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TRADE UNION SOLIDARITY: HISTORY AND MODERN TIMES

One of the issues the trade unions of Russia have to deal with today refers to the issue of international solidarity. If we start from afar, originally, already starting from the 19th century, the trade unions specially emphasized mutual assistance when they originated. Including – and in the first places – international mutual assistance. The “proletariat having no Fatherland” was not always (in contrast to the Bolsheviks) emphasized. Ultimately, both the English and French trade unions had their Fatherland. The Russian trade unions also had it. Just at a certain stage, the inner contradictions between Labour and Capital in Russia were brought into a force format for resolving contradictions. And – if we are fighting for the just remuneration for labour – we are looking for all allies who can help us. If there are no venues for talks, if there are no proper employment and labour laws, if troops are called immediately against protesting people instead of talks, should anyone support the demands being just in their essence? Thus the concept of international solidarity was formed. It based on the statement that if workers’ labour lights were infringed in a country, the workers from other countries would be ready to provide them the required support. The concept of international solidarity phrased like that already in the time of Karl Marx has been functioning till now. With various degrees of efficiency. In the early 20th century, after the October Revolution and the start of the Civil War, we witnessed the coordinated efforts of the Western trade unions in limitations of military supplies to fight Soviet Russia. Surely, that was not just a reaction to the military conflict of countries but a giant social experiment the implementation of which was launched over a giant space. From the point of view of rights and documentarily fixed guarantees for the workers – legal changes, it was a breakthrough to a more just future. It is fairly natural that watching the practical implementation of the demands put forward by the Western trade unions for many years, the said trade unions in fact supported the Soviet state and its trade unions by their actions.

World War II became the next stop on the way of international solidarity. It is no secret that one of the ideological mindsets of the Soviet society before the war began was: “the German proletariat will turn their bayonets away.” That is, the class unity at the time of an armed conflict will be the basis for “turning the imperialist war into a civil war” (to remind you the Bolsheviks’ slogans during World War I) and putting the end to the conflict. This did not happen. The overwhelming majority of German workers really supported Hitler and ignored proverbial international solidarity. The USSR had to manage as the states at war usually managed – putting the economy on a war time footing and military operations.

The post-war time made adjustments in military and economic blocs. As well as the international trade union setup. The Warsaw Treaty Organization originated in paral-

lel with the NATO bloc formation (it sounds very interesting now – the Warsaw Treaty!), similar associations of trade unions of various countries appeared as well. The original association of trade unions that declared supranational solidarity, the General Federation of Trade Unions, split soon after it was created. The American, English and partly French trade unions set up the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions. The political interest was put in the first place instead of the “class interest”. There was a division, and according to George Orwell, there were trade unions “more equal” and more expecting that “class support”. However, it was not determined by the degree of the progressive nature of the labour standards, the level of worker’s protection or defenselessness but rightness or wrongness of ideological concepts. This division lasted till the 1990s.

The new format of the trade union association was called to life by the break-up of the social projects’ confrontation related to the USSR disintegration. In fact, the following was said: the economic and social rules had been set forth in the world, and the organizations fighting for the workers’ rights should unite to be more efficient and carry on discussions with the global counter-agents. The emphasis of discussions was transferred to the International Labour Organization, OECD and other conference venues. As they say, “size matters”. The International Trade Union Confederation that originated as the association of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, a number of other world trade union centers, and separate national structures, has become the real united global venue to discuss and resolve trade union issues at the supranational level. First, international trade union secretariats became elements of the international trade union network, followed by international trade union sector associations influencing the supranational sector “decision taking centers” meaning transnational corporations or those lobbying changes in the Conventions and Recommendations of the International Labour Organization (and that finally had an impact on the domestic legal framework).

Thus the period of globalization took place. There were no problems with the manifestation of trade union solidarity on the international scene at that time, at least at the declaration level. However, the launching of the Special Military Operation seriously changed the state of affairs.

The Russian trade unions absolutely unexpectedly found out that the armed conflict in which trade unions from various countries should at least proceed from the same “class interests” listening to the arguments of the sides of the conflict, does not suppose that. There was a very clear division into the countries unconditionally and univocally blaming Russia and trade unions of the countries... that in their time had been the victims of foreign manipulations and consequently were better seeing into such formally democratic cries and calls. One can understand when emotions affect the behaviour of a crowd. But a structure – and a supranational one even more so – should be more responsible in its approach to assessments. This did not happen. Support of one side and ignoring the opinion of the other side became the reason for the suspension

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At the same time, the international association of countries in the BRICS format goes on rather vigorously. Several countries are already on the threshold and several dozens of countries are really considering such a format of cooperation. It is fairly probable that the common economic interests of the BRICS states will bring about the uniting of trade unions on this platform. It is still unclear how much and

how thoroughly our Western "partners" will lower the iron curtain in cooperation of trade unions... However, the issue of international solidarity of workers is definitely reviewed now not only from the point of view of just labour standards and guarantees. In a way, the tragedy of the situation is that we are viewing Solidarity becoming a pawn of political decisions and ideological choices. There is no doubt that after some time national trade unions will again unite in an organization at an international level. But the form of this unity is still unclear.