

Soviet workers defy strike ban

Three weeks after his Oct. 2 demand for a nationwide ban on labor strikes was transformed by the Supreme Soviet into a ban on strikes in vital industries (just about everything except for the faltering consumer goods sector), Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov took to *Izvestia's* letters-to-the-editor page, to plead with workers not to strike any more. His request had little effect on the ever more desperate Soviet labor force.

On Oct. 25, it became known that coal miners in all the 12 coal mines of Vorkuta, north of the Arctic Circle, had walked off the job at midnight on Oct. 23-24. In defiance of the strike ban, the Vorkuta strike committee put forward pay and benefit demands, but also political ones: elimination of Article 6 of the U.S.S.R. Constitution, which defines the Communist Party of the Soviet Union as the "leading force" in society; direct elections to the post of President; direct elections for all People's Deputies; and official recognition of miners' strike committees as trade unions.

Oct. 23 also saw a two-hour warning strike by miners in the Kuzbass coalfields, Siberia, which the Soviet news agency TASS said was motivated by "the non-fulfillment of a series of points agreed with the government commission after the July strike." In the Kuzbass, the miners were joined by other local workers, including from the sector which most threatens to bring the Soviet economy to a full halt—the railroad employees.

Nor was that all. In fact, the Soviet Union is beset by every sort of strike. Coal strikes. Port strikes. Threatened cement strikes. Threatened subway strikes. Warning

strikes. Manipulated strikes. Strikes blending into nationalist protests. And, even personal strikes, so to speak, in the form of surging absenteeism in industry.

Winter strikes

The gravest strike threat looms in the transport and energy sectors. As the strike ban was debated in the Supreme Soviet, *Pravda* came out on Oct. 4 with an assessment of the impact of rail and coal strikes to date. Goods shipments, it said, have been "stuck at border railway stations in Moldavia, seaports in the Baltic, and so forth. The former and the latter have been paralyzed by strikes. The rail minister reported the following overall figure: Because of the disorders, there are 100,000 freight cars 'not working,' that is, standing idle, in the country each day."

Deputy Prime Minister Lev Voronin spelled out the impact of the strikes, the ethnic clashes in the Transcaucasus, and the non-labor-related transportation snarls, as a shortfall of goods delivered that was 50% higher in the third quarter than in the first half-year of 1989. In July and August alone, 4 billion rubles worth of consumer goods and 1 billion rubles worth of food were not delivered. In September, 300,000 tons of produce were not shipped. "Two million tons of imported freight including grain, sugar, and light industry goods, cannot be moved from seaports. . . . The time that ships spend standing idle has to be paid for in convertible currency. The cause of the problems is the shortage of freightcars."

As for fuel and raw materials, *Pravda* said, the coal shortfall for September alone was 3 million tons, including 600,000 tons of coking coal. Metallurgical plants are threatened with "standstill," since they only had three days' coking coal stocks on hand. "Fuel reserves at thermal power stations have been drained to the minimum and coal stocks for the population's needs are only one-half of last year's figure. Let us repeat the point: the frosts

are used to cover up massive Soviet arms exports which are still taking place. That is a demand of the Soviet military production sector, their military engineers and managers, who demand that high levels of military exports be maintained.

With the oil prices on the world market continuing to fall, the Soviets are in no position to renounce arms exports. They bring in approximately 1 billion rubles per day. The same goes for Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia can in no way allow itself to go onto a soft line. Czechoslovakia produces a very significant part of this arms export.

There are some developments that look good. These are façades. It looks like certain military positions in Vietnam are being given up. It looks like things are being done to Cuba. It is an advantage for the West that 55,000 Cubans

are now leaving Namibia or Angola. It is important that Mengistu in Ethiopia is no longer being fully supported.

But in Afghanistan, very little has changed. The Pakistanis are being neutralized. The Iranian government is playing the Russian card insofar as Afghanistan is concerned. The arms deliveries to Nicaragua are being continued. And the liberation movements in Latin America are never without Soviet help.

Now, I would like to give you an estimate of the entire course of events. In 1920, the United States abandoned European politics with a great deal of disillusionment because they believed that the Versailles Treaty was going to bring another world war. Over the last 81 years, we have had a tremendous development of civil wars, a kind of worldwide civil war. It is

are approaching and they will spare no one—neither strikers, nor those intending to strike, nor those who work conscientiously.”

The Russian Republic's daily *Sovetskaya Rossiya* reported Sept. 29 from a meeting of the Supreme Soviet's Transportation, Communications and Information Technology Commission, that “the complex of questions connected with the long-term development of transportation . . . is perhaps causing the greatest anxiety” in the country. From January to August, the commission was told, the shortfall in freight shipments, due to work stoppages alone, was 40 million tons of goods.

Other types of transportation were threatened, the article said. In Moscow, “like a bolt from the blue,” a strike committee was formed of Moscow Subway workers, who are discussing a package of demands, including “to almost double the drivers' pay, that is, to raise it to R900 a month.” It was argued that this would close the gap with the pay of regular railway workers. V. Tetenov, chairman of the parliamentary commission, called this yet “another example of group selfishness. Every conflict like this, if it is expressed in a strike, is a heavy blow to the whole country's economy.”

More threats

The threat of a nationwide construction strike was part of the lead-up to the Supreme Soviet's ban on strikes. The official trade union daily, *Trud*, reported Sept. 21 on a “warning of a possible mass strike by the [energy] sector's construction industry workers, caused by the cement shortfall.” The threat came in a telegram from an ad hoc committee of the construction workers' (official) trade union, to state planning and supply officials. It said that “150,000 construction industry workers within the Ministry of Nuclear Power Generation and the Nuclear Industry system will find themselves unemployed and unpaid in

the next few days.”

At issue was a reduction of the the cement allocation to the centralized construction industry by 153,000 tons, so that that amount could be sold “through the trade network” to the population—e.g., construction cooperatives. *Trud*, which deliberately publicized the strike threat and thereby built up the sense of an emergency, said that the union committee session was “stormy, with passions boiling as they did in the mining towns” last summer.

If the threat relayed by *Trud* seemed to introduce the element of official (or factional) provocation into the strike picture, the news from Ukraine showed the potential for strikes to break out of all controls and merge with nationalist resistance movements in the captive nations. On Oct. 3, Agence France Presse said that miners from 21 pits in the Lvov-Volinsk coalfield, in western Ukraine, stopped work for two hours to protest failure to honor strike agreement commitments by the authorities last summer. This news came from Ukrainian Helsinki Watch sources, at the moment of the Supreme Soviet debate on the strike ban, and just after a huge Ukrainian demonstration in Lvov. The same day, workers at “a number of firms” in Lvov also struck for two hours, to protest the brutality used against that Oct. 1 demonstration. The stoppage was called by a strike committee, founded in Lvov on Monday, Oct. 2.

Just after the strike ban, *Pravda's* Oct. 5 front page editorial called for “discipline” and “dictatorship of conscience,” in order to meet market requirements for all sorts of goods. In the process of describing how bad the crisis has become, *Pravda* revealed that worker absenteeism is idling trains, machines, and entire shops and plants. In the first six months of the year, 12,465,000 man-days were lost due to absenteeism (compared with 2,000,000 man-days lost from strikes in that period), reflecting the widespread disgust among Soviet workers. Every day, 95,000 people fail to show up at work.—*Rachel Douglas*

now 45 years ago that the friendship with Uncle Joe was broken. But all of the agreements of Yalta and Potsdam have remained, without any attention to the fact that there have been no free elections in Eastern Europe.

I stress that the opposite coast of the Atlantic Ocean, the European coast, must be maintained for the free world. Why? This is where we have to look at the third factor in strategic estimates, the overall strategic potential.

The old Roman Empire could only exist so long as it held the entire Mediterranean basin, and held the opposite coast, the African coast, under its control. Western civilization can only remain alive as long as the Atlantic can function as a kind of internal sea of Western civilization. There never will be, in all of history, a repeat of such a large amphibious

operation as the Normandy invasion. The two military technical revolutions that have taken place since 1945, rule that out absolutely.

The key to the door of the future lies in Europe. Why? Look at it the way the Russians do for a moment. They have the idea of the “common European house,” an invention of Brezhnev. What that means in strategic terms is 500 million producers. That is the biggest market in world history, the Russians want to get into it. If the Soviets were able to dominate that market, by getting the U.S. out under the slogan “Yankee go home,” then the lights would go out here in the United States and everywhere else on the Atlantic also.

I have been talking about three strategic factors: man; the development of strategic potentials, and the time factor. All