Labor Relations in Socialist Russia: Printers, Their Union, and the Origins of Soviet Socialism, 1918-1921

Diane P. Koenker

University of Illinois
Dr. Diane P. Koenker
803-09
March, 1991

The work leading to this report was supported by funds provided by the National Council for Soviet and East European Research. The analysis and interpretations contained in the report are those of the author.
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Executive Summary

When the Bolshevik party came to power in Russia in October 1917, the implementation of socialism on a national scale had never before been attempted. There was no blueprint for a socialist society. The definition of socialism and of socialist labor relations, therefore, evolved only in a complex struggle among socialists with differing views of socialism, in interaction with workers and other elements of society. This study of workers in the printing trades during the Russian civil war offers unique insight into the formation of a socialist system of labor relations because the Bolsheviks and their Marxist rivals, the Mensheviks, fought for supremacy in the union of printers precisely over the issue of labor relations under socialism.

By 1921, the end of the Russian civil war, the elements of present-day Soviet labor relations were in place. Two alternative models had competed. The Bolshevik, or communist, model of labor relations was predicated on production as the highest goal of the socialist economy, on the subordination of labor to that goal, and on a system of centralized, integrated economic management in which unions obeyed the economic administration, workers obeyed the unions, and in which any discussion of alternative policies was deemed to be harmful to the interests of production and therefore to the socialist system itself. The Menshevik model insisted that the interests of the buyers and sellers of labor were always in conflict, even in a socialist economic system, and that workers' interests could only be protected through independent trade unions and in a democratic system that permitted and relied upon free discussion of alternative
During the years of the civil war, most Russian printers supported the Menshevik model, but the communists won control of the union by 1920 for a number of reasons. Their vision of labor relations was persuasive to many. But they also triumphed due to their control over industry and over access to jobs and food. They triumphed also through their willing use of force and intimidation against their opponents.

The communist productivist model of labor relations demanded great sacrifices from the working class the system represented. Archival and journalistic evidence from individual enterprises in the printing industry demonstrates that shop-floor workers resisted such sacrifices. For them, the revolution meant greater control over their everyday and work lives, it meant peace, but it meant above all the right to a decent standard of living, to an end of material inequality. This claim was denounced by Mensheviks and Bolsheviks alike as "narrow-minded" and apolitical, but it underlay the printers' support of the Menshevik model of labor relations and their resistance to communist policies of sacrifice. Printers' continuing protests and those of other workers led by the end of 1921 to the communist regime's abandonment of the economic system of war communism and its replacement with the market-oriented New Economic Policy. Many contemporary reformers hail NEP as a model for today's perestroika. But in giving in to the workers' material demands in 1921, the regime did not loosen its control over discussion nor modify its centralized and authoritarian system of labor relations. The Mensheviks with their vision of democratic labor relations remained "counterrevolutionary capitalist lackeys" and "traitorous scoundrels."

This is the system that is under challenge today in the USSR, and it is especially timely
to consider the fate of alternative systems as they were proposed during the civil war. The Mensheviks offered a viable socialist alternative, but its success depended upon a democratic political process and freedom of discussion. These were absent in 1918-1921. Even moderate communists advocated a more democratic system of labor relations than what eventually emerged, but their efforts were defeated in the printers' union by communists of a more ruthless disposition, who were unconcerned with political procedure, with honest debate, or with compromise. The victory in the printers' union of such militants reveals the embryo of a Stalinist political culture that was never far below the surface in the 1920s and which would triumph by 1929.

These militants were able to triumph in part because "socialism" was such an ill-defined ideal in 1918-21. Much energy and intellectual capital was expended in trying to create socialism under the appalling conditions of war and external blockade. There was little energy left over to devote to political debate and procedure. The "socialist administration" of the printing industry proceeded haphazardly, without plan, and with great cost to the official ideal of productivity. Workers would or could not work because they had no food, no fuel, no paper or ink. But they were unable to offer an effective alternative to the communist muddle: once the Menshevik voice of the socialist alternative was branded as counter-revolutionary by those who controlled the means of communication, dissident printers courted arrest and imprisonment. The revolutionary solidarity of workers in 1917 dissolved under pressure of hunger into intra-class rivalry among workers of different industries, different sexes, different regions, different skill levels. The arena of working-class life retreated from the unions and soviets, which no longer tolerated discussion, to the individual workplace, where workers' committees
sought independently to administer their corner of production, to feed, house, and clothe themselves, to settle disputes, to protect the diminishing standard of living. The individual print shop, and the workers within it, emerged from the civil war as a surviving nucleus of working-class democracy, collectivism, and egalitarianism. But its sphere of competence was tightly constrained by the overall centralized command-administrative system of economic decision-making.

Was the command-administrative system merely a response--an inevitable one--to the social and economic breakdown of the civil war? Or did its imposition produce and intensify the very breakdown that communist planners sought to alleviate? The decline of production in the printing industry may well have followed from the absence of independence and of participation, may have been the direct result of the absence of workers' engagement in their world of work. The independent Menshevik alternative to labor relations did not lose to the command-administrative system in a fair contest of the survival of the economic fittest. It may well be that economic rationality could not be achieved without democracy. In this case, it was not workers' demands for higher wages or the fear of unemployment that undermined the success of the socialist economy, but the inability to criticize without retaliation and the impossibility of openly discussing alternative ways of organizing the economy. One can not prove but only speculate whether democratic socialism would have been a more productive solution than authoritarian socialism to the social and economic problems of civil war. Certainly at the present time, Soviet leaders seem to recognize that there can be no significant economic reform without democratization as well.

The current Soviet search for a new usable past has focused on alternative paths to
socialism proposed from within the communist party, within the Leninist tradition. The socialist agenda is thus still paramount, but this exploration of the early years of Soviet labor relations emphasizes the historical existence of a democratic socialist alternative. While Stalinist-type authoritarianism was certainly an integral part even of the early revolutionary experience, it was not the only alternative in 1918 or 1921, and it need not be today.
The Bolshevik party came to power in October 1917 on the promise of a socialism that would more justly allocate society's economic resources. Its socialist promise was widely supported by Russia's urban workers; the Bolsheviks received 46 percent of the vote in Petrograd and Moscow in the elections to the Constituent Assembly that followed the October revolution, and all socialist parties together received two-thirds of the vote. Nor was socialist sentiment confined to the cities. Parties representing the various strands of Russian socialism also collected two-thirds of the national total in November 1917. But few of these voters knew precisely what they could expect from "socialism," beyond the popular goals of land, bread, and peace. The fact was, the implementation of socialism on a national scale had never been attempted before. Once in power, Russian Marxists had to rely on a great deal of theory about capitalism but very little about what a socialist society should or could be.

For workers, the nature of the socialist workplace was also uncharted territory. The aspirations they expressed in their political and economic protests in 1917 give some idea of what they expected from a socialist revolution, but offer little indication of how their aspirations would be implemented within a socialist economic structure. They had demanded food, jobs, workshop democracy, improved health and work conditions, shorter hours and paid vacations. Many expected that all this could be provided once the capitalists had been deprived of the surplus they had so long expropriated. But how these things would be
provided, how workers would interact with management, the state, and each other under socialism--these questions had no ready answers. Lenin, in his *The State and Revolution*, begged the question of labor relations; he argued the state would eventually wither away, as Engels had predicted, but whether and how factory authority would also go the way of the state remained outside Lenin's field of vision. Leading theorists from both Marxist political parties, Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, also argued among themselves.³

And so the dictatorship of the proletariat (itself a disputed construct) was established without benefit of a theoretical consensus on the role of management and authority in the workplace, on the issues of labor discipline, remuneration, or on the rights of workers in a workers' state. The system of labor relations that had emerged by the early 1920s and that provides the fundamental model for Soviet labor relations today was unavoidably shaped by the civil war and the atmosphere of military emergency that accompanied it. Out of this experience by 1921 had grown a centralized political system in which one party exercised a monopoly of power. This is the system which Soviet reformers today are painfully seeking to refashion, and it is therefore especially important to examine the origin of this system, to search in the early years of Soviet socialism for the "alternatives" that policy-makers draw upon today for their projects for change. For if in 1917 there was no single blueprint for the construction of socialism and socialist labor relations, there did exist alternative visions, which grew out of events as well as theory. The experience of the printing industry in these years offers a vivid illustration of this search for alternatives, because the printers' union between 1917 and 1921 was the focus of a bitter struggle between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, a struggle fought precisely over the nature of socialism and the role of workers
and trade unions in a socialist system.

This paper will examine the political and economic experience of workers in the printing trades between 1917 and 1921. Three broad themes underlie this research. Most fundamentally, the paper will examine the construction of socialism and the evolving definition of the role of labor in a workers' state. It will explore the process of the communist consolidation of power, the extent to which the party triumphed by coercion as opposed to the power of its socialist program, the ways in which consolidation was modified by struggles within the party over its role and policies. The question of whether communist authoritarianism was a natural or perverted outgrowth of Bolshevik ideology must be resolved if the Communist Party of the Soviet Union today is to retain its legitimacy. Finally, both these issues of socialism and communist power can be explored only by understanding the position of the communists' constituency, the working class. The civil war experience transformed the Russian working class physically and ideologically; the evolution of labor relations under socialism was inextricably linked with a "reformation" of the working class, as workers sought to adapt their old consciousness to the new realities of state ownership of the means of production and to define a role for themselves in the new order.

Printers and Their Industry

Workers in the Russian printing industry maintained an ambivalent status in the family of labor. Like other industrial workers, they worked in production with their hands and with skills learned through years of apprenticeship and on-the-job practice. Printing
activists in the years before 1917 had forged a self-identity as proletarians; printers shared
the status of exploited sellers of labor with workers in other branches of production. They
rejected a narrow craft unionism which separated typesetters from press operators
(characteristic among printers in most other industrial societies) in favor of an all-
encompassing industrial unionism. They prided themselves, whether Menshevik or
Bolshevik, or their bona fide revolutionary history, which began in Russia with industry-wide
strikes in 1903 and extended to activism in the 1905 and 1917 revolutions.4

But printers also possessed certain unique characteristics, which separated them, quite
self-consciously, from others in the proletarian family. Their place of work was generally
in the urban center rather than the industrial suburb, and their daily work brought many of
them into close contact with journalists and writers, with the printed world of ideas. The
nature of their work required them to be not only highly skilled but literate as well, and there
evolved among printers a culture of intelligence and literacy. Many consciously cultivated a
superior "aristocratic" image, marked by fastidious dress and a special trade jargon. They
were not "workers" but "blacksmiths of the leaden army." Their contribution to society was
not raw or finished goods like coal or steel, but the transmission of ideas and values; many
printers considered themselves, therefore, to be especially valuable to society as a whole and
to the working class in particular. They were also especially vulnerable, for their
contribution to society came at the cost of a damaging ingestion of lead and other chemical
poisons, but it is not clear to what extent intimations of mortality colored the ideology and
behavior of activist printing workers. It may have contributed to another characteristic of
some members of the profession, the consumption of vast quantities of alcohol.5
With the fall of the old regime in February 1917, printers joined with other Russian workers to organize trade unions, to bargain collectively with their employers, and to engage in political action on a local and national scale. The end of tsarist censorship opened the way for a flourishing printing trade, and employment opportunities expanded. Printers mounted a series of city-wide strikes across Russia, and improved their material position in many other places without strikes, through collective bargaining backed by strong union organization. But internally, printers were beset by divisions similar to those among other groups of workers: between skilled and unskilled (in printing, the newspaper compositor emerged as the highest paid in the profession), and among adherents of various socialist parties. Unions were officially outside partisan divisions, but the printers' union became a bastion of Menshevism in 1917. To counter this influence, smaller groups of Bolshevik supporters in Petrograd and Moscow formed caucuses and "subdistricts" and agitated among their fellows for the adoption of their line. This partisan struggle became increasingly vocal and bitter in the second half of 1917, at the same time as the general collapse of the Russian economy began to affect the well-being and future prospects of printers everywhere in Russia. The collapse of production would become catastrophic in the months after the Soviet seizure of power in October 1917.

The printers' trade, their skills, their position in the economy, and their self-image made many of them perceptive observers of society and the working class. Their access to the technologies of the printed word allowed them to describe their position and to comment on society in a remarkable range of periodicals both before and after the 1917 revolution. And their politics placed them in the very center of the struggle to define the goals of the
revolution. For all these special characteristics, printers offer a unique and valuable window on the struggle for socialism in Russia.

Models of Labor Relations

No labor relations "system" emerged from policy-making circles in the immediate aftermath of the October revolution. But as the fragile Soviet regime sought to establish its authority in the face of economic chaos and political and military challenges, pieces of a system were fashioned through an avalanche of central decrees. Throughout the civil war, issues concerning labor relations provoked heated political debate, pitting communists against each other as well as against rival socialists. The debate and the decrees, as they affected the printers' union as well as industry as a whole, focused on five major areas.

Most immediate was the nature and rights of management and of workplace authority. Should ownership be private or public? If private ownership remained, how much state regulation was appropriate, and what would be the mechanism of regulation? Or, if public ownership prevailed, would this take the form of national, local (city or region), or workplace ownership? And what was the appropriate amount of superordinate regulation of such public properties? Although the impulse to central planning and state regulation arose in Russia during the war, as it did elsewhere in Europe, the virtues of central planning were not universally supported in 1918. Initially, the Soviet regime permitted continued private ownership, with the public interest represented by state regulation. Such a relationship proved unworkable, and most Russian industrial enterprises were nationalized by decree on
June 28, 1918. The printing industry, however, was not included in this compulsory nationalization scheme.  

The question of administrative structure in socialized industry remained similarly open: would industry be centrally or locally administered? How much autonomy would individual plants possess? What would be the mechanism for the allocation of resources, for gaining access to raw materials, to orders, to customers? The demands of the civil war economy inexorably pressed policy makers to advocate greater and greater central authority and control, but this outcome was by no means the only one possible under social ownership of industry. Within plants, a critical question was whether authority would be vested in a committee, or whether social justice could properly be supervised by a single individual. "One-man management" was more efficient and worked better with the developing centralized apparatus; Lenin argued forcefully and successfully for its universal implementation, but workers and trade unions frequently resisted. In many places they retained collective systems in which plant administration consisted of representatives from workers, union, and central economic organs.  

For workers whose claims for workplace democracy in 1917 had fueled the conflicts which resulted in the socialists coming to power, the issue of workplace authority in socialized enterprises was very important. How much power would workers have in enterprise decision-making? Would factory committees independently administer plants, participate in their administration, or merely exercise supervision and hold the power of veto over decisions made by specialized managers? How would workers exercise their claims to better work conditions, their determination to be bossed by sympathetic and not tyrannical
Many socialists in higher positions felt workers' interests would be sufficiently defended by virtue of the state acting in the name of the proletariat, and by the exercise of higher authority by individuals who had once been workers. But the extent of workers' power on the shop floor remained a gray and contested area. It was not settled by the revolution, by the decree on workers' control of November 14, 1917, or by the 1918 decree on nationalization. As it is a critical element in any system of labor relations, it will be important to return to this issue in the specific context of the printing industry in the years 1917-1921.

The question of productivity and how to promote it constituted a second crucial area of labor relations. What were appropriate socialist incentives to production? Among positive incentives, would wages disappear in favor of a psychology of production, "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need"? In the breakdown of the economy after 1917, the Russian Republic came near to effecting a system, labeled by historians "social maintenance," in which the state provided a bare minimum of subsistence to all workers regardless of output. Some saw this as the wave of the future, others as a stopgap measure to cope with crippling scarcities of food and other resources. The question remained open whether positive pecuniary incentives were necessary and desirable under socialist production. Also undetermined were the forms such incentives could take: were skill-based differentials compatible with socialism? Was the "family wage," in which a wage was based on family size as well as on work, an appropriate element of socialism or would it discourage individual productivity? Were specific schemes tied to productivity--piece rates, bonuses, norm-setting--compatible with and appropriate to socialist labor relations, or were
they necessary only in capitalist systems? Non-pecuniary incentives--appeals to patriotism or enthusiasm, such as designating heroes of labor and volunteer work Saturdays--might also play an important role in socialist productivity.

The reverse side of these positive incentives was labor discipline: would there be a need to enforce discipline in a socialist enterprise, and how should it be done? Capitalist industry had employed close supervision, fines, and threats of dismissal to ensure discipline. The wartime state added to this the threat of military mobilization to ensure the obedience of labor. Some socialists expected that under socialism, only "unconscious" workers would have to be compelled to work, but here too the nature and extent of compulsion remained to be defined.

A third contentious area was the problem of conflicts. Would disputes arise between workers and management under socialism, and if they did, how should they be resolved? The classic form of conflict, the strike, was widely considered to be inappropriate under socialism. Workers, by withholding their labor, harmed the collective interest of all workers now, not the private interest of capital. Arbitration, conciliation, and judicial procedure--labor tribunals--were hailed as socialist alternatives to labor stoppages. Political pressure in a democratic system could also replace labor stoppages as a means to settle conflicts. But if all else failed, should workers be permitted to strike or to engage in other forms of direct action (sit-ins or slow-downs) against their own society? This question perplexes Soviet policymakers even today.12

Linking these three areas of labor relations was the crucial fourth one, the role of trade unions, their relationship to the state and its economic organs, their relationship to
workers on the shop floor. Would trade unions exist outside the state’s economic apparatus or within it? Was it possible for unions to disagree among themselves, and if so, could individual unions follow their own policy or were they bound by the union movement as a whole? What was appropriate union practice: would "trade union rules" be centralized and authoritarian, or federal and democratic? Were workers’ interests identical to those of the state and its organs—higher productivity—or somehow different? It was precisely on the question of union independence that Bolsheviks and Mensheviks were most sharply divided, but the Bolsheviks themselves were split over this issue.

Equally central to the problem of labor relations under socialism is the nature of the state. Would the socialist state subsume all sectors of society, or would the state function as superarbiter, balancing conflicting demands on its resources, resolving inevitable conflicts among different elements of society? In the economy, would the state function as regulator or manager? How centralized would state power and authority be? Where would control over its coercive forces lie? And who would regulate state policy—was a dictatorship of the proletariat incompatible with socialist democracy? To raise these questions opens a vast realm of political theory and socialist practice, and to consider them fully would take this essay far from its main task. Although the specific issue of the state received much less contemporary discussion than, for example, the role of trade unions, the emergence of a centralized state with control over all institutionalized activity and with a monopoly of coercive power played a critical role in the development of labor relations in the printing industry, as elsewhere.

If no consensus on a system of labor relations emerged out of these discussions and
conflicts, five more or less distinct models can be constructed from the terms of the debate.

The Bolsheviks, or communists, as they renamed themselves in March 1918, account for two of these models. In the "pure productivist" model, the supreme goal of the socialist state is to raise production levels for the benefit of society as a whole. Economic efficiency is good for the state, and therefore it is also good for workers. Workers are expected to devote all their energies to raising production; the central state is in the best position to determine the optimal application of this energy. The role of trade unions is to assist the state's economic organs by organizing workers, by promoting labor discipline. This view was most closely linked to the position of Leon Trotsky, and it received particular attention during the so-called trade union debate within party and union circles in the winter of 1920-21. Early in 1920, Trotsky had argued that workers would have to be compelled to subordinate their narrow interests to those of the whole society. "The whole history of mankind is the history of its education for work, for higher productivity of labour. This is by no means so simple a task, for man is lazy and he has the right to be so... We know that every labour is socially compulsory labour. Man must work in order not to die. He does not want to work... The new socialist order differs from the bourgeois one in that with us labour is performed in the interest of society." In such a model, the rights of management were dominant over those of workers, discipline was more efficient than positive pecuniary incentives, conflicts must always be settled in favor of efficient production, and the union should serve the interests of society as a whole, the state, not those of its members. In fact, there was little need for a trade union at all in such a scheme.

Communist veterans of the trade union movement, not surprisingly, took exception to
this view and supported an alternative model of labor relations that preserved some autonomous role for unions. Nonetheless, beginning with the First All-Russian Trade Union Congress in January, 1918, they fully endorsed the primacy of production. Productivist interests could only be served by state regulation of all printing enterprises and by centralized economic administration, with orders and policies transmitted from state economic organs through trade unions to the trade unions' local agents, the factory committees. The latter, although their appointments were ratified by workers, remained responsible for promoting production. In any conflict between workers' welfare and production, production came first: only from productivity gains could come a higher standard of living. Factory committees and unions likewise served as the industry's disciplinary body, with the power to fire workers for absenteeism or for challenging administrative decisions. They also implemented the centrally contracted wage and bonus systems. Conflicts in this productivist system, where the unions and managers represented workers' collective best interests, could only be individual. The union provided a system of hearings and appeals for individual complaints over improper firing, or improper treatment of workers by their supervisors. Collective protest and strikes constituted a serious threat to the entire system and were officially discouraged by labeling them as Menshevik-inspired counter-revolutionary acts, as we shall see. Protest leaders risked dismissal, loss of food rations, and sometimes arrest and imprisonment.

The trade union productivists differed from their more hard-line colleagues in their defense of a role for trade unions in this system, and in their emphasis on education instead of compulsion to achieve production goals. Although unions were only cogs in the economic
machinery, they served society as a mass organization that could raise the cultural level of all workers, not just the elite few who belonged to the vanguard party. Trade unions were to be the "school for communism," they promoted the long-term interests of sustained production not just through implementation of economic policy but also in leading cultural and agitation work among all segments of the work force. Unions were ideally positioned to teach the unity of their group interests with those of the whole society.¹⁵

Trade union independence was the keystone of the Menshevik model of labor relations. Regardless of the economic system under which workers were employed, workers as sellers of labor had interests in conflict with those who purchased their labor. Only trade unions independent of their employer could properly represent the workers' interests. For proponents of this model, the nature of plant ownership was irrelevant for the tactics of trade unions. Many Mensheviks believed socialism was premature in backward Russia, but whether workers confronted socialist or capitalist managers, they needed to defend their immediate interests first. Unions could do this through organized collective bargaining: gathering information, preparing proposals, and negotiating on behalf of the sellers of labor as equals with the buyers of labor. The rules of their interaction would be defined through the democratic process, not by arbitrary use of state force. In the Menshevik model of labor relations, as in the communist models, production was in workers' best interests. Within this system of bargaining, workers were prepared to accept output norms and limits to wages.¹⁶ Menshevik union leaders therefore agreed to participate in the economic agencies that directed their industry, the better to be able to represent the interests of workers.¹⁷ Strikes which halted production were also to be discouraged. But the right to strike had to be
retained as the final weapon of workers in defense of their interests. 18

Two additional models of labor relations can be constructed from the practical experience of the civil war economy. Both communists and Mensheviks warned against the implementation of an anarchist model, whose key feature was ownership and management of an enterprise by the workers themselves. Such a model was incompatible with a centrally administered socialist economy. Independent factories, operating as "federated republics," would never subordinate their immediate interests to the collective good. 19 Without markets (which were capitalist) and without central authority, there would be no way to allocate resources to these plants or to distribute their output. Furthermore, neither party's leaders had much confidence in the ability of Russia's "backward" labor force to master the complicated science of factory management. Worker self-management, in the conditions of Russia's economic collapse, would lead to workers selling off the capital stock of their plant and going to the countryside on the proceeds. It was therefore a recipe for the rapid collapse of Russia's remaining industrial capacity. Such a model received little theoretical support from printing workers, but practical experience pushed workers toward such a system, as we will see.

Mensheviks and communists also denounced what they labeled the "narrow-minded" obyvatel'skij worker's model of labor relations. As Trotsky had argued, too many workers, left to their own devices, would choose a system which guaranteed a maximum of compensation for a minimum of work. Capitalism or socialism, dictatorship or democracy, dependent or independent trade unions, the "broad interests" of class or society--were equally irrelevant to the narrow-minded worker, who chose whichever alternative provided for his
immediate material interests. Printers "live their own lives, live only for what today's need prompts them to do." If one system did not deliver, he would choose another. Printers were indifferent to which party promised bread, clothing, and freedom to travel in search for food, argued the communist union journal. "He wants to have all this--and that's enough." For socialists, this attitude was dangerously short-sighted. Trotsky proposed to combat it by force, the communist unionists by education, and the Mensheviks by organization. On the shop floor, however, workers practiced a tenacious resistance to the politics of sacrifice advocated by their leaders, using whatever means practicable to defend their self-interest. The real difference between the so-called "narrow-minded" workers and far-seeing socialists was where they drew the limit to their self-interest: at themselves, their family, their workshop, their industry, their country, or the world.

Models in Conflict: The Printers' Union, 1917-1918

Printing workers had a long history of organization, one dogged by penetration by police spies and periodic prohibition. With the fall of the tsarist regime in February 1917, printers in scores of cities across the Russian empire again formed unions, elected officers, worked to strengthen their organizations, and engaged in collective bargaining. By the end of 1917, representatives of forty-eight local unions met in Petrograd to form an all-Russian trade union of workers in the printing trade.

The December conference elected a central council for the new national union. Locally, unions were governed by boards of directors elected by a general vote
of members; workers elected shop delegates to councils of representatives [sovety upolnomochennik]. Workers in individual print shops also elected factory committees, whose relationship to the union structure would constitute a focus of dispute in the coming years. Because politics were so potentially divisive in 1917, union activists sought above all to keep trade union issues apart from the political disputes between Bolsheviks, on one hand, and Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries, on the other. Bolsheviks believed a socialist revolution in Russia could trigger a worldwide revolution, that the capitalist system was doomed to an imminent fall. They believed that politically conscious workers should do all they could to hasten this coming revolution. Mensheviks believed capitalism was not yet ripe for its overthrow, especially in Russia with its millions of small-holding peasants.

Consequently, Mensheviks served in a coalition government in 1917 and opposed the Soviet seizure of power in October. They saw their role as leading the class struggle in a capitalist society, but the immediate goal of struggle was not the overthrow of the society but the collective defense of workers' interests. As long as trade unions functioned in a system that was essentially capitalist, as before October, these conflicting viewpoints could (uneasily) be subordinated to trade union interests. But with the establishment of workers' power in October, trade unions could no longer remain insulated from political questions.

The majority of trade unions had pledged their allegiance to the Bolshevik vision by October 1917, but not printers. The Moscow union elected Mensheviks as its directors, representatives, and deputies to the Moscow Soviet; the union was nearly alone in Moscow in opposing the "premature" seizure of power. Petrograd printers were more radical, and replaced their Menshevik board with a Bolshevik one in November, after the Soviet seizure
of power. Nationwide, the union continued to support Menshevism: fifty of ninety-three delegates at the December national conference were Mensheviks, seventeen were Bolsheviks.\textsuperscript{26}

Printers' union leaders faced challenges on two fronts in the weeks after the October revolution. On one hand, printers were engaged in protracted economic struggles with their employers, who resisted implementation of citywide collective agreements.\textsuperscript{27} Conflicts over interpretation of the contract—on layoffs, work rules, nonpayment, and short pay—also absorbed the Moscow union's energies in 1917 and 1918.\textsuperscript{28} Continuing inflation provoked rank-and-file demands for raises outside the collective agreement. One typography demanded a 150-ruble bonus in September, 1918, another claimed 200 rubles.\textsuperscript{29} The union had to resolve these claims to preserve equity, ultimately convincing the Moscow Trade Union Council to adopt an across-the-board increase of 200 rubles for all workers in the industry.\textsuperscript{30}

On the other hand, the union also faced conflict with the new proletarian dictatorship. One of the first moves of the regime was to close down newspapers which openly opposed Soviet power. This violated the Mensheviks' (and many Bolsheviks') belief in the right of press freedom, and it also put many printers out of work. (The extent to which printing workers' opposition to communism was based on the incompatibility of their dictatorship with printers' livelihoods must remain an open question for now, but it is an important one.) In any case, the Petrograd union's council of representatives demanded (by a vote of 120-78, with 32 abstentions) that press freedom be restored or they would call a general strike. Many printers recoiled from using a political strike against their own government, and it was at this point that new Petrograd union elections turned out the Menshevik board of directors
and put a Bolshevik majority in their place. The union representatives, though, were not reelected and the council retained its Menshevik majority. The balance of political power in Petrograd was so even that the council could force the directors to send two Mensheviks and two Bolsheviks to the first national congress of trade unions in January; the board had initially voted to send four Bolsheviks.

Moscow's union faced a similar issue when the local Bolshevik authorities shut down the liberal newspaper Russkoe Slovo. This was a case which raised all the contradictions of socialist labor policy and previewed conflicts to come. In response to Russkoe Slovo's inflammatory opposition to Soviet power, the Moscow Soviet sequestered its print shop, owned by the printing magnate I. D. Sytin, and closed the newspaper on November 28, 1917. An armed guard occupied the shop and ordered its workers home. The next day, workers met to protest the use of force on the eve of the meeting of the Constituent Assembly (called by its supporters for November 28, but postponed by the Bolshevik regime until January 4, 1918); they declared a strike against the government. The union's Menshevik leaders intervened, and persuaded the Moscow Soviet to retain the workers to print the Soviet paper, Izvestiia, on the same terms as before. Workers became Soviet employees, and they signed a collective agreement. Two weeks later, when the Soviet failed to pay these workers, they struck again, charging a breach of the agreement. The Soviet and its local labor commissar immediately labeled this a political strike and refused to negotiate. Red Guards occupied the print shop, and its 1,500 workers were dismissed with sixteen days' severance pay. When workers in other shops refused to print Izvestiia, the Soviet recruited two hundred printers who belonged to the Bolshevik party, and they managed to put out the
paper after a short delay. (Strikers had hidden the matrices necessary to print the paper.) The 1,500 unemployed printers refused to accept their severance pay and continued to strike.\textsuperscript{33}

Was this a political strike now, or economic? The union and the \textit{Russkoe Slovo} workers claimed they wished only to be paid their rightful wage. They were branded "saboteurs" simply because they had dared to defend their economic interests, because they had the audacity to consider the Soviet presidium as an ordinary employer.\textsuperscript{34} The union asked for the usual neutral party to arbitrate the dispute between workers and their "new owners."\textsuperscript{35} But the Soviet replied it did not recognize neutral arbitration, that the labor commissar was now the supreme authority.\textsuperscript{36}

When word leaked that the print shop's expropriated owner, Sytin, had given the workers money to tide them over the Christmas holidays, the \textit{Russkoe Slovo} strikers now genuinely seemed to be colluding with the class enemy. They ended their strike on January 18 and applied for unemployment benefits, only to find that even their peers had turned against them. On January 27, the Moscow union's council of representatives declared that the strike had been political from the start, that there was no difference now between economic and political actions. With growing unemployment, printers should not devote the scarce resources of the union unemployment fund to those who chose to quit work for political reasons. The council's resolution, proposed by the Bolsheviks, also condemned the Moscow union's directors for supporting the strike.\textsuperscript{37} The strikers responded with what would become a familiar theme in the months ahead: the workers' government was treating workers worse than any capitalist employer had.\textsuperscript{38} Such sentiment was quickly labeled counter-
revolutionary.

A precedent had now been set. According to the regime, the socialist employer was not simply another boss but the embodiment of the revolution. To challenge one’s economic superior was now no different from challenging the revolution: such an equation immediately placed the independent union movement at an ideological disadvantage, creating a precarious moral status from which the trade union independence movement never recovered.  

The Russkoe Slovo strike polarized the Moscow printers union. Bolshevik printers strengthened their party organization and began to publish their own journal, Revoliutsionnyi Golos Pechatnika. A month later, Moscow representatives again supported (by a narrow margin) the left position. Their radicalism at this moment seemed genuine: the events of October, the resistance of the old ruling classes to the decrees implementing socialism, the promise of a socialist order, had legitimately pushed the sentiment among printers--some of the most moderate workers in Russia--toward the left. But the Bolsheviks could not capitalize on this victory in Moscow or in the national union. Instead, rank-and-file sentiment among printers and other workers began to shift away from the Bolsheviks, toward the Mensheviks, the party of the socialist alternative.

Continuing challenges to Bolshevik power and the party’s response contributed to growing polarization. The hopes of the anti-Bolshevik forces had centered on the Constituent Assembly, and the printers’ unions (overruling their Bolshevik minorities) had joined liberals and moderates in defiant demonstrations in its support. When the Bolsheviks closed down the Assembly after one day’s deliberation, two Petrograd printers numbered among the
victims of a protest demonstration that ended in bloodshed. Furthermore, economic conditions continued to deteriorate. Food rationing had not kept the capital cities from starvation, so the new regime sent out armed detachments of workers to confiscate grain by force. Little fuel or raw materials for production reached the cities either. Returning soldiers were flooding print shops, exacerbating problems of unemployment. Privately owned shops refused to absorb the extra workers and closed their doors to all. When the Bolshevik government concluded its peace agreement with Germany at Brest, the terms were denounced for giving away the country's food and fuel producing regions.

Reaction was sharpest in Petrograd. Once the communists had gained control of the union, argued their Menshevik opponents, their adoption of "state socialism" had led to the immediate closure of many print shops. "Every type of 'control,' 'requisition,' 'nationalization,' and blind systemless evacuation [with the government to Moscow] conclusively weakened the union and harmed its authority among the masses." From local shops in Petrograd came the call for a general meeting, the ultimate source of authority in the union movement. The meeting on March 24 attracted some 5,000 printers, who turned the communist board of directors' report into a trial of communist rule. Workers condemned the communist monopoly on printing announcements and on publication of classic literature. They charged the government had requisitioned print shops but could not provide them with any work. Private shops refused orders for fear they would be shut down and confiscated for printing the wrong thing. All this contributed to growing unemployment, the opposite of what workers expected from socialism. In a tumultuous conclusion, the meeting adopted a resolution denouncing the union's failure to defend workers' interests in the four months it
had been led by communists. The board had not called a single general meeting, there was no plan or direction to the union's work, no consideration of the pressing problems of evacuation from Petrograd or of unemployment. The meeting called for new board elections within two weeks.48

New elections in Petrograd returned the Mensheviks to power with 6,300 of 9,300 votes.49 In Moscow, new board elections were preceded by a lively campaign of shop floor meetings. Communists sought to pass a series of resolutions against the current board, promising "milk rivers with jelly shores" if elected to run the union, branding the Menshevik leaders as scoundrels and counter-revolutionaries for their unwillingness to embrace the October revolution. But the Mensheviks countered with their own resolution campaign, and in a secret ballot with 10,000 members voting (half the union membership, but a big increase over the 2,500 who had last voted in 1917), fifteen independents and ten communists were elected to the board.50

Armed with this mandate, the Moscow union leaders attempted to live up to their self-image as a union that defended its members' interests. The collective agreement (tarif) won in October had expired in April, 1918, and the union struggled to negotiate a new one, a task complicated by growing unemployment and rapid inflation. The owners felt already constrained by a series of government decrees requiring them to contribute to unemployment and insurance funds,51 but agreed in late April to a stipulated wage increase, with promised productivity gains and plans for an orderly reduction of the labor force to be negotiated by a commission of representatives from both sides.52 The agreement was backdated to April 1, but to be valid it had to be approved by the Moscow Council of Trade Unions and by the
commissar of labor. Both subscribed to the communist model of productivist labor relations. The commissar approved "in principle," but the council rejected the agreement after a month's deliberation, claiming the pay scale was too high. In individual disputes, however, the labor commissar upheld the tarif anyway and even authorized a flat rate increase in July, although it was higher than the citywide pay scale decreed by the Moscow Council of Trade Unions. Communist labor policy was not yet unanimous in 1918.

Persistent conflicts over the tarif and its modifications continued to tax union resources. Workers at the Vazhenkov typography sent the union a long letter complaining of union inaction in a series of disputes over pay, vacation time, and work rules. Some eight or ten trips to the union had resulted in nothing; their elected representative refused to make these fruitless journeys any longer and the factory committee had to make three additional trips without ever finding the responsible union official at his desk. Their owner knew the union was powerless, so he acted with increasing impunity. Significantly, the workers of Vazhenkov did not publicly voice their complaint at such a "difficult time" for the union: their dissatisfaction with union performance did not extend to disapproval of its overall independent line. The union's Menshevik activists were already under great pressure for their political activism; the party had been expelled from the Moscow Soviet in June. But the union's ability to serve its members was also constrained by the application of the state's productivist vision of labor relations, by the refusal of communist board members to fulfill any union functions, and by increasing divisions within the printing industry labor force. All these pressures sapped the collective force the union needed to counter the resistance of private employers.
Private enterprise still existed in the printing industry in mid and late 1918, particularly in Moscow. As late as January, 1919, only thirteen enterprises in Moscow were nationally owned. But social forms of enterprise—workers' and state control—were gaining increasing importance. By the end of 1918, 325 Russian typographical enterprises had been socialized, some 18 percent of the total in the republic. The term "socialization" covered a wide range of authority; the Russkoe Slovo print shop in Moscow had been sequestered by order of the Moscow Soviet, and that body's presidium assumed managerial authority. Nationalization here was prompted by the need to suppress a voice of the opposition but also by the Soviet's desire to print its own organ, Izvestiia, in a well-equipped shop. The convenience of an in-house print shop prompted other agencies to appropriate other shops, resulting in a chaotic grab of printing resources. The biggest institutions, such as the military and transport commissariats, seized the largest and best shops, locking up their resources and operating them outside the regular channels of the economy. In Petrograd, nationalization proceeded from the bottom up. During the short communist tenure at the head of the union, pressure came from workers in scores of shops, demanding, "If power is now in the hands of the working class, then there cannot be any talk of typographies, as the weapon of Soviet power in its struggle with the bourgeoisie, remaining the property of the bourgeoisie." To take control of this chaotic march towards socialization, the Supreme Economic Council created a polygraphic division early in 1918 to coordinate administration of all public print shops. The division would appoint commissars to supervise enterprises, and it would rationalize the supply of materials, set wage policy, and distribute orders, labor, and
output. The polygraphic division and its local branches (fifteen provincial affiliates were created by the end of 1918) became the refuge for communists ousted (or alienated) from printers' union activities; these activists, such as Nikolai Gordon in Petrograd and Alexander Borshchevskii in Moscow, used their new managerial positions on behalf of the productivist model of labor relations.

Within individual print shops, workers' control had been legislated in November 1917 to operate in private enterprise. The tariff concluded between the Moscow union and the employers' association in April 1918 further codified the rights of factory committees to enforce the agreement, to approve hiring and firing of workers. But the practical meaning of such agreements became rapidly obscured by rampant nationalization and ad hoc interpretation. In private shops, factory committees negotiated with their employers and exercised the right to approve hiring and firing decisions, but seemed no more powerful at this level than they had in 1917, when factory committees arose spontaneously as workers' representatives. In the growing circle of public enterprises, workers' control had more scope. The Menshevik union organ, Pechatnik, pointed out a peculiar case to illustrate their distaste for unrestrained workers' control, the anarchist model of labor relations. Workers at the print shop of the Soviet of Soldiers' Deputies voted to accept their factory committee's offer of a complete distribution of current assets, "as a reward for the labor they had endured." Two who objected to the economic irrationality of the move were fired, and workers refused all attempts by the union to reinstate them. You see how workers' control operates in practice, said the journal. The paying out of dividends and the firing of dissidents was no different from capitalism.
The new owners of these shops, state institutions, also disapproved of such practices, and the more normal form of factory management in the public sector was collective administration, elected or at least approved by the workers themselves. Perhaps most such collegia, as they were called, worked as well as they could under conditions of a deteriorating economy, but many cases of abuse reached the pages of the union journal.

The division to administer state typographies in Petrograd considered itself all-powerful, and ignored work rules, tarifs, and norms establishment in agreement with the union. At Moscow’s Seventh State Typography, a communist stronghold, the workers’ elected collegium soon refused to consult with the factory committee and even threatened to fire them if they protested. At the First State Typography, when the factory committee threatened to resign unless the collegium paid it more heed, the collegium said the committee’s departure would make its own work that much easier. At Girshfeld’s bookbindery in Moscow, the factory committee chairman and control commission behaved as “Tsar and God” toward workers, promising Christmas bonuses only to workers who refrained from criticism.

In shops where one-man management (Lenin’s own preference) replaced collective administration, workers faced the same kinds of authoritarian management they thought existed only under capitalism. Workers at a military typography complained that when a former printer named Lekhman arrived to direct their work, the shop became hard labor [katorga] instead of a livelihood. At the shop of the Soldiers’ Soviet, where workers early in 1918 had shared out dividends, the new commissar, Gurevich, attempted to fire the factory committee chairman over a disagreement. Eventually he summoned the militia, who
refused to carry out his order. Gurevich next called a general meeting to appeal to the workers, but they too denounced his autocratic behavior and added that his ignorance of the printing trade was leading the shop to utter ruin. 71

Increasingly, such embattled commissars and committees called upon the forces of state power to discipline their unruly workers. Workers at the nationalized typography of Ostrogozhsk (Voronezh province) complained in 1919 of excessive layoffs and loss of back pay. The town’s Revolutionary Committee chairman ordered (in the manner of Trotsky, the Red Army commander-in-chief): "Shoot every tenth man--and the rest will be silent." 72 Printers at another nationalized print shop were told they would be branded as "saboteurs" if they failed to complete an order for the military commissariat, despite workers' claims that the order was technically impossible to complete on time. 73 Factory committee members in suburban Bogorodsk were arrested when they protested the nationalization of their shop. 74 Workers at the shop of the newspaper "Voice of the Toiling Peasant" faced firing if they did not sign a statement of loyalty to the regime. 75 And when workers at the Sixth State Typography in Moscow refused to work on December 4, a religious holiday sanctioned by the union, the next day an armed detachment of Red Army soldiers occupied the shop along with members of the Cheka. They served papers on three dissidents and promised a permanent armed occupation if protests continued. 76

From the point of view of trade union productivism, the purpose of centralized state pressure on recalcitrant printers was to raise production in the industry. The Menshevik union publicized these instances to show that the interests of employers, whether socialist or capitalist, were inevitably in conflict with those of workers. They argued also that such
arbitrary and thoughtless administration had further plunged the industry into ruin. Communists claimed on the contrary that industry would only recover if they were able to devote all activist resources to organizing production, not to defending workers' rights. Whoever was right, the printing industry continued to collapse. In Petrograd, unemployment had already affected 15 percent of the labor force in early 1918. Newspapers had closed, orders from industry were down, Russian print shops now faced competition from German firms hiring Russian prisoners-of-war to set type and print books. The departure of government to Moscow further reduced the demand for printed work in Petrograd. Unemployment rose to 4,000 printers by autumn 1918, and many more printers now left the city for refuge in the countryside.

The Mensheviks' trade union dream of a united working class standing up to its employer disintegrated under such conditions. "Unity," such as there was, became an artificial construct, enforced by state and communist institutions. Latent divisions within the work force now became more acute. Demobilized soldier-printers challenged non-combatants for scarce jobs, while others took on overtime assignments which only exacerbated growing unemployment. Women bore the brunt of industrial demobilization policies that allowed only one member per family to be employed in a given print shop: "they want to take from us the right to a share of bread, a right of every citizen," they protested in one instance. Despite the tariff in force in Moscow, newspaper typesetters in state enterprises received 50 percent more than those employed under the collective contract. New tariff proposals pitted skilled workers against unskilled, fanning a perpetual source of discord. Urban workers chastised their colleagues with rural ties, who now
walked away from the city with two months’ severance pay instead of staying on to help restore industrial production. Disputes over which branches of printing were hazardous enough to warrant extra summer leave and similar arguments over special ration entitlements also divided workers.

Such fissures split apart the entire Russian working class in these months, shattering the class-based sense of purpose that had contributed to the Bolshevik victory in October 1917. Among printers, political party divisions now assumed an even more prominent role, as communists and Mensheviks tried to rally support for their respective visions of labor relations and of the socialist revolution.

Working-class dissatisfaction with communist policies had reached a peak in May and June of 1918. A growing opposition movement in Petrograd called for new democratic soviet elections and the convocation of an independent workers’ congress. Responding to the Petrograd initiative and to the expulsion of Mensheviks and SRs from the Soviet’s Central Executive Committee, Moscow’s printers held a mass rally at the Zimin circus on June 16, denouncing the curbs on free speech and press, and demanding an end to the persecution of all those who disagreed with the regime. This is not workers’ power, they claimed, but power by a group of fanatics. The meeting concluded by warning that if the representatives who carried this message to the Soviet were arrested, the printers were prepared to launch a political strike whenever the union board called them. Communist influence among workers seemed weaker in mid-1918 than ever. And at the same time, the simmering civil war now threatened the regime’s survival with the revolt of Czech soldiers in Siberia. The task of building socialism in a wrecked economy was now compounded by a
renewed military emergency, and the communist regime responded with emergency measures against all who would oppose their policies. In Petrograd, communist printers now found their minority position intolerable, and they began an intensive campaign to win control of their union by fair means or foul.

The Assault on Union Independence, 1918-1920

Electoral methods having failed, Petrograd communists decided to weaken the Petrograd union by creating a parallel, "red" union. During the summer of 1918, Petrograd communists exhorted printers to reject Menshevik policies and to support their radical communist line. Communists launched a shrill press campaign against the Menshevik "yellow," "counter-revolutionary" board, "yellow" because they supported the capitalists, not the workers. The Petrograd Council of Trade Unions, a communist-dominated body with the authority to adjudicate such conflicts, began to investigate communist charges against the printers' union, but refused to dissolve the board or to sanction the creation of a second, communist printers' union. Nonetheless, radical printers went ahead early in October to organize a new union. The Mensheviks would allege that the organization campaign was backed by threats of job dismissals and bald promises of food and housing.

The independent union agreed to call new board elections to settle the issue democratically, but before a vote could be organized, the conflict came to a head. On the eve of the first anniversary of the October revolution, the Petrograd Trade Union Council challenged the printers' union to declare its support for Soviet power. The union refused to make such a statement, advising members they were free to attend the festivities as
individuals. On November 5, Grigorii Zinoviev, Petrograd’s party and Cheka chief, attacked
the Menshevik board at a rally of communist printers; the next afternoon a "claque" [kuchka]
of red printers rushed from another rally to the union’s office, expelled officials working
there, and demanded they hand over all documents and keys. Threatened by such force, the
old officials agreed to capitulate not to this group, but to the Council of Trade Unions, which
accepted their "resignation." Three weeks later, a mass meeting convened to elect a new
board. Menshevik reports estimated no more than 1,500 printers (of a maximum 18,000
members) attended. After non-communist speakers were denied the floor, many of these
left, and only about 900 remained to elect by a show of hands a new all-communist board of
directors.92

Buoyed by this victory, Petrograd printers sent representatives to other cities and
regions to lead the same kind of agitation.93 In Moscow, communist board members had
long since withdrawn from active work in everyday union affairs, but at the end of
December 1918, they returned to a board meeting with an ultimatum. They would resign en
masse unless the board now pledged allegiance to the official productivist role for trade
unions.94 The board refused, and the communists walked out, only to find themselves
isolated in the Moscow labor movement. No union had ever before splintered like this, and
even Moscow’s communist party committee disapproved of its printers’ actions. The
printers’ union council of representatives voted to condemn the walkout by a vote of 81-13
(with 10 abstentions), and a mass meeting of several thousands in early February 1919 also
voted its support for the Menshevik board of directors. 95 At this point, the communist
minority of 600 walked out; 176 arrived some time later at the communist printers’ club and
voted to constitute themselves as a new red printers' union. Now the Moscow party committee approved of the split, but the communist-dominated Council of Trade Unions continued to refuse to sanction a divided union. The Moscow red union of printers remained officially "schismatics."

At this point, the Petrograd and Moscow red unions turned their attention to the capture of the national printers union. They joined forces to call their own congress of supporters; this would challenge the planned congress organized by the existing union's all-Russian central council. Once again, the red renegades were thwarted by their comrades, this time in the national union center, the All-Russian Council of Trade Unions (VTsSPS), whose organizational department published a notice insisting the red congress was unauthorized. Nevertheless, some ninety delegates arrived in Moscow in mid-May, some to help build a new red national union, others with mandates to bring the two factions together, others only seeking information.

The congress organizers claimed to represent 56,000 printers from across Russia. The independent union later questioned this figure, claiming many delegates were sent from meetings and organizations of dubious legitimacy. For example twenty-six Petrograd delegates claimed to represent 27,000 printers. In fact, the entire work force of the city was down to 100,000; 27,000 had been the maximum size of the printing and paper work force in 1917; one correspondent estimated only 10,000 were left in September 1918. Instead of 56,000, Mensheviks conceded the red congress may have represented 14,000 or 15,000 printers nationally.

The All-Russian Council of Trade Unions refused to accept this congress's legitimacy,
either, and called on both reds and independents to organize a new special congress that would end the schism and determine the union line and leadership. Accepted trade union rules still depended nominally on democratic procedure and majority rule. Both sides realized they must win a majority of Russia's printers to be recognized as the sole representative for the industry, but when the VTsSPS named an organizing bureau of two communists and one Menshevik (one from each union; the second communist represented the VTsSPS), independents feared their complaints about new voting irregularities would be ignored. Indeed, the VTsSPS refused to "enter into the petty details of the election." Complaints would be handled at the congress, by its elected mandate commission. At this point, the independents left the organization bureau and called on their delegates to boycott the special congress.

When the congress opened on August 18, 1919, after several postponements due to a military threat to Petrograd, the red organizers claimed to represent 48,600 union members. The 123 delegates in attendance included 104 communists or communist sympathizers, four Social Democratic Internationalists, one Zionist, one anarchist, two Mensheviks, and fifteen without party affiliation. Meanwhile, the Menshevik union assembled ninety-seven delegates representing 26,700 union members at its offices in central Moscow. Their central council refused to legitimize the special congress by giving the required report on its activities, and although VTsSPS chairman Mikhail Tomskii (himself a former printer) gave a conciliatory address at the congress's opening, he concluded that the existing union had refused all efforts to end the schism. Before the congress had concluded its business, the VTsSPS ruled that the old central council was dissolved, and the central committee elected at
this congress would henceforth represent the new all-Russian union of workers in polygraphic production—a name chosen deliberately to include the widest possible range of workers.\textsuperscript{107}

The new union fully endorsed the principles of centralization and productivism. Its new center would be "a military command—because we live in an armed camp, and the masses have gotten used to look upon their central organizations as upon their fathers."\textsuperscript{108}

The task of the union was not to struggle for an extra five-kopeck piece but to help in the restructuring [perestroika] of society, of its economy.\textsuperscript{109} Although printers argued at the congress about whether productivity could be raised more by rational incentives (to lure skilled workers back to production) or by better administration, no one questioned the primacy of production. This would remain the theme of the union for years to come.\textsuperscript{110}

The Menshevik losers argued with much justification that the communists had won the union over to the principles of production by illegitimate methods, by threats of repression and coercion, by the methods of "Cheka, prison, and bullets."\textsuperscript{111} This was a crucial difference between the two parties. The Mensheviks proudly insisted they would never use the communist methods of "lies, slander, demagogy, and bayonets," but only "speech, the pen, and the ballot."\textsuperscript{112} We criticize in words, but obey in our actions, the union leader Kefali editorialized in April 1919.\textsuperscript{113} Many, if not most, communists did not share the Mensheviks' commitment to democracy and democratic methods. At the February 1919 meeting that gave birth to the red splinter union in Moscow, the communist Perepechko reportedly said that the idea of popular rule [narodopravstvo] should be consigned to the archive, that it was time for the dictatorship of the proletariat to be established throughout the world through means of "blood and iron."\textsuperscript{114} But was this rejection of democratic
procedure an inherent attribute of the communist ideology or only the position of a militant faction within it? Is it possible to see the communist takeover of the printers’ union as part of a concerted and general assault by the party center, a coordinated effort to implement its monopoly of power wherever it could and through whatever means proved effective? The history of this particular communist victory suggests otherwise, and thus offers important insight into the process of the communist consolidation of power.

Trade unionists, communists and independents alike, believed in trade union unity, even if for communists this meant tolerating elements that opposed their cardinal principles of socialist labor relations. The idea of two or more unions representing the same workers was anathema to most communist union activists. But to other communists less imbued with the principles of the historic trade union movement, the existence of a so-called proletarian union that opposed the tasks of socialist construction was an even greater insult to proletarian values. Communists, consequently, were divided in their attitude toward the independent printers’ union. The leading Moscow communist printer, Aleksandr Borshchevskii, and leaders of the central union apparatus such as Tomskii and S. A. Lozovskii placed a greater value on unity than on ideological purity. For the leader of the Petrograd communist printers, Nikolai Gordon, the correct ideological line was more important than outmoded trade union solidarity. In the battle over the printers’ union, Gordon and his supporters were directly responsible for the manipulative and coercive way in which the independent printers’ union was defeated.

The assault on the Petrograd union in 1918 began on the personal initiative of Gordon, who launched a scathing press attack on the independent union in the aftermath of
the repression of the independent workers' movement in July. But he met with communist opposition. Several times, his calls to dissolve the Petrograd board of directors were rejected by the city's Trade Union Council and by the central council, the VTsSPS. Even in planning their coup over the union, Gordon's communists feared a reaction to their highhanded methods, and were relieved and surprised when none materialized. The fait accompli of November 6 was successful but unpopular with party union bosses; Moscow communist printers applauded the victory but condemned the tactics employed. The Petrograd Trade Union Council also acceded to the coup only after the fact.

Radical pressures acted in Moscow, too, although not directly from printers. The soviet of the district in which the union office was located tried twice late in 1918 and again in 1919 to evict the union, only to be overruled by the Moscow Soviet and the Moscow Trade Union Council. The union journal was closed "forever" for anti-soviet propaganda in September 1918 by order of the press department of the Moscow Soviet, but this order was overruled on pressure from the VTsSPS. The initiative to follow Petrograd's lead came from Petrograd, not from the Moscow party. The final decision to walk out of the union board of directors was made in Moscow by a small group of printers--a committee of the communist printers' caucus plus the ten communist members of the board. On the day after the walkout, the communist fraction of the Moscow Trade Union Council unanimously objected, and the Moscow city party committee also condemned the communist printers' action. Radical communists thus found themselves estranged from the party mainstream.
It is difficult to assess the extent of genuine rank- and-file support for these tactics or for this outcome. Communists like Gordon had their supporters; 400 printers joined in the assault on the Petrograd union in November 1918. Three thousand Petrograd printers voted for communist board members in that union’s last open election in April 1918;\(^{123}\) 4,000 voted for Moscow’s communists in April 1918 and some 2,000 would vote for them in the next official election in late 1919.\(^{124}\) But the majority of printers in both capitals supported the Menshevik position.

The situation in the provinces was more complex and unsettled. Workers in many localities had little knowledge of the split between Mensheviks and communists, or tended to attribute it to personality conflicts and local squabbles. In the provinces, material life—"bread and sugar"—interested workers much more than ideology.\(^{125}\) Yet Mensheviks enjoyed strong support in areas such as Kiev and along the Volga. How then did the minority faction manage to triumph?

First, the communist position enjoyed certain legitimate appeal. A majority of the trade union movement, after all, had adopted the productivist principle of labor relations, and this issue remained central in the campaign to oust the Mensheviks from union leadership. The communist union journal argued that the Menshevik board had opportunistically appealed to the greed of workers, and by negotiating high wages instead of supporting the drive for labor discipline, they had contributed to the decline of production. Moreover, high wages only led to more unemployment.\(^{126}\) Communists also sought to win votes by criticizing the inactivity of the Menshevik union center: it had failed to call a national congress, it had failed to organize provincial unions.\(^{127}\) Communists also appealed to patriotism and to the
good "instincts" of printers, claiming they had been manipulated and led astray by the
"yellow generals," supporters of Kolchak and Pilsudski, who used the printers' union as their
last legal bastion in the opposition to Soviet power.\textsuperscript{128}

But clearly communists did not rely on persuasion alone. They used their managerial
positions to silence dissenters with firing and arrests.\textsuperscript{129} Distribution of the central union's
\textit{Vestnik}, which publicized such abuses, was banned in Petrograd.\textsuperscript{130} Attendance at factory
meetings was enforced at times by armed guards; workers were expected to endorse
unanimously communist resolutions and to elect by acclamation communist delegates to
conferences.\textsuperscript{131}

Communists also employed a repertoire of "democratic procedures" to ensure their
victories, alleged the Mensheviks. If a lawful council of representatives voted against a
communist proposal, the communists would call a conference of factory committee
representatives and claim that this body was more authoritative.\textsuperscript{132} Mensheviks argued that
such groups were merely easier to manipulate.\textsuperscript{133} And when even this failed, the
communists could resort to their tactics of divide and conquer, as Gordon argued in the new
red union presidium on May 8, 1919: if we hear that a given meeting has voted in favor of
the Menshevik union and not us, "then our people ought to carry out a schism and organize
our own union." His more moderate colleague, A. Tikhanov, argued this was
"premature."\textsuperscript{134}

The Menshevik union journal also detailed a series of electoral abuses leading up to
the special congress. When a general meeting of 210 printers in Voronezh elected two
independents to the congress, the provincial Council of Trade Unions canceled the election
and organized a new ballot by print shop. The Menshevik board realized the council’s motive for this was "clearer than clear," but they were powerless to oppose it. In one shop, the red candidate warned the printers that if he were not elected, he would use his authority in the local polygraphic division to have them all drafted into the Red Army. In the end, the independents out polled the reds, 279-139, and the provincial council of trade unions decided to send one delegate from each side to the congress. In Petrograd, a conference of factory committees elected fourteen independents to the fifty-person delegation, but the Petrograd Trade Union Council refused to confirm even this result and called a new election. In Samara, local authorities annulled an election that gave the independents 83 of 145 votes, on the grounds of lack of a quorum.

The reds, for their part, charged the independents with similar tricks. The so-called 26,700 workers sending delegates in support of trade union independence was systematically inflated, claimed the communist Vserossiiskii pechatnik. The Mensheviks counted all 498 (sic) Voronezh printers as theirs, when in fact only 249 (sic) had voted for them. (Note that according to the communist journal, the reds had won exactly half the votes in Voronezh.)

Although both sides strove to place a democratic veneer on their claims for legitimacy, the times were not favorable for democratic procedure. A White army had come near to capturing Petrograd in the summer, and another would strike only 250 miles from Moscow in October. Shortly after the Voronezh election, the city was raided by an advance party of anti-Soviet cavalry, and the union directors had to go into hiding for twenty-five days. The rank-and-file remained hostage to the suppliers of food, fuel, and shelter.
Most communists in the rear felt they were facing a life or death struggle for the survival of the revolution. Since mid-1918 the Menshevik leaders of the printers’ union had been branded as heinous betrayers of that revolution. At such times, the democratic impulses of communists like Tomskii gave way to the coercive and authoritarian impulses of communists like Nikolai Gordon.

Gordon, a small-time communist, is thus an important figure in the history of the union. He did not shrink from threatening or employing force in order to achieve victory for his position. He fought the Petrograd union establishment and won by his precipitate methods; he seemingly single-handedly carried off the unauthorized red congress in May 1919, and he received final vindication in his election to the new red union’s central committee in August. The Gordon that appears in the historical record cared little for politeness or procedure. At the 1919 congresses he dominated all others in his intolerance of discussion and dissent; he quarreled with his Moscow counterparts over who should take the credit for the first red congress; he argued vociferously for the subordination of labor to productive interests. "Now that we are the bosses of production, why shouldn’t we introduce such rules as, for example, that a worker does not have the right to leave his enterprise early, or that he ought to produce a given quantity of output in the allotted time?" At the third all-Russian congress of the union in 1921, Gordon lamented they had dispersed the Mensheviks too late, but better late than never. It is not hard to see in the attitudes represented by Gordon the embryo of the Stalinist system of coercive power and disregard for democratic procedures.

Despite the victory of the reds in the national union, the observance of established
procedures, of "trade union rules," continued to protect Menshevik printers in Moscow for ten more months. The VTsSPS refused to allow two unions to co-exist in Moscow, and ordered new elections by secret ballot. In the December 1919 vote, the Mensheviks retained their decisive majority in the board of directors, winning eighteen seats, to one for the SRs, and six for the communists. The Moscow union was now officially subordinate to the communist-dominated union center, and conflict between the two factions continued to boil.

Gordon kept up his attack in letters from Petrograd to the chairman of the union central committee, A. Tikhanov. He repeatedly called on Tikhanov to dissolve the Moscow board. Objecting to publication of a Moscow union journal, he warned that it should be carefully monitored, and closed with the least "declaration" of a political nature. In any case, he wrote, if they tried to distribute the journal in Petrograd, those responsible would be arrested and sent to hard labor. Tikhanov replied that to dissolve the board by force was a confession of weakness, not strength, but Gordon and the Moscow union continued on their collision course. Moscow leaders took advantage of a visit by an English trade union delegation to call a general meeting of printers on May 23. A thunderous attack on Soviet power by the union leader Kefali and then an appearance by the fugitive leader of the Socialist Revolutionary party, Victor Chernov, led to the arrest of several Moscow board members. In response, the Moscow union refused to cooperate in organizing a national printers' tariff conference in June and were punished by exclusion from the conference.

Gordon, meanwhile, feared the union central committee was still dragging its feet. He recommended sending "the most reliable communist-printers" plus Cheka agents to patrol every print shop that might volunteer to publish the verbatim account of the May 23 meeting.
And he urged that the Moscow board be dissolved without further delay: to this effect, he was sending a "shock group" of printer-agitators to Moscow and organizing a big mass meeting in Petrograd to denounce the "Moscow yellow sons of bitches." On June 17, a delegates meeting in Moscow met to object to their exclusion from the tariff conference, but the conference voted 30-5 to demand the dissolution of the band of "saboteurs and Pilsudski supporters." The following day, the Moscow Council of Trade Unions agreed to dissolve the "counterrevolutionary" board of directors and to reorganize the union. The union apparatus was now and henceforth permanently in the hands of the communists.

The Production Union in Power and the Shop Floor Response, 1920-21

The communist printers' claim to legitimacy was that a union which shared the productivist values of the regime would take better care of its members through its coordinated effort to raise production. Produce more, and you will eat better, was their message. But the years of party struggle had taken their toll. The rank-and-file seemed thoroughly disaffected from the union and its policies. A few large shops struck in defense of the disbanded Moscow board of directors; they saw their factory committee representatives arrested and replaced with more compliant ones. The union and regime were now free to implement their model of labor relations, to demonstrate how centralized and coordinated economic leadership would raise production and improve the welfare of the working class.

Symbolizing the new productivist line, the union's permanent secretary, Tikhanov,
also assumed the leadership of the economic organ administering the industry, the polygraphic division of the Supreme Economic Council. But he faced competition in Moscow, now the largest center for printing, from the Moscow polygraphic division, led by another communist, Borshchevskii. Only late in 1920 was the situation resolved by subordinating the central polygraphic division to the Moscow division.155 Worse was the status of production in the industry: there were insufficient supplies of ink, grease, kerosene, spare parts and type, reported a workers' inspection team in May 1920. Because of fuel shortages, 80 percent of enterprises were unable to work a full day. Skilled workers had disappeared, there was no transport to haul paper or fuel. Presses and buildings had not been repaired since 1914. Management conducted its work unsystematically, it failed to account for materials. Poor food supply forced workers to leave their jobs to search for bread for themselves and their families.156

The polygraphic divisions had no power or authority to solve many of these problems. Their first priority was to optimize the remaining scarce resources: this meant a drastic concentration of enterprises. Presses, type cases, and workers from small establishments were redirected to enterprises with the best sanitary and fuel conditions.157 But most pressing was the need to stimulate individual and collective productivity with material rewards. Workers on the shop floor remained resistant to working for nothing, and together the union and economic administration attempted to implement one wage system after another in the effort to lure workers back to work. Collective tariffs measured in money had become worthless along with the money supply. Bonuses payable in kind were officially adopted, but the system of measuring output was so complicated that the system could not actually be
implemented. Further, promised supplies of food were insufficient to reward individuals for higher productivity; what supplies reached the union ended up being divided equally among all workers, and even then, workers complained the amount was too little to live on. Union officials blamed the situation on the undervaluing of printers by the higher economic and trade union organizations. But V. V. Shmidt, the People's Commissar of Labor, replied this was nonsense: printing was recognized to be an important industry, but no union had defended its members as poorly as this one. If the union would only properly gather the facts and defend its requests, he promised to listen. To keep up what levels of production they could, union officials sought to appease workers in piecemeal fashion, here managing to put a shop on the higher Red Army ration, there responding to individual requests for boots, underwear, gloves, fabric, or overcoats.

The struggle for resources was similarly chaotic. The Moscow polygraphic division calculated that it employed three hundred individuals full-time in the effort to obtain supplies for the industry. Their system of allocating these supplies was in turn laden with bureaucracy and red tape. The director of one print shop described the process of securing oil, grease, and kerosene: first he had to apply to the polygraphic division's subdivision on supply, which after two days would issue a voucher on the appropriate center. The center would then issue a voucher authorizing its warehouse to dispense the material, and by then there was usually little left of what had initially been requested. Other complaints came about the polygraphic division's inability to administer the industry. Presses taken for repair disappeared for months at a time. The polygraphic division was too ignorant of local conditions to rationally allocate labor and materials.
Workers on the shop floor expected more from their union and from socialism. Gathering to express their anger at conditions in March, 1920, Moscow printers denounced the regime's failure to deliver its promised bonuses for December, its refusal to authorize the union to send a special train to acquire food for its members. "Our impoverished conditions, our starving families, have forced us to gather here," cried one worker. We are branded as saboteurs by the workers' and peasants' regime only because we ask for bread for our children. "The faces of starving children give birth to that mood which the regime labels 'sabotage,'" said another.

A year later, after ten months under the new productivist Moscow union, a conference of the city's printers remained angry. We were urged to elect a new board to replace the yellow one, and this would place us in the forefront of the red army, said one delegate. But there have been no improvements, we do not even receive the bare minimum standard of living. How can we work calmly? Another agreed: "A year of the existence of the red Board, from which we dreamed we would receive relief, and what do we have? An official account about the fact that they have organized 610 meetings."

Printers at the Sixteenth State Typography were especially enraged. A month before this conference, they met to complain about the irregular distribution of pay-in-kind, demanding that all printers in Moscow receive the same high level of rations as certain shops designated as "exemplary," demanding cash payments, soap, shoes, clothing, and the right to move freely. Their demands remained unsatisfied and they refrained from striking in May only in the hope that the provincial conference would force the union to ameliorate their conditions. Two months later, food supplies were again promised with no result. Once
again, the workers here stopped work, "because they have many times deceived us. For example, they promised to issue in-kind payments for January, February, and March within two weeks, but we received only part of this after two months. Therefore we will not trust comrade Kolpakov [from the union] and we will not appear at work until we see the products delivered to the yard of our factory." \[172\]

These workers and others resisted as they could. Strikes were endemic throughout the period, although the extent of these stoppages cannot be measured because such actions were not reported in the press. (The relevant trade union documents further suggest that strikes were commonly dealt with by the party bureau within the union rather than by the union board or its secretariat.\[173\]) Absenteeism was a worse problem; workers left work for days at a time, even in the face of strict union sanctions against such "indiscipline."\[174\]

The absenteeism problem was only solved with an improvement in the regularity and amount of pay.\[175\] Theft of factory property also increased, as workers took paper, light bulbs, anything they could steal that could be exchanged for food on the black market.\[176\]

Such behavior proved to both communists and Mensheviks the immaturity of Russia's working class, its narrow-mindedness, its lack of a proper socialist consciousness. For Mensheviks, the low cultural level of the "masses," even in the highly skilled printing industry, was one reason that Russia was not ready for socialism and why the communist experiments in socialist labor relations were doomed to fail.\[177\] Communists preferred to blame short-term factors for the behavior of this mass: the "best workers" had volunteered for the Red Army or were posted to Soviet commissariats. What remained even in the printing industry were women, youths, and semi-peasants whose exposure to a proletarian
ethos was too brief to generate the proper consciousness.\textsuperscript{178}

But were both parties correct in characterizing even the printers, with their traditions of intellectualism and independence, as a "mass" driven only by their stomachs, not their heads? I would argue that these activists were blinded by old dichotomies between "economic" and "political" consciousness, and that both failed to appreciate the fundamental connection between welfare and politics. The issue of food had been an important political catalyst in revolutionary Russia: the demand for better distribution of bread and flour had frequently been the only issue in widespread strikes across Russia before February, and the demonstrations that toppled the tsar in February 1917 were sparked by shortages in the bread supply in Petrograd. It was the failure of the Provisional Government to improve the supply of bread and foodstuffs that contributed to its loss of popular support in October 1917. The right to subsistence was seen to be a basic human right. The communists in power blamed their failure to improve the food supply on many obstacles beyond their control--loss of territory, blockade, and war, but workers' protests over the regime's continuing failure to supply food meant as much that the socialist government had broken the social contract as that workers were hungry and physically starving. It was illegal and dangerous to couch these protests in terms of rights and of the social contract in 1920. In 1920, as in 1916, the cry, "We are starving" was more politically neutral and therefore safer than the claim, "You do not protect our welfare."

But of course, workers were physically starving, too. Early in 1918 the regime enacted measures intended to make urban food supply totally dependent on the state: a ban on free trade in grain, curbs on workers' rights to travel beyond the city limits to purchase
grain, severe punishment for "speculation." Even collective food purchases by unions required government permission. But the state struggled in vain to satisfy the subsistence needs of its dependents. By January 1919, for example, only five or six days' reserve of flour remained in Moscow. In 1920, the daily ration of bread was down to one-half pound in Simbirsk, three-fourths of a pound in Astrakhan. On the illegal free market in northern Viatka, rye flour cost 150 rubles a pound, a quart of milk or a pound of meat cost 400 rubles. The average skilled worker here earned 2,000 rubles a month. In Moscow, printers were entitled to one pound of bread a day in 1920, but as elsewhere, delivery was not guaranteed. Production plummeted as workers devoted all their time and resources to foraging for food, and many failed to survive. At the large First Model State Typography in Moscow, a representative reported that they were burying a colleague a week in 1920. In fact, 174 died here in eleven months from mid-1919 to May 1920, 9.5 percent of the plant's work force. The average death rate for all government typographies in this period was the same.

Even at this margin of subsistence, however, "narrow-minded" printers remained conscious of more than their stomachs. They were especially incensed that workers in the tobacco, leather, chemical, and metal industries, whose products had immediate value in exchange for food, lived better than the printers whose printed word had been as valuable for the revolution as bayonets and bullets. We do not want privileges, argued the delegate Kazatskii in 1921, "We speak only of equalization... It is not a misfortune when everyone suffers, but if I suffer and my neighbor finds a way not to suffer, then this creates unrest."
The failure of the regime to feed its citizens was a political failure, and printers recognized this. It was not Lloyd George who blocked Russia's food supply but the regime's policy of seizing grain by force, they argued in December 1919. "The workers' power does not support workers' interests!" In March 1920, they said the communists took power over the economy, but did not know how to use it, throwing the workers a "bare bone," a promise of an extra ration of three-eighths of a pound of bread.

Both communists and Mensheviks accused the other side of exploiting the workers' subsistence demands, of "demagogy." One unionist argued that 80 percent of printing union members, who belonged to no party, cared only about food. But in the town of Penza, when local communists promised cheese and butter to workers who joined the red union, just like those who had earlier left the independent union, printers said no. "We are workers, not sandwich makers."

This core of pride in their status as workers, their proletarian collectivism and egalitarianism found greatest scope for expression at the level of individual print shops. The failure of the centralized economic apparatus to support workers and their families reinforced the centrality of the workshop, which assumed more and more welfare functions. To some extent, the factories did become the "federated republics" denounced by activists. Factory meetings and factory committees allocated wages, dispensed food, distributed clothing, secured empty buildings for workers' housing, and assigned their workers to apartments there. Factory-level tribunals ruled on violations of law and workplace rules. Factory committees arbitrated personal conflicts and pronounced on proletarian morality: workers who swore at others, who drank on the job, or who demonstrated "indifference" to
their work were reprimanded or fired. Cultural life also devolved upon the factories, which sponsored libraries, clubs, and even their children’s schools.

Such workplace cohesion contributed to the political mobilization of printers even after their independent union had been decapitated, and workplace protests over the food situation in shops like these eventually forced the regime to change its policies. The New Economic Policy would reintroduce free trade, end requisitioning, and permit private enterprise and a market economy: all of these were elements of the Menshevik critique from the start of communist rule. This new policy required new thinking from the printers’ union, and it could potentially have altered the relations among workers, unions, and management.

The struggle for the printers’ union during the civil war ultimately yielded two distinct alternative systems of labor relations. The communist system, based on the belief in the absolute harmony of interests between proletarian state and worker, placed production above consumption, state interests above local interests, central authority above democracy. In a communist utopia, with a perfectly planned economy, such a system might promise efficiency and yield a material surplus that could raise the welfare of all. In the real world of war and revolutionary conflict, the system’s implementation came quickly to rely upon imperfect and arbitrary authority, which met challenges unsystematically and increasingly through use of force and repression.

The Menshevik system was less perfect in the abstract. It recognized that even under socialism workers and employers had interests in conflict and they sought to regulate those conflicts through compromise, through institutionalized bargaining, through preserving for trade unions an autonomous civil status apart from the state. It recognized that such a
system could only function in a democratic system, that democratically established rules and procedures could most peaceably protect the interests of workers and employers. In such a socialist system, the state should be an ally, but it should never be permitted unlimited power.

The system that emerged by the spring of 1921 was the communist system modified to the extent that workers themselves had been able to resist its most repellant aspects. The overall management of industry in 1921 was no more democratic than it had been in 1914, and much more highly centralized, hierarchical, and bureaucratic. In a political democracy, workers might influence central economic policy through the political process, but the communist system of management left them with little formal leverage. On the other hand, the workplace in 1921 reflected important changes from before the revolution: local democracy and self-organization were possible, and workers continued throughout the civil war to exercise the important right won in 1917 to reject supervisors they could not work under. A variety of forms of participation--factory committees and commissions, as well as communist party organizations in each enterprise--organized the rank- and-file to deal with their immediate problems. The enterprise emerged from the civil war a more central unit of public life than was probably imagined in either communist or Menshevik visions of socialist revolution.

Workers also succeeded in imposing their preferred incentive system on communist visionaries. The adoption of the New Economic Policy was an implicit admission that coercion and other negative incentives had failed. So too had moneyless ration schemes and the direct supply of clothing and fuel, if only because supplies had been so irregular. Wage
differentials based on skill proved to be the only way to lure skilled workers back into production; wages dependent on fulfilling output norms—including piece rates and bonus systems—also proved to be more successful in raising production than standard compensation for all regardless of work.\(^{197}\)

But unlike the adversarial capitalist system, the victorious new system of labor relations also relied on proletarian enthusiasm. Appeals to patriotism during the civil war had certainly helped to raise productivity and to squelch conflicts.\(^{198}\) Voluntary labor Saturdays (subbotniki) generated productive enthusiasm from the stratum of communist supporters.\(^{199}\) Participation in management, in many forms, also emerged as a way to involve workers in the drive for production. As factory committees became bogged down in the routine of administering material and daily life, workers were called upon to elect their "most reliable" comrades to the workers’ and peasants’ inspectorate, a body charged with monitoring production performance.\(^{200}\) Later in the NEP, factories would employ production conferences and factory newspapers as non-pecuniary methods of raising workers’ interest in production.

Collective resolution of conflicts remained a casualty of civil war labor relations, as adversarial collective bargaining virtually disappeared. Overarching agreements on wages and work conditions became a function of state policy; decrees by the Council of People’s Commissars, the Supreme Economic Council, or the Commissar of Labor replaced negotiation and arbitration. Such central policies could be debated at party, soviet, and trade union congresses, but their adoption came through the highly centralized administrative process, not through democratic or local initiative. Within the terms of these agreements,
individuals could appeal to their unions about violations or for special treatment; disputes about improper job assignments, personnel conflicts, poor work habits, labor indiscipline, and inappropriate behavior were dealt first within factory committees and then in union-level comradely-discipline courts.\textsuperscript{201} The strike was never formally outlawed, but its implications were so threatening that the word disappeared from common usage. Workers might engage in "stoppages," but a "strike" by 1921 was a serious political act and punished accordingly.

The trade union that emerged from the civil war was a subordinate participant in the formulation of industrial policy, and the mechanism through which centrally determined policy was implemented. Unions need not compete for resources for their workers, because wise central authorities would determine in advance the optimal allocation of resources. The trade union that led the printers in the NEP pledged to organize production and raise the cultural level of its members, but it was disinclined to fight for any interests that were not identical with those of the Russian work force and economy as a whole. Trade unions also emerged as highly centralized institutions: trade union locals received instructions from union central committees, whose policies in turn depended on directives from the VTsSPS as well as the central economic organs. The evidence further suggests that within each trade union unit, decisions were made in advance by the party cell directing the unit.\textsuperscript{202} If workers had gained some authority at the shop floor level since the days of tsarism, their exercise of authority at higher levels of power and decision-making was sharply circumscribed in favor of the party vanguard.

The centralization of power and authority also strengthened the role played by the
state in labor relations. No socialist would deny that the state had a role to play: even the independents were happy to invoke state power to enforce favorable settlements in disputes with private entrepreneurs, to legislate the participation of capitalists in unemployment and social welfare funds. The socialism that emerged from the civil war was a centralized state socialism, which relied on the power of the state's coercive agencies—the Cheka and the concentration camp—to ensure adherence to its centrally defined goals and policies. The goodness of the goal—maximal social welfare—justified concentrating all power in the hands of the central apparatus, subordinating trade unions, and punishing political dissent. In the end, printers had to throw in their lot with this state, because they were allowed to choose no other.

By 1921, the communist system of labor relations had triumphed in the printing industry more by virtue of the communist monopoly on state power than by the system's inherent workability or intellectual appeal among printers. But in practice, the system was forced to compromise by pressure from below, because printers refused to give up all their rights and independence to their union or to the state. In their resistance to communist policy in the winter and spring of 1920-21, these and other workers insisted on their right to choose the system that best protected their welfare. The communist government was able to restrict the choices open to workers, by outlawing opposition socialist parties and by ruthlessly limiting the right to discuss alternatives beyond factory walls. The official history of the printers' union in the civil war was now told as a simplistic tale of valiant communists overcoming the treacherous Menshevik manipulation of the hearts and minds of virtuous proletarians in the printing trade. The consideration of alternatives, socialist or
otherwise, was henceforth beyond the limits of permissible discourse.
ENDNOTES

1. Support for the research and writing of this essay was gratefully received from the National Council for Soviet and East European Research, the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), the Fulbright-Hays Faculty Research Program of the U.S. Office of Education, and the Australian National University.


4. Pechatnik, 11 (November 10 [October 28], 1918), p. 4; Vtoraia moskovskaiia gubernskaiia konferentsiiia rabochikh poligraficheskogo proizvodstva (Stenograficheskii otchet) 12 maiia 1921 g. (Moscow, 1922), p. 31; Tretii vserossiiskii s"ezd soiuzov rabochikh poligraficheskogo proizvodstva i poligrafotdelev (2-6 iunia 1921 g.) Protokoly i postanovleniiia s"ezda (Moscow, 1921), p. 13; Istoriiia Leningradskogo soiuza poligraficheskogo proizvodstva (1904-1907 gg.) (Leningrad, 1925).


6. Sbornik dekretov i postanovlenii po narodnomu khoziaistvu (25 oktiabria 1917 g. - 25 oktiabria 1918 g.) (Moscow, 1918), pp. 226-229.


8. Ibid., pp. 191-94.

9. This is a theme of the work of Sheila Fitzpatrick, particularly in Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1934 (Cambridge, 1979), and "The Bolsheviks' Dilemma: Class, Culture, and Politics in Early Soviet Years," Slavic Review, 47:4 (Winter 1988), 599-613; see also the discussion following the essay, with Ronald Grigor Suny and Daniel Orlovsky (pp. 614-626).


13. In the printing industry, discussion can be found in Vserossiiskii pechatnik, 10 (1921), pp. 2-9; 11 (1921), p. 7; Moskovskii pechatnik, 2 (February 15, 1921), pp. 3-4.


15. Vserossiiskii pechatnik, 10 (1921), pp. 2-6.

16. Pechatnik, 12 (December 10 [November 27], 1918.

17. Pechatnik, 5 (May 30, 1919): decision of the board meeting of May 8; the Menshevik Nikolai Chistov joined the collegium of the Moscow polygraphic division in February 1920 (Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv moskovskoi oblasti [TsGAMO], f. 699, op. 1, d. 60, l. 17).


19. Vtoraia vserossiiskaia konferentsiia soiuuzov rabochikh pechatnogo dela (14-21 dekabria 1917 g.) (Moscow, 1918), p. 63.

20. Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii (TsGAOR), f. 5525, op. 1, d. 10, l. 14: discussion at 1919 congress.

21. Vserossiiskii pechatnik, 6 (10 June 1920), p. 3.


23. The term for this body was unique in the union movement; other unions called their analogous institutions "assemblies of delegates" [sobraniia delegatov].


25. The degree of support among printers for the agrarian Socialist Revolutionary party is hard to determine. The Menshevik party had the more dynamic leaders and dominated the political discourse. An indeterminate number of printers claimed membership in the SR party, but their voices are indistinct in the historical record.

27. Paperwork--circulars, petitions, replies--about collective agreements can be found in TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 4. Other individual cases are reported in TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 5, l. 7; Pechatnik, 5 (1918), p. 13.


29. TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 164, 160.

30. Pechatnik, 9-10 (October 10 [September 27], 1918), p. 5; 12 (December 10 [November 27], 1918], p. 2.

31. Materialy po istorii professional’nogo dvizheniia rabochikh poligraficheskogo proizvodstva (pechatnogo dela) v Rossi, sb. 1, ed. F. Smirnov, N. Gordon, and A. Borschevskii (Moscow, 1925), p. 91.


33. Materialy, pp. 142-156, provides some of the correspondence in the affair.


35. Materialy, pp. 150-55.

36. Ibid., p. 156.


39. The significance of this episode in establishing the nature of labor relations in Moscow is suggested by the extent of the discussion in the history of the Moscow union in Materialy.

40. I was unable to find a copy of this journal in Moscow libraries; it is attacked in Pechatnik, 1-2 (January 31 [February 13], 1918), p. 4.

42. The Bolshevik leader at the time, Borshchevskii, later implied the victories in January and February were due more to the temporary absence of Menshevik representatives than to Bolshevik predominance in the union (Materialy, pp. 178-79).


46. Pechatnik, 3-4 (1918), p. 11.

47. Ibid.


49. Gazeta pechatnika, December 16, 1918, p. 4.

50. Pechatnik, 5 (1918), pp. 6-8.

51. These are discussed in the journal of their society, Biulleten' moskovskogo obshchestva tipo-litografov, 1918.

52. Pechatnik, 5 (1918), pp. 15-16.


54. TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 34, ll. 178-79.


57. Vysshei sovet narodnogo khoziaistva, poligraficheskii otdel, Obzor deiatel'nosti 1918-1920 gg. (Moscow, 1921), pp. 1-2; Plenum Tsentral'nogo komiteta vserossiiskogo soiuza rabochikh poligraficheskogo proizvodstva (7-11 dekabria 1920 g.). Doklady i rezoliutsii (Moscow, 1921), p. 15.
58. Materialy, pp. 94-95.

59. The predecessor of the polygraphic division, a "technical council," was created on January 9, 1918, with representatives from the commissariats of enlightenment, labor, and finance, from the Soviet Executive Committee, the union, and from workers in nationalized enterprises [Sbornik dekretov, p. 320].

60. A polygraphic division under the Moscow Council of the Economy was created in January 1919 [Vserossiiskii pechatnik, 4-5 (March 20, 1920), supplement, p. 1]; it would come to rival the national polygraphic division in importance. Conflict also reigned between the Petrograd and central polygraphic divisions [TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 38, ll. 19, 22].

61. TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 37-44.


63. TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 34, ll. 1-3, 12, 178-79.

64. Pechatnik, 3-4 (1918), p. 18.

65. Pechatnik, 9-10 (October 10 [September 27], 1918), p. 16.


68. Ibid., p. 15.

69. Pechatnik, 12 (December 10 [November 27], 1918), p. 13, for an example at the print shop belonging to the Moscow district military commissariat.


71. Pechatnik, 9-10 (October 10 [September 27], 1918), p. 20.

72. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 22, l. 19.
73. **Pechatnik**, 12 (December 10 [November 27], 1918), p. 12.

74. Ibid.

75. **Pechatnik**, 9-10 (October 10 [September 27], 1918, p. 20.


78. **Vestnik vsrpd**, 4 (October 20, 1918), p. 5; **Pechatnik**, 9-10 (October 10 [September 27], 1918), pp. 15, 16.


82. **Pechatnik**, 9-10 (October 10 [September 27], 1918), pp. 3-4.


84. **Pechatnik**, 9-10 (October 10 [September 27], 1918), pp. 9, 10.


86. **Pechatnik**, 6 (1918), pp. 9-10.

87. The genesis of this decision cannot be determined. Newspaper attacks on the counter-revolutionary "yellow" union board of directors began during the summer of 1918.

88. Once again, as in the naming of their opponents Mensheviks ("Minorityites"), the communists seized the semantic high road; in fact the communists' preferred union type, a productivist one, could also be called a company union, a yellow union. The Mensheviks did not seize on this debating point.


92. Gazeta pechatnika, December 16, 1918, p. 4; Vestnik vsrpд, 6-7 (December 1, 1918), pp. 1, 21; Pechatnik, 12 (December 10 [November 27], 1918), p. 10.


95. Gazeta pechatnika, January 19, 1919, p. 4; January 23, 1919, p. 4; the February 10, 1919, issue says 5,000 workers took part in the meeting.

96. Materialy, p. 189 (recollections of Borshchevskii, who says 250 voted for the new union board); TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 34, l. 3. In 1921, the 600 who walked out of the mass meeting would turn into "half" the meeting of 5,000 (Moskovskii pechatnik, 1 (January 15, 1921), p. 6).

97. Materialy, p. 189; TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 38, l. 5.

98. Professional'noe dvizhenie, April 4, 1919, p. 10; May 9, 1919, p. 3.


100. Pervyi vserossiiskii s"ezd soiuza rabochikh poligraficheskogo proizvodstva; TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 8 (mandate commission report); Vserossiiskii pechatnik, 1 (May 1919), pp. 11-18.

101. Pechatnik, 9-10 (October 10 [September 27], 1918), p. 15. Official union figures at the start of September 1919 would show 16,000 printers in Petrograd [TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 26, l. 38; Vestnik vsrpд, 6-7 (July 15, 1919), p. 5].

102. Vestnik vsrpд, 6-7 (July 15, 1919), p. 5.
103. Professional'noe dvizhenie, August 15, 1919, p. 4.

104. Ibid., August 29, 1919, p. 1.

105. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 12, l. 2-3; Vserossiiskii pechatnik, 1 (October 28, 1919), p. 6. (This journal appeared in two series, both numbered 1 and 2, in 1919. The first series had presumably been annulled along with the legitimacy of the first red congress.)

106. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 9-10.

107. Ibid., l. 198; Professional'noe dvizhenie, August 22, 1919, p. 4.

108. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 10, l. 19.

109. Ibid., l. 34.

110. Ibid., ll. 137-39.


112. Pechatnik, 12 (December 10 [November 27], 1918), p. 3.


114. Ibid., p. 20: statement at the general meeting of February 9, 1919.

115. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 9-10.

116. Access to the relevant party archives might shed more light on the role of the party in these decisions. It is highly implausible that Gordon was acting with no encouragement at all. He seems to have been closely associated with Zinoviev, who himself was no stranger to unsavory methods. (Gordon was involved in the Joint Opposition statement in 1927, and disappears from the historical record after that.)

117. Materialy, p. 104; Pechatnik, 9-10 (October 10 [September 27], 1918, p. 16.

119. *Pechatnik*, 12 (December 10 [November 27], 1918, p. 10.

120. Ibid., p. 8; 1-2 (January 25, 1919), p. 12; 3-4 (April 1, 1919), p. 18. The union also spent 30,000 rubles to fight the eviction order, but did not say how (*Pechatnik*, 12 (December 10 [November 27], 1918), p. 9.

121. *Pechatnik*, 9-10 (October 10 [September 27], 1918), p. 2; 11 (November 10 [October 28], 1918), p. 9.


123. *Gazeta pechatnika*, December 16, 1918, p. 4.

124. *Pechatnik*, 5 (1918), p. 6; *Professional'noe dvizhenie*, December 19, 1919. The 1919 vote total is calculated from the seats won by the communists. They elected six members to the board of twenty-five; 9000 votes were cast in all.

125. TsGAOR, op. 1, d. 10, l. 6: local report at the special congress, August 1919; *Pervyi vserossiiskii s'ezd soiuza rabochikh poligraficheskogo proizvodssta*, pp. 14-26.


127. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 6, l. 8; *Vserossiiskii pechatnik*, 1 (May 1919), pp. 4, 21-23, 30; TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 10, II. 14-15.


129. *Pechatnik*, 11 (November 10 [October 28], 1918), p. 1. A compositor, Bogomazov, was arrested on authority of his factory committee chairman after he complained about a meeting at which only communists were invited to speak (*Pechatnik*, 9-10 [October 10 (September 27), 1918], p. 20).


131. *Pechatnik*, 9-10 (October 10 [September 27], 1918), p. 20; TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 22, l. 19; *Vestnik vsrepid*, 5 (May 30, 1919), p. 13; 6-7 (July 15, 1919), p. 13. (The original of this item, a letter from A. Likhter, is in TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 24, l. 17.)


134. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 20, l. 7.

135. TsGAOR f. 5525, op. 1, d. 22, l. 18.


138. Ibid., p. 6.


140. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 22, l. 19.

141. E.g. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 7, l. 15; d. 10, l. 16, 204; *Pervyi vserossiiskii s"ezd soiuza rabochikh poligraficheskogo proizvodstva*, p. 56.


143. Ibid., p. 31.

144. Tretii vserossiiskii s"ezd, 1921, p. 18. The same sentiment appears in *Materialy*, p. 91.

145. *Professional'noe dvizhenie*, December 19, 1919. The victory was not widely reported.

146. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 2, d. 11, l. 75: Gordon to Tikhanov, March 2, 1920.

147. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 2, d. 11, l. 76: Tikhanov to Gordon, March 16, 1920.

149. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 2, d. 48, l. 5.

150. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 2, d. 11, l. 74: Gordon to Tikhanov, June 5, 1920. Gordonism is not dead. A recent Soviet study of Menshevism in this period cites this letter only as proof that the Menshevik printers were plotting to print the account of the May 23 meeting, proof of their anti-Soviet agitation (P.A. Podbolotov and L.M. Spirin, Krakh men'shevizma v sovetskoiRossii (Leningrad, 1988), p. 146.

151. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 2, d. 48, l. 4.

152. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 2, d. 48, l. 5.

153. Professional'noe dvizhenie, June 26, 1920, p. 3.

154. E.g., at the First Model State Typography: TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 74, ll. 39, 40; TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 2, d. 5, l. 29.

155. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 2, d. 49, l. 51.

156. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 2, d. 49, l. 30.

157. Plenum Tsentral'nogo komiteta VSRPP, 1920, p. 19; Vserossiiskii pechatnik, 4-5 (March 20, 1920), supplement, p. 4; Moskovskii pechatnik, 5 (April 15, 1921), pp. 4-5.


161. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 2, d. 5, l. 9; op. 2, d. 33 (these protocols of the Moscow union board are full of such requests); op. 3, d. 64 (Petrograd union), ll. 11, 32; TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, 63, l. 21.

162. Vserossiiskii pechatnik, 4-5 (March 20, 1920), supplement, p. 7.

164. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 3, d. 103.

165. Vtoraiia moskovskaia gubernskaia konferentsiiia, 1921, p. 69.

166. TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 12, l. 4.

167. Ibid., l. 5.

168. Vtoraiia moskovskaia gubernskaia konferentsiiia, 1921, p. 15.

169. Ibid., p. 17.

170. TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 134, l. 1.

171. Ibid., l. 3.

172. Ibid., l. 20.

173. TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 136, l. 19: a report on the situation at the 20th State Typography to the party bureau.

174. Cases of punishment for absenteeism are recorded in TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 3, d. 103, l. 5.

175. Moskovskii pechatnik, 2 (February 15, 1921), p. 8; 3 (March 1, 1921), p. 11; 6 (May 1, 1921), p. 15.

176. TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 136, ll. 5, 36; d. 145, ll. 20, 23, 24; TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 3, d. 106, ll. 175 ff.


179. TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 60, l. 25, 38.

181. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 2, d. 48, ll. 14, 25.

182. TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 12, l. 2; d. 74, l. 8, 32; TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 34, l. 6.

183. TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 12, l. 5; Vysshii sovet narodnogo khoziaistva, poligraficheskii otdel, *Obzor deiatel'nosti*, p. 34.

184. TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 74, l. 32. Such comparisons surfaced in angry meetings in December 1919 (TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 34), March 1920 (TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 12), and at the Moscow province conference in May 1921 (*Vtoraiia moskovskaia gubernskaia konferentsiia, 1921*).

185. *Vtoraiia moskovskaia gubernskaia konferentsiia, 1921*, p. 18.

186. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 34, l. 10.

187. ibid., l. 17.

188. TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 12, l. 5.

189. TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 1, d. 34, ll. 7, 18; *Tretii vserossiiskii s'ezd, 1921*, p. 9.

190. *Vtoraiia moskovskaia gubernskaia konferentsiia, 1921*, p. 15.


192. Such functions were routinely performed by the three Moscow printshops to whose records I had access: the First Model State Typography (TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 74, ll. 2, 13, 17; d. 145, l. 4), the Sixteenth State Typography (TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 134, ll. 1, 13), the Twentieth State Typography (TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 136, ll. 8, 42).

193. TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 74, ll. 72-73; d. 145, ll. 20, 23.

194. TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 74, l. 11; d. 134, l. 28 (swearing); d. 145, l. 61 (drink).
195. TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 134, l. 68; d. 145, l. 72.

196. Examples at the First Model State Typography: TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 145, ll. 29, 50.


200. TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 134, l. 42.

201. Otchet Moskovskogo gubernskogo otdela VSRPP s sentiabria 1920 g. po marte 1921 g. (Moscow, 1921), pp. 84-99, gives a summary of cases in Moscow, and TsGAOR, f. 5525, op. 3, d. 106, in Petrograd.

202. TsGAMO, f. 699, op. 1, d. 136, l. 19.

203. For example, in Vserossiiskii pechatnik, 15 (December 1, 1921), p. 2; Moskovskii pechatnik, 1 (January 15, 1921), pp. 4-11.