CHAPTER-V
CONCLUSION:
The Emerging Trends In The Trade Union Movement In Russia

Desperate to demonstrate to the world bank and IMF that the reforms were proceeding according to plan and to his erstwhile supporters that there were some benefits to be obtained from such reforms, Yeltsin began issuing privatization decrees, culminating in the August 1992 distribution of privatization vouchers. Designed as a popular move, privatization where it has taken place, has in practice most usually enriched directors and managers rather than workers, while failing to provide incentives for transforming production. As before, the Russian government and its western advisors assumed that the withering away of the party-state had cleared the ground for market economy to be built by decree, as though it were a target for a five year plan.

Thus, due to the neo-liberal policies of the regime in the post Soviet Russia the official trade unions (FNPR and some enterprise level unions of earlier AUCCTU) functioned in a very vulnerable position. There remained only four major trade union formations in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The FNPR inheritor of official TU property and functions; the independent Miners’ Union (NPG); An independent union of civil aviation pilots, and SOTSPROF. The leaders of the independent trade union/movement saw Yeltsin’s victory as their opportunity to challenge the power and prosperity of the official unions
in three important ways. First, they demanded a re-registration of unions, which would give workers the opportunity to choose which body would represent them, in the hope that workers would throw out the official unions in favour of new bodies. Second, they pressed for a redistribution of union property on the basis of membership following re-registration. Third, they insisted upon the removal of the administration of social security funds from the hands of the official unions, and their replacement by a system of state and/or private social insurance.

The leaders of the FNPR and of the official branch unions were only too aware of their vulnerability, and were finding themselves in increasing financial difficulty as branch unions at enterprises and regional level reduced their affiliation fees to the centre. However the Yeltsin government was also aware of the danger that the official unions could present if they were to provide the focus of an effective campaign of mass opposition to the 'reform programme'. The result a compromise between the government and the official unions, in which the unions confined themselves to rhetorical attacks on the government, and the government confined itself to rhetorical attacks on the unions.¹

The regional and Republican union bodies had become essentially political organizations, which rhetorically espoused the cause of working class in an attempt to defend themselves and their property
from political and legislative attack. Like the central organization, the regional federations had considerable property at their disposal, and faced financial difficulties with sharp fall in affiliation fees. They therefore tended to be even more concerned than the FNPR was at the national level with consolidating their political position and defending their property.

In many regions many local executive bodies remained under the control of old nomenclatura and worked hand in glove with the official union federation in the attempt to create a regional power base in apposition to Yeltsin Government and Yeltsin appointed chiefs of administration.

In January 1992, Yeltsin government established a tripartite Commission for the regulation of social and labour relations. The Commission included equal number of representatives of labour, management and government in a three sided negotiating structure. Of the labour, 14 seats 9 were allocated to FNPR, one each to the independent miner's union and the independent union of civil aviation pilots, and three to Sotsprof. The commission was to review the wage levels, monitor working conditions, mediate industrial disputes, and negotiate annual socio-economic agreement. In exchange for their role in Commission, unions took a no strike pledge.²
Although FNPR adopted its agenda to the Yeltsin-Gaider reform it also demanded that privatization process should transfer ownership and control of enterprises predominantly to the workers, condemning other variants as "Nomenklatura" privatization. Indeed, in tripartite commission the unions and industrialists often cooperated in efforts to maintain real wage levels, subsidies, and continued high employment levels against the Government programme of austerity and fiscal restraint. In general, commission worked poorly. Its meeting were marked by dissension and the frequent absence of government officials. The efforts at the policy making were conflictual and generally ineffective. FNPR generally protested against the arbitrary decisions of the government.

In June 1992, the "Social Partnership" began to break down. FNPR threatened to call a nationwide strike unless the government paid overdue wages in all regions and demanded that solvency of the enterprise be guaranteed.

Frustrated with workers' declining living standards, the FNPR made a formal agreement on cooperation with the Civic Union, and in the autumn the Federation joined an alliance of anti-reforms elite, including much of the Congress of People's Deputies, in a successful campaign to dismiss the Gaider Government.
Again a Tripartite Commission was set up in 1993 with FNPR again the dominant representative of labour. A second general agreement was concluded (1993) in spring with some specific provisions and many vague intentions within weeks Khochkov was alleging violation of the agreement, and the 1992 pattern of alienation and growing acrimony between the federation and Yeltsin's govt. was repeated. By August the FNPR was threatening to organise an All Russia General strike, giving central place to the issue of wage arrears (which reached 13 trillion rubles mainly owed to the coal, grain, health and defence sector) and claiming support among defence, agriculture, industrial and cultural workers. But no general strike materialised in 1993. In fact, most significant strike that did take place, among coal miners, was led by NPG.

Vast majority of Russian workers at the end of 1993 remained with the FNPR (50 million out of 73) in almost all branches of economy (except civil Aviation) not because the FNPR represented their interests but because of crucial social security benefits associated with its membership. The Federation remained hierarchical and bureaucratic in its style of functioning. The union leadership is more comfortable and capable at negotiating with government officials and forming alliances with managerial elites than at grassroot organization. It defended the workers' interest with limited success under Yeltsin, but largely without genuine participation or consent of its members.
In 1992 the five most established independent organizations together organised fewer than half a million members Sotsprof, 250000, the pilot union 30000, the air traffic controller 5000, the independent miners union 70000, and railroad workers 2000.\textsuperscript{7}

The independents trade union organizations have been generally pro-reforms, with Sotsprof and NPG especially supporting Yeltsin and governmental economic policies. Sotsprof was closely linked to the liberal, pro-reform, social democratic party and to top officials in Yeltsin's earlier labour ministry. Yeltsin did little for the independent unions. In 1993 tripartite commission it was excluded entirely. Independent unions continued to support Yeltsin on critical issues like April 1993 referendum and on Yeltsin's action in dissolving the Parliament in September 1993.\textsuperscript{8}

The challenges to the FNPR dominance continued in 1992-93. Oil and gas workers split from it by supporting reforms. In coal industry many FNPR members looked to the NPG for leadership, the trade union of mining and metallurgical industry with its 2 million members formally split first trade unions from FNPR. So the progressive loss of workers in energy and advanced manufacturing with at least some expert potential were weakening the FNPR.

Finally Yeltsin gave a blow to the FNPR by proposing nationalization of Federation's property and Sotsprof asserted its rights to a portion of it, proposing that administrative offices and other facilities
be divided among existing unions. When Federation condemned Yeltsin’s dissolution of Supreme Soviet as an illegal usurpation of power, it called a general strike against dissolution. Under de facto President’s rule Yeltsin government undertook measures to undercut the Federation: enterprise financial organs were prohibited from collecting trade unions dues, Pension Funds were placed under control of the government and finance ministry; management of social security fund was transferred to the government.

In the autumn crisis Klochkov resigned and was replaced by Maikhail Shmakov former head of Moscow Trade Unions Federation. In December 1993 elections the Federation claimed a very ‘apolitical’ stance its popularity rating declined sharply among its member, 90% of whom were dissatisfied with the union. Its chairman proposed forming a left/cenrist/laborite block, uniting social democratic and socialist parties and the unions and committed itself to the political representation and social protection of workers.9

After the Coup and Counter Coup of August 1991 a common pattern of development of workers’ movement can be discerned in general and trade union movement in particular. The plight of Russian workers is intensely increasing with ‘shock therapy’. Since his second coup in October 1993, the Yeltsin regime has abolished virtually all fundamental economic, social and legal achievements of the October revolution. In
November 1996 about 12 million people were without work in Russia and, those who were lucky enough to be employed, their wages were merely 25 to 30% of 1990 wages.\textsuperscript{10} The vast state and enterprise-owned Soviet network of creches, kindergartens, summer camps, vacation homes, cultural centres for children and adults has been abolished by privatization, becoming inaccessible to workers. Recently it was reported that a quarter of Russian workforce receive its wage late, in kind, or not at all.\textsuperscript{11} In October 1996 wages worth of $7.5 billion were unpaid.\textsuperscript{12} It has a high moral and psychologically depressing impact upon the consciousness of the Russian working class. In December 1995 when workers were striking in Tractor plant for the non-payment of wages at Cheboksary, three workers committed suicide in protest against their hunger.\textsuperscript{13} Russian working class is helplessly watching while the bureaucratic cliques, the criminal bourgeoisie, and foreign capitalists loot and destroy the productive forces of the country created by blood and sweat of generations of Soviet workers.

The social Darwinism in Russian life has hit very hard some sections of Russian workers along with the general populace. The IMF/IBRD recommended development (with their politics of deindustrialisation of third world) has led to the closure of many unprofitable enterprises. It has rendered jobless the vast mass of people particularly the unskilled, women and aged workers. The overall job situation faced by women summed up by the head of the Moscow Centre
for gender studies. "Typical view of the lower level manager was that they had to sack women because, under the new self-accounting system, each brigade had to earn more; and men in the brigade said that women did not work as hard as men and were legally protected from some kinds of work. Therefore, they should be the first to go." Abandoned by the bourgeois state, working class women have been exposed to the worst abuses of market. First to be laid off, last to be hired, they make up about 80% of all unemployed and get the least skilled and less paying jobs. Sexual harassment in the workplace is rampant and goes unprosecuted. Many women are forced into prostitution as their only means to feed their children.

One of the major reason for rise of independent trade unions was the branch principle of organization of unions which was ill-adapted to articulating and expressing the diverse interests of a membership spread over the wide range of occupations and industries. Hence organizations of unions along professional lines gathered momentum. It has raised the possibility of the emergence of sectional unions, representing particular categories of workers. In liberalization of economy presumed common interest of progressive management and workers in the restructuring of production. In this context such perspectives are at best divisive, representing an alliance between management and younger skilled male workers and technicians at the expense of older, unskilled and women workers.
But such sectionalism can not be successful in the long run as such unions have no control over access to their occupation, the skills of workers in question are by no means in short supply, there is no secure basis on which to constitute the "Aristocracy of Labour", and solidaristic and egalitarian ideology of Russian working class.¹⁷

Both sectional and divisive tendencies can be seen as well as solidaristic orientations of the Russian working class. The first of these tendencies can be seen during 1991-92 teachers' strike call for wage increase. The independent miners' union, and workers' committees did not respond to their strike call. Again in 1995 the miners' displayed a token solidarity with the strike of teachers and health workers in Kuzbass, but again, in January 1996 when both the organizations of miners as well as of teachers were on strike simultaneously, no need was felt to coordinate the movement.

Not only this, the more profitable open cast mines have no interest in supporting the movement of other miners, rather they even increased their output to get more commercial contracts and profit undermined the trade union solidarity. It not only undermine the unity but negated the impact of the strike as such. It has been particularly seen that whenever the miners are on strike (from 1989 to 1997) they have always been supported by people and other working class organizations in one way or another. This fact gives strength to the solidaristic concept.
This has given a sense of "Vanguardism" to the miners, as they themselves never sought the help of other workers', taking care of their demands. This exclusion of other groups of workers from participation in the movement deprived the later of the experience of struggle through which their leaders could emerge and develop their organizational and negotiating skills, and could build their own organizations. Their "vanguardism" has certainly played a role in reproducing and reinforcing the passivity of other groups of workers.

Miners themselves are divided into mainly two organizations, NPG and Rosugleprof, the former hold the management responsible for the ills of workers while the latter directs its attack on government as originator of policies and controller of economy. The miners go for spontaneous strike since last 4 years and secure the payment of wages. This is supported by the NPG, but Rosugleprof is not inclined to support such strikes as this simply tended to involve the diversion of payment from one group of workers to another.18

However, the success of the miners from 1991 onwards did not so much depend on their TU's strength as, on the one hand, on the support they received from their employees, who had an equal interest in beating the subsidy out of Moscow, and on the other, the political conjectures in which the miners pressed their case.
In the beginning it was Yeltsin versus Gorbachev, while the September 1993 strikes took place at the time when Yeltsin was confronting with the Supreme Soviet. The December 1993 strikes of Miners also took place when Yeltsin and his party were facing the election for Duma. Miners skillfully articulated their demand and went on strike when Yeltsin was fighting Chechen war in February 1995. Likewise, they went on strike in February 1996 when Yeltsin went ahead for presidential election. In this way miners never missed any opportunity to bargain with government as and when she was facing some serious troubles.

Under the IMF/IBRD deindustrialization plan the govt. had been attempting to reduce the scale of the subsidy year by year. This has great effect on the mining industry as many mines are on the verge of closure. It will not only reduce the employment in general but also make 'much needed' skilled workers redundant. Today only one million skilled workers are employed which is five percent of the industrial working class.¹⁹

The threat of unemployment, ban on political activity at the workplace, and, growing direct physical terror against worker activists by the so-called security services, or more simply by armed thugs hired by owners and administration. This psychological and physical intimidation is further enhanced by the wall of silence about the real
conditions of working class erected by the "democratic" mass media, while the army of former Soviet experts on the national and international labour movement now advise the regime on how best to divide workers and prevent their self-organization. In this they are assisted by the AFL/CIO international department with its Moscow based operation, the free trade union institute (FTUI).

Another weakness of the trade unions and working class movement is that workers resent trade unions discipline as a reaction against the centralism of Soviet era while the mentality of trade unions leadership is to look for patronage in aligning with the management. The former had not allowed the development of any strong trade union organization worth the name and the latter had given an opportunity to management to use the labour strikes in their own interests.

This weakness of workers' movement became apparent when on July 10, 1998 workers met defence minister to get their backlogue of wages. In Moscow these workers came on foot walking for three days from distant places. Their head of trade union organization after meeting the authorities said "we have achieved our goal" "we wanted to attract attention to the critical situation in our industry and we succeeded. Our problems have been heard and we will get the money." But when next day Dy. Defense Minister Nikoloi Mikhailov met the protesters the angry crowed dismissed him "It is just mere empty promise". Shouted one man
who clutched a sign reading "Yeltsin, the rails are waiting for you." The
government owes to the defense workers $400 million as their backlog
pay. Their next action according to declaration is expected in December
1998.

The politicization of economic demands is the only and last hope
of working class movement in Russia. Since the very beginning the
workers have fashioned their demands in terms of sophisticated political
economy. It can be observed in 1989-91 miners’ strike. In September 1993
workers raised their demands in defense of Duma, in 1995 at Vladivostok
power station they demanded resignation of president and government
along with their demands, in January 1995 Vorkuta mines in their
regional conference approved the political declaration of citizens of
Russia which condemned the war in Chechnya and demanded the
resignation of president and government. This is reminiscent of the
historical tradition of Russian working class without which Russian
workers stand alone, disoriented and demoralised, isolated inside the
country and internationally.
NOTES


12. Vladimir, Bilenkin above cited.

13. Ibid.


17. Ibid, page 189.


