

THE MANAGEMENT OF LABOR PROTEST IN TSARIST RUSSIA: 1870-1905¹

An autocratic regime undergoing industrialization either develops effective techniques to “manage” inevitable labor protest or sows the seeds of its own destruction.² Its highly concentrated authority is incompatible with the accumulation of power within the mass movements which industrialization engenders or stirs into action. It must destroy or control them. This problem faced Tsarist Russia as it later faced Soviet Russia. In neither case were the rulers inclined to treat industrial disputes as a private affair between employers and workers and leave the solution in their hands. Yet, the two cases are radically different in methods and consequences. The modern totalitarian state directs and controls labor through worker mass organizations, by channelling the energy of the leaders and the enthusiasm of the followers into predetermined patterns. This method of control, which is essentially indirect and “from within”, contrasts sharply with the old-fashioned method of direct control “from the top down”, which aimed mainly at repressing rather than using labor organizations and at resolving industrial unrest partly through punishment and partly through more positive preventive measures.

The attempt by the state to regulate the relationship between industrial workers and employers has not been peculiar to Russia. The historical, economic, and social circumstances that account for a country’s labor relations policies are a topic of sustained interest among labor historians and economists.³ The focus of the present

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² For a general statement of the problem of management of labor protest see C. Kerr, F. H. Harbison, J. T. Dunlop, and C. A. Myers, *The Labor Problem in Economic Development*, in: *International Labour Review*, LXXI, No. 3, (March 1955), 3-15.

³ On Russia see for instance J. Walkin, *The Attitude of the Tsarist Government Toward the Labor Problem*, in: *American Slavic and East European Review*, XIII (April 1954), 163-184. For a comparison between Britain and Germany see Gaston V. Rimlinger, *The Legitimation of Protest: A Comparative Study in Labor History*, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 1, II, No. 3, (April 1960), 329-343.

article, however, is more narrow. Its purpose is to analyse, first, the manner in which governmental policy was implemented in the decades before the 1905 revolution, and second, the kind of problems connected with specific methods of dealing with labor unrest. To provide a basis for the discussion, the character of the work force and the rationale of the government's labor policy will be examined first. Then the development of policy measures, punitive and protective, will be considered, which will be followed by an analysis of the practical application of these measures in terms of handling worker complaints and strikes.

THE WORKERS

A brief account of the size, social characteristics, and conduct of the industrial work force is necessary for an appreciation of the government's task. During the period under consideration Russia was still an underdeveloped country, and its major economic institutions, including those concerned with labor, were in the initial stage of adaptation to the industrial order. At the time of the first general census of the Russian empire, in 1897, approximately 75 per cent of the country's population still derived its income from agriculture, with only about 10 per cent dependent on mining, manufacturing, and construction, and 5 per cent on transport, trade, and finance.¹ By the turn of the century, the workers with whom this study is mainly concerned, those in factories and mines under the jurisdiction of factory and mine inspectors, numbered 2,354,500, which represents an increase of 79 per cent during the period of expansion since 1887.² The total number of industrial workers was still small enough to let the government long adhere to the idea that the country had no real "labor problem"³ but the high degree of concentration of the workers in large factories was conducive to the introduction of governmental labor control measures. In 1905, 35.1 per cent of the factory workers were employed in plants with over 1,000 workers, 52.2 per cent in plants with over 500 workers, and 81.3 per cent in plants with over 100 workers.⁴ This concentration was also bound

¹ The remaining workers were mainly in handicrafts and small shops not included in these categories. Data are computed from *Pervaja Vseobščaja Perepis' Naselenija Rossijskoj Imperii, 1897* (St. Petersburg: Ministry of the Interior, 1905), General Summary II, Table XXI, p. 296.

² A. Rašin, *Formirovanie Rabočego klassa Rossii* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Sotsial'no - Ekonomičeskoj Literatury, 1958), pp. 30-31. The total number of hired "workers and servants" according to the 1897 census was 9,153,600. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

³ See Walkin, *loc. cit.*, p. 165.

⁴ Rašin, *op.cit.*, Table 34, p. 98.

to contribute to the development of labor solidarity and consequently increase the possibilities of collective action, in spite of governmental prohibitions.

Counteracting this facilitation of collective action, however, was the instability of the work force. A German investigator reports that he "found many establishments in which the work force changed on the average of once a year. It was considered fortunate if one tenth of the work force formed a permanent core."¹ Many workers undoubtedly shifted employers because this was a way to escape the problems of their current job. But to a large extent this instability was a manifestation of the "dualistic" nature of the economy², which also helped to perpetuate a widely held governmental view that Russia was industrializing without creating a separate class of industrial workers. Many workers maintained ties to the land and returned seasonally to the village to help their family with field work. The percentage of those shifting between the fields and the factories varied greatly among regions, being lowest where industry was most developed. It was lower for the skilled occupations than for the unskilled and increased with the amount of land held by the worker and his family.³ In part, the employers were directly responsible for some of the seasonal turnover by discharging workers during the summer months, when wages tended to be high, and concentrating their production during the winter months, when wages were lower.⁴ Regardless of whether they maintained direct ties to the land, in most factories the majority of the workers were of recent peasant origin.⁵ With the peasant character of the work force, of course, went the peasants' legacy of social subordination.

Another important variable affecting the problem of managing labor discontent was the workers' low cultural level, which is reflected in their high degree of illiteracy. In 1897 about 50 per cent of the industrial workers were illiterate.⁶ But this signified already a vast

¹ O. Goebel, *Entwicklungsgang der russischen Industriearbeiter bis zur ersten Revolution* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1920), p. 13.

² On the character of dualistic economies see J. H. Boeke, *Economics and Economic Policy of Dual Societies as Exemplified by Indonesia* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1953).

³ Seasonal factory workers in nine industrial areas for 1886-1893 were approximately 30 per cent of all workers, but the range was from about 11 per cent for the St. Petersburg area to 76 per cent for the Voronezh district. Rašin, *op.cit.* Table 136, p. 565.

⁴ M. Tugan-Baranowsky, *Geschichte der russischen Fabrik* (tr. by B. Minzes; Berlin: E. Felber, 1900), pp. 519-520.

⁵ Goebel reports that in two St. Petersburg factories 70 and 84 per cent of the workers had come from the village. *Op.cit.*, p. 12.

⁶ Rašin, *op.cit.* Table 150, p. 593.

improvement during the recent past. Of the men taken into military service in 1881, 76.9 per cent were illiterate,¹ which was exactly the percentage of illiteracy among the factory workers in the Moscow district at that time.² The wide social gulf between workers and government officials greatly increased the problem of communication, not to mention the problem of mutual understanding.

It is safe to assume that the Russian industrial workers of the late 19th century did not possess the "degree of personal independence and strength of character" which the Webbs thought was required to form "independent associations to resist the will of the employers."³ But if they were unable to overcome the obstacles to the organization of unions, they nonetheless were able to engage in strikes and riotous conduct. As in all countries in the early stages of industrialization, many of the conflicts were marked by blind violence, but almost all were of very short duration. The data available on the number of strikes during the period are presented in Table I. Until 1895 no

TABLE I
Industrial Conflicts in Russia: 1870-1904

Year	No. of Strikes	No. of Disturbances	Year	No. of Strikes	No. of Disturbances
1870	17	3	1888	26	45
1871	14	7	1889	26	42
1872	21	8	1890	33	39
1873	17	12	1891	28	40
1874	23	11	1892	29	45
1875	13	13	1893	35	47
1876	19	13	1894	41	61
1877	12	10	1895	68	n.a.
1878	37	16	1896	118	
1879	51	9	1897	145	
1880	23	10	1898	215	
1881	14	13	1899	189	
1882	18	8	1900	125	
1883	20	11	1901	164	
1884	19	9	1902	123	
1885	26	73	1903	550	
1886	24	53	1904	68	
1887	56	88			

Sources: For 1870-1894, A. M. Pankratova (ed.), *Rabochee Dviženie v Rossii v XIX Veke* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat 1950-52), II: i, 45, 56 and III:i, 72, 79; for 1895-1904, S. P. Turin, *From Peter the Great to Lenin* (London: King and Son, 1935), p. 187.

¹ *Ibid.*, Table 145, p. 582.

² *Ibid.*, p. 587.

³ S. and B. Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* (new ed., London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), p. 44.

official records were kept on their occurrence. The data presented here refer only to strikes about which reports were found in the ministerial archives of the central government by a team of Soviet researchers. The data for 1895-1904 are based on official reports by the factory inspectors, but they also are likely to omit many small strikes which employers failed to report, in spite of a law ordering them to do so. The metal and textile industries, which were the most highly concentrated, also had the highest percentages of workers involved in strikes and the largest strikes in terms of participating workers.

RATIONALE OF TSARIST LABOR POLICY

Until the 1905 revolution, when the government reversed some of its long standing labor policies, especially the prohibition of unions, it was the official view that employer-worker relations in industry, as in agriculture, were in fact, or should be, on a "patriarchal" basis. More fancy than fact, at least in the late nineteenth century, this conception of social relations in industry put the employer in the position of stern but benevolent master who was deeply concerned with the material and moral well-being of his workers, their wives, and children. The first obligation of the employer, as listed in a compilation of official rules based on existing legislation, was to deal "correctly and gently" with those working for him.¹ But at the same time he was to maintain a rigid paternal discipline and not tolerate any kind of insubordination. Treated like children, the workers were supposed to rely on the good will of their masters and under no circumstance, no matter how well-founded their complaints, were they to resist his authority. Theoretically, if the employer misbehaved, it was his master, the Tsar, who was entitled to take corrective steps, not the workers. The workers were entitled to and often did appeal to the Tsar or his officials, but such appeals against their masters had obvious disadvantages, especially before the establishment of the factory inspection.

This hierarchical image of social relations had important implications for the development of labor policy. The general view was that patriarchal relations existed in the past, that they were the social and political foundation of the regime, and that their continuation was bound up with the survival of the regime in the face of industrialization. Implicit in this view was the idea that industrial employers could and would execute the "will" of the Tsar at the local level in the manner this had been done in the past by the landholding classes.

¹ A. A. Mikulin, *Očerki iz istorii primenenija zakona 3-go ijunja 1886 o najma rabočich* (Vladimir: V. A. Larkov, 1893), Appendix No. 1, p. 9.

The patriarchal character of employer-worker relations was supposed to prevent the development of mass discontent and resistance among the workers. In fact, however, it seemed to work in the opposite direction. Although there is evidence of the existence of some of the benevolence of paternalism in industry, the major emphasis was on its disciplinary aspects.¹ The workers' defenseless position and the employers' almost unlimited power led to many abuses which were obviously incompatible with the patriarchal ideal. But the government's historical frame of reference could not be reconciled with the abandonment of this ideal as impractical and the introduction of some freedom of economic self-defense for the workers. The low economic and social status of the workers, along with their servile peasant heritage, and Tsarist absolutism made the idea of a strike utterly unacceptable. Shortcomings of individual employers were of course recognized, but they could not be accepted as valid reasons for a strike, which was seen only in the light of an uprising against authority. This explains why the large-scale strikes of the early 1870's aroused so much astonishment in the press and such panic among governmental officials. A large strike in St. Petersburg in May, 1870, was the subject of a lead article in the newspaper *Novoe Vremia* which opened alarmingly: "And a strike of workers has befallen us, and God has not spared us."² With the rising strike movement, the government necessarily became more and more pressed to find a solution. In essence, this "solution" was no more than an extension of the existing system of absolutist controls, which logically shifted some of the patriarchal functions from the employer to government officials. The disciplinary side of paternalism developed in the form of an extension and amplification of punitive measures. And, in uneasy balance with punitive measures, the benevolent side of state paternalism manifested itself through labor protective legislation and factory inspection.

PUNITIVE MEASURES

Repressive measures against workers and peasants were not new in the late 19th century. The Tsars had always dealt severely and

¹ "In general it can be said that although a substantial group of St. Petersburg employers who are always prepared to do something for 'their' workers, on the other hand, will not tolerate even the least opposition. 'Whoever disobeys is thrown out', that is their Leitmotiv." R. von Ungern-Sternberg, *Ueber die wirtschaftliche und rechtliche Lage der St. Petersburger Arbeiterschaft* (Berlin: Puttkammer und Muehlbrecht, 1904), p. 73.

² Quoted in S. N. Prokopovich, *Krabočemu voprosu v Rossii* (St. Petersburg: E. D. Kuskova, 1905), p. 49.

sometimes savagely with insubordinate and recalcitrant laborers.¹ But until the closing decades of the 19th century it was not necessary to make frequent use of drastic repressive measures, and this is why they could be effective. In large industrial enterprises, the Tsarist authorities soon discovered, mere repression, especially when good grounds for worker discontent were evident, presented thorny dilemmas. Their inherent limitations account in part for the shifts in emphasis and the haphazard application of repressive measures.

The first specific mention of strikes in Tsarist law is in the amendments to the Penal Code of 1845, which made strikes to raise wages punishable with imprisonment from three weeks to three months for "instigators" and seven days to three weeks for ordinary strikers.² This law was supplemented in June 1874 by another amendment to the Penal Code which made anyone found guilty of membership in "illegal organizations aiming at fomenting unrest among peasants and workers and at stirring up strikes" liable to eight months of fortress imprisonment and exile to Siberia.³ Those found guilty, moreover, were to suffer the loss of their property. During the seventies and eighties the penalties of the 1845 law against strikes were increased in severity and further punitive laws enacted. In the place of the old maximum of three months those agitating to start or to continue a strike faced a penalty of four to eight months' imprisonment, and the maximum penalty for other strikers was increased from three weeks to four months. Those strikers who instigated the damaging or destruction of property belonging to the employer or to other employees were liable to prison terms from eight to sixteen months and their accomplices from four to eight months. The penalty for using threats against persons in order to coerce them to stop working or to keep them from returning to work was imprisonment for a period from eight to sixteen months for instigators and four to eight months for accomplices. This last violation, Shelymagin notes, "was widely applicable, for every attempt at protest could come under it."⁴ In addition to all these penalties, which were assessable under the criminal statutes, a law of 1886 provided that in

¹ See for instance R. Portal, *L'Oural au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Institut d'Etudes Slaves, 1950), pp. 283 ff.

² I. I. Šelymagin, *Fabrično-trudovoe zakonodatel'stvo v Rossii* (Moscow: Juridičeskoe Izdatel'stvo, 1947), pp. 30-31. Another amendment made collective resistance to the employer equivalent to an uprising against the state, punishable with 15 to 20 years' of hard labor. But it does not seem that this statute was ever applied. In any case it was no longer part of the Penal Code in 1870, although there were occasional uninformed threats by officials to invoke it.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

civil suits also imprisonment of up to one month for refusal to work before expiration of contract or for failure to give proper notice of intention to quit could be imposed. Since the law against strikes contained a rather narrow definition of what constituted a strike – a stoppage which was the result of a conspiracy aiming at change in agreed upon wages or working conditions – this new statute greatly reduced the technical difficulties which might spare a striker from imprisonment. On the practical significance of this law, however, information is not available.

Passing repressive laws to control labor unrest is one thing, but making them effective is an entirely different matter. Apparently, the first time workers were tried under the law prohibiting strikes was in 1870. Numerous difficulties soon became obvious. The courts simply did not hand out criminal convictions with the speed and dispatch that would please administrative officials and especially the political police. Aside from the problem of what to do if a large number of workers in a given plant were actually found guilty, there were all the uncertainties, expenses, and demands of time of workers and courts, and bad feelings connected with mass trials. If the law was meant as a strike deterrent, its application sometimes had the opposite effect. When St. Petersburg strikers were brought to trial in 1870, the publication in the press of the revelations about working conditions in cotton mills created considerable public indignation. Although the government soon prohibited this kind of publication, and all other public reports on strikes, a trial still left the accused workers, and especially the strike leaders, an excellent opportunity to state their grievances for the record and provided the rest of the workers with a focal point for their discontent. The government was not unaware of this problem, as the following incident reveals. In a report on a strike in the Moscow province, in 1887, the Vice-Governor of the province states that: "... in view of the stubborn character of the strike and the extremely excited state of mind of the crowds, which threaten very serious disorder, and taking into account information we have that workers in the district await the outcome of the strike... with the intention of going on strike themselves, the Governor-General of Moscow assumed that it would be more expedient not to bring those guilty of instigating the strike to trial but to subject the arrested workers, some 31 individuals, to... administrative punishments."¹ The major offenders thought

¹ A. M. Pankratova (ed.), *Rabočee dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX veke* (Moskva: Gospolitizdat, 1952), III: i, No. 191. The six volumes under this title contain several thousand pages of documentary materials on Russian labor in the 19th century, collected by a team of researchers from the ministerial archives of the central government.

guilty of inciting to strike and of showing disrespect for authority were to be sent to remote provinces for three years. Lesser offenders were to be sent to their villages and kept under police surveillance or merely kept in prison for the rest of the month.

The severe limitations of mass punishment as a means of handling industrial unrest are inherent in the problems created by the enforcement of punitive measures as well as in the inability to enforce them. No government can afford to let the threat of mob action prevent it from using regular court procedures and certainly not an absolutist regime. Respect for law cannot develop if the authorities ignore the process of law and resort to arbitrary "administrative" measures. Even when no danger of violent popular reaction was present the authorities were reluctant to bring strikers to trial. Judging from the many complaints about too light sentencing, the courts were not entirely insensitive to the workers' descriptions of the conditions which provoked their protest. The police felt that light sentences merely encouraged further unrest, and it was presumably for that reason that the anti-strike law was amended to increase the length of the prison terms and the 1874 law on membership in "illegal organizations" was passed. At the same time it is interesting that the lawgivers were prepared to give strikers a break: any striker who went back to work as soon as he was asked to do so by the police was exempt from punishment.¹

These difficulties help to account for the widespread, and seemingly preferred, use of the alternative method of repression, "administrative punishment", which could be anything from birching to banishment at the order of a government official. The advantage of this kind of summary justice, or injustice as the case may be, was that it could be administered on the spot, without lengthy investigations and accusations, and without undermining the authority of the police and the employer through too light punishment. The inauguration of the long series of secret directives on labor policy from the Ministries to regional and local officials, a system attacked later as one of the causes of the 1905 revolution,² may be said to have started with Circular No. 1906, of the Ministry of the Interior, July 6, 1870.³ In addition to ordering the provincial governors to keep a close watch over the factory population, it gave them the authority to banish strike instigators to remote parts of the country without trial. A little over a

¹ Selymagin, *op.cit.*, p. 113.

² Professor I. Ch. Ozerov, a leading authority on labor problems, denounced Tsarist labor policy as "Tsirkuljarnaja Politika" (secret circulars policy) in his well-documented study entitled *Politika po rabočemu voprosu v Rossii za poslednye gody* (Moskva, 1906).

³ Pankratova, *op.cit.*, II: i, No. 86, 242-243.

year later, September 30, 1871, the authorization for administrative banishment was extended to all strikers, not merely instigators.¹ That these arbitrary measures were open to a great deal of abuse there can be little doubt. Perhaps for that reason the Ministry of the Interior found it necessary to add soon another secret circular, dated December 15, 1871, explaining that a work stoppage was considered a strike only when it was connected with an attempt to force higher wages from the employer and that administrative measures should be taken against strikers only in extreme cases, after other measures have been exhausted.² The original circular of July 6, 1870, on the other hand, had emphasized immediate banishment, reflecting the panic caused by the first large-scale strike and inexperience in how to handle it.

The application of these directives depended a great deal on the time, place, and circumstances of a strike. Strikers were not always sent to remote parts of the country. In 1875 the city governor of St. Petersburg received permission to send strikers to their home village. This kind of deportation seems to have been most frequent in later strikes. In the early 1870's, however, there was a substantial number of the more severe kind of banishment. Both kinds presented problems. It often happened that if strikers were sent to their village they soon drifted back into town and rekindled discontent. On the other hand, if strike instigators were sent to more distant parts of the country, they tended to take work in factories in their new location and renew their activities in previously perhaps untroubled areas. A "political survey" by the head of the police of the Moscow province in 1889 notes for instance that in most cases strike instigators were not local people but individuals who had come from other provinces.³ A similar impression is conveyed by the stories of individual agitators.

As a punitive measure the displacement of strikers from one city to another naturally lost its effectiveness once the labor protest mentality had spread to most industrial localities. The authorities still had two weapons at their disposition. The first was to establish an extensive system of surveillance and spying, and the second, imprisonment of suspects in times of unrest as threats to the general security. Ever since the 1825 uprising of the Decembrists, the Tsars had a secret political police, the so-called Third Department of His Majesty's chancellery, at their disposition. This agency, along with the regular police, took on the task of uncovering agitators and discontents

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 619.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, III: i, No. 235, 649.

among the workers. From the instructions given to the police in charge of this surveillance in the factory towns it is clear that their duty was not restricted to watching the workers. A directive of the Moscow Governor-General of May, 1870, includes among the duties of the police in factory towns the task of studying working conditions and the relationship between the workers and their employers.¹ The police were to find out whether the employer was oppressing the workers and to report all incidents. But in spite of reports by the police on "oppression" and the activities of various governmental commissions investigating labor problems, until the factory legislation of the 1880's little was done or could be done to protect the worker. The police usually saw the labor situation through the eyes of the employer, which is not surprising since often they were paid by him. This attitude of the police, of course, made it more difficult for them to carry out their strike prevention duty effectively. No less an official than the head of the Moscow province police recognized that "the local police are incapable of stopping strikes at their outset. The workers do not trust the police. They consider them on the side of the employer and not without reason, since he pays them a subsidy."² With the growth of the strike movement the surveillance of the workers increased in intensity; even the factory inspectors were expected to carry on certain political police functions. Workers were to be shielded from all kinds of subversive ideas, and some books that passed the censor for the general public were considered harmful in their hands. One of the best indications of how difficult the problem of surveillance had become is the creation in 1899 of new police contingents which were planted right into the industrial establishments at a ratio of one policeman for every 250 workers.³ In spite of the protests of the employers, factories had to operate under police supervision, and, moreover, the cost of maintaining the new police force had to be borne by the manufacturer. Finally, after the turn of the century, police supervision was extended to legalized worker organizations, giving rise to the ill-fated "police socialism".

This extensive network of police control was designed to prevent unrest as well as to facilitate repressive measures against individual leaders or would-be leaders. According to a directive issued by the Ministry of the Interior, August 12, 1897, such individuals were to be put in jail in times of unrest as threats to the internal security of the country, regardless of any intention of bringing suit against them

¹ *Ibid.*, II: i, No. 10, 231.

² *Ibid.*, III: i, No. 235, 650.

³ Ozerov, *op.cit.*, pp. 157 ff.

under the anti-strike laws.¹ The directive explains that it is often difficult to establish guilt under the criminal procedures of the anti-strike law and that even if such guilt is established the courts do not always impose jail sentences. Since the release of "determined leaders" would only renew unrest, it is therefore advisable for the police to keep them in prison on grounds of security until general calm is reestablished.

From the Tsarist experience interesting insights may be gained on the limitations of repression, even in an absolutist regime, as a means of dealing with labor protest. If the punitive measures are harsh, they cannot be applied on a wide scale without becoming a source of further discontent and disturbance. If they are light they lose their effectiveness. Where the strike is the only moderately effective means available to oppressed and defenseless workers to seek economic and social justice, a law which treats strikers as common criminals cannot but offend the sense of human dignity of judge and jury and fail in its intended purpose. If punishment is not to be meted out arbitrarily, accused persons must be allowed to present their case, but their case makes them the accusers and the system the accused. If it is meted out in summary fashion, it discredits the rule of law and undermines loyalty to the powers that be. Somewhat like the nine-headed Hydra, Russian labor protest grew two more heads where one was cut off.

PROTECTIVE MEASURES

Repressive measures, it was noted earlier, were only one aspect of Tsarist labor policy. There was also a protective side. The Russian people had traditionally looked to the Tsar for protection, and among the workers this tradition was quite alive until the 1905 revolution, in spite of occasional repression. Until then revolutionary sentiments were restricted to a very small number of workers. Most workers seemed to feel that if the Tsar knew about their lot he would take measures to improve it. Aware of these feelings, the government could not restrict itself to the negative approach of repressing every demand for improvement. The police, of course, always had been instructed to prevent abuses and oppression by the employer. But this was hardly effective since the police, aside from partiality to the employer, were mainly concerned with violations of the law, and for a long time no meaningful labor protective laws existed. It was not until the law on child labor in 1882 that modern factory legislation

¹ N. Kolosow *Die Organisationen der russischen Arbeiter*, in: *Die Neue Zeit*, XVI:ii (1897-1898), 579.

came to Russia. Other major factory laws followed in 1884, 1885, 1886, 1894, and 1897. The most important of these as far as measures affecting labor unrest are concerned was the law of 1886. Its objective was to define and regulate the conditions under which workers could be hired and discharged, the basic rules for the internal order of the factory, the methods of wage payments, and the extent of permissible fines and other deductions from wages. In addition to protective functions the law was so designed as to facilitate police surveillance over the workers' movements.

The law of 1886 tried to protect the worker mainly by restricting the area within which employers had been ruling with unchecked arbitrariness. The intention was not to give him the means or permission to resist arbitrariness or abuse. It did not repeal or alter the article of the Civil Code which stated that hired workers "have to be faithful, obedient, and respectful toward their master and his family and have to strive through good conduct to maintain peace and harmony." What the law did, for instance, was to define the reasons for which fines, the most prevalent form of abuse, could be levied. Fines could be legally imposed only for incorrect work, absenteeism, and violation of internal order. Each of these was defined by the law. As violations of internal order were counted: 1) coming late to work or leaving without permission; 2) non-observance of fire prevention rules; 3) failure to keep lodgings owned by the company clean and neat; 4) disturbance of the peace at work through noise, shouting, cursing, quarreling or fighting; 5) failure to obey orders; 6) coming to work drunk; 7) gambling for money. The law also made it illegal for the employer to make deductions from the worker's pay for medical aid, lighting of the workshops, and use of tools. Furthermore, it ordered that wages be paid in currency and not less often than once a month. Although these were rather elementary rights, if they could have been vigorously enforced it would have meant a substantial achievement.

Disregarding the many technical difficulties and the widespread employer resistance to the introduction of the regulatory system,¹ its effectiveness as a method of countering labor unrest was bound to be weak because it failed entirely to consider some of the workers' most frequent complaints and furnished inadequate protection in areas that were covered. It offered no protection against low wages, whereas according to official statistics wage questions were the principal cause of strikes in 60.8 per cent of the strikes between 1895 and 1904.² Nor did it offer any protection against the next two most

¹ Cf. Rimlinger, *op.cit.*

² Turin, *op.cit.*, pp. 188-189.

important strike causes: hours of work and behavior of managerial personnel. In practice, however, as will be seen below, some of these shortcomings were made up by the factory inspectors, who were in charge of the administration of the regulatory system.

The factory inspectors, in effect, became the workers' defenders, but the Ministry of Finance, under whose jurisdiction they operated, reminded them now and then that their first duty was to maintain law and discipline within factories and mines. Nevertheless, the workers now for the first time had an official, other than the police, to whom they could turn with complaints about working conditions. "We come to you as to our father who will protect us against oppression", they would state in their petitions. Such phrases, of course, cannot always be taken to reveal genuine sentiments, but at least the workers must have thought them effective. The inspector had the right of free entry into industrial establishments, the right to subpoena documents and witnesses and to impose fines, and he could bring civil suits against employers for violations of the factory legislation. Most fines were under 100 rubles, except in the case of illegal wage reduction, for which the law specified 100 to 300 rubles. A rather curious and characteristic Russian stipulation was added to this last violation. If it had become the cause of labor unrest, instead of a fine, the penalty was up to three months in prison for the employer and possibly the loss of the right to manage an industrial establishment for a period of two years.¹ Such heavy penalties were imposed only by the courts and for fines imposed by the factory inspector the employer had a right to appeal to a Commission on Factory Matters composed of the provincial Governor, the Vice-Governor, the public prosecutor, the chief of police, and the factory inspectors. Neither the employers nor the workers were directly represented on this board. Its exclusive composition of "public" members, with emphasis on law enforcement officials, is highly indicative of the government's basic concerns.

If the workers had acquired new defenders and a definition of some basic rights and of the basic obligations of the employer, they showed little enthusiasm for these gains. The fact that they had little faith in any kind of official, police or factory inspector, made factory inspection an inadequate device for airing grievances. So long as the workers felt that the factory inspector was on the side of the employer, which was by no means always the case, especially not in the early years, they were naturally fearful that complaints would entail disadvanta-

¹ *Arbeiterschutzgesetzgebung (Russland) in: Handwörterbuch der Staatswissenschaften* (4th ed., Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1923), I, 525.

geous consequences for them. Moreover, as a police report impatiently notes, on many points the workers were in full agreement with the employers in their objection to factory legislation.¹ They particularly objected to the curtailing of child labor (law of 1882), the prohibition of night work for women and adolescents (law of 1885), and the prohibition of the system (part of 1886 law) under which they drew goods from the company store, forewent regular payment of wages and drew the balance of their earnings at the end of the year. How common these objections were among workers is not known, but given their low cultural and economic level such an attitude is not surprising. Their distrust and misunderstanding of the government's intentions led in a number of instances to strikes and unrest when attempts were made to put the new laws into effect. The law of 1886 required that each worker carry a pay-record book containing all the work rules, the reciprocal obligations of employers and workers as defined by law, and dated entries for all wage payments and fines.² Suspecting that every change was a change for the worse, the workers, in a number of instances, riotously declared that they wanted to continue working under the old conditions. Since many of them were illiterate, their suspicion was probably increased by the fact that employers often asked them to sign or put down their mark testifying that they had received the books.³ The workers' conviction of their right to work according to the old rules was so strong that not only did they sometimes risk imprisonment for striking to defend their traditional conditions, but in at least one case actually hired a lawyer to protect their imagined rights. Nothing could illustrate better the difficulties even of well-intentioned measures simply decreed "from the top down". It should be added, however, that there were cases in which the workers actually requested the introduction of the inspection system. For the opposite danger, exaggerated hopes about the protective potentialities of the legislation, existed in a number of places.

HANDLING OF COMPLAINTS

The factory inspectors were expected to make regular visits to industrial establishments to control the enforcement of the factory

¹ Pankratova, *op.cit.*, III: i, No. 15, 717-719.

² A replica of the model pay-record book issued by the Vladimir provincial authorities is contained in Mikulin, *op.cit.*, Appendix No. 1. The use of this kind of record did not originate with the law of 1886. Pay-books of various kinds were in use at least since the 1840's and in some areas were required by little observed laws before 1886.

³ For a description of strikes against the acceptance of the pay-books see Pankratova, *op.cit.*, III: i, No. 200, 571-577.

legislation and at the same time receive complaints by either employers or employees. Accounts of such visits illustrate the practical problems of the system. After examining the pay-record books of the workers and the corresponding files in the plant office, both of which were often hopelessly mixed up and incomplete, the inspector proceeded to make the rounds of the factory to question the workers. But the latter were characteristically reluctant to impart any kind of information. In most cases, one inspector reports, the men questioned insisted that everything was in order and in compliance with the law, even when the inspector knew of existing abuses and the workers had sent for him complaining of violations and abuses.¹ A conscientious inspector was then forced to crossexamine the workers at length, preferably without the presence of company officials. A less conscientious or less broadminded inspector would probably conclude that the complaints were "unfounded". This may help account for the fact that of the 224 reported complaints against employers in the Moscow district between 1886 and 1888, all of which were investigated, including those from anonymous sources, about one half were characterized as "unfounded".² For workers who were not in the habit of taking complaints lightly, this seems a rather high proportion.

Another reason for considering complaints unfounded may have been that the subject of the complaint did not come under existing legislation. Take for instance the petition of the workers of a St. Petersburg textile mill to the district factory inspector. They had five demands: 1) construction of a mechanical ventilation system; 2) filtering of drinking water; 3) a pharmacy to be connected with the plant containing "all necessary medication" and a dispensary with a visiting physician or resident assistant physician; 4) change in the system of computing wage rates; 5) drapes on the windows of the south side to shelter against the hot sun.³ None of these requests seems unreasonable, but the employer had already informed the workers that anyone who dared to bring up the matter again would be fired. Legally, the inspector could not satisfy the workers' request to "protect them from their master", and as a rule he would not step in unless the temper of the workers indicated that disorder might break out. One of the weaknesses of the method of handling complaints was precisely that the inspectors' response was geared to how seriously law and order were menaced. So long as workers suffered in silence, higher governmental officials could only conclude that the inspector's job was well done, but labor disturbances were

¹ Mikulin, *op.cit.*, pp. 73-76.

² Pankratova, *op.cit.*, III: i, No. 21, 748-750.

³ *Ibid.*, No. 27, 754-755.

a clear indication of failure. If disturbances were threatened at a plant with foreign managers, the inspectors, so it seems, were animated with particular zeal. The situation at the Gusevskaia Manufactura in 1894 may serve as an illustration.¹

The inspector reports² that he was informed of serious discontent among the workers of this textile concern, mainly on account of low wage rates on new types of work, the discharge of pregnant women as early as a month and a half before delivery, inadequate living quarters, and most of all the callousness of the English technicians. None of these complaints seems to be classifiable as a violation of the letter of the law, but the inspector apparently had no difficulty in establishing that the management imposed fines on the workers that were too high and for reasons not in accord with the law. He discovered also that even though the company had established schedules of fines, these were imposed irregularly and in a discriminatory manner. Failure to punish regularly could cause just as much trouble as punishing too much, but the law had not foreseen that. The inspector found the foremen guilty of complete arbitrariness in their treatment of the workers. His report explains that the director of the company was a capable and forthright Englishman but knew only a little Russian. Recently the company had expanded rapidly and the director had surrounded himself with English technical assistants who knew no Russian at all. The inability of these assistants to communicate with the workers was the root of the problem of discrimination because it left Russian clerks and foremen, who presumably knew some English, in complete command in personnel matters. The inspector found this delegation of authority to persons in such a low position quite unacceptable; it was not normal, he thought, especially since "this category of people" usually had low moral standards.

In a situation like the one just described the factory inspector could not take legal steps to bring about all the changes he felt were necessary to prevent labor unrest in the future, but he could use whatever violations of the law he found as a leverage to gain broader concessions from management than the law stipulated. He could "recommend", preferably unknown to the workers, various reforms which management could not easily ignore, especially if there was danger that failure to consider the reforms might lead to unrest, for which management could then be blamed. At times this amounted

¹ A steam-driven cotton spinning and weaving establishment in the Vladimir province employing between four and five thousand workers.

² Pankratova, *op.cit.*, III: ii, No. 27, 610-614.

to nothing less than secret labor negotiation via administrative black-mail. In the case cited the inspector "recommended" a large number of changes. He suggested that wages be raised somewhat, that some of the heavy penalties be abolished, that a new schedule of fines be introduced and enforced with "moderation and discretion", that the clerk of the weaving department be either discharged or transferred, that the office of the company issue a declaration which would dispell the workers' suspicion that the direction of the firm is an accessory to the misdeeds of its lower agents and would indicate that those found guilty would be removed from their posts, that pregnant women be allowed to work until two weeks before delivery and those in need paid assistance from the funds levied in fines,¹ and finally, that a Russian or Russian speaking technician be put in charge of the weaving department, where abuse was most rife. The management agreed to put at least some of these suggestions immediately into effect, and the inspector took it upon himself to give a lecture to the new clerk of the weaving department. In addition to serving diligently the interests of his master, he pointed out to the clerk, it was his duty to promote, through his impartial, tactful, and considerate relation with the workers, a favorable attitude toward the higher management of the factory and toward the job where they earn their living.

The methods chosen to deal with complaints indicate that the content of the factory laws was far less important than their administration. There were cases where the inspector found that the workers' complaints rested on direct violations of the law, and yet he was content with issuing repeatedly ignored warnings to management and recommendations of patience to the workers. In cases of ill-treatment of workers, the inspector would sometimes exact written promises from the accused manager that he will improve his conduct. Yet, what seems like an arbitrary and opportunistic handling of labor problems was not due so much to a lack of conscientiousness of the inspectors but to the exigencies of the frequently overheated situations in which they had to make decisions and to their double duty of maintaining discipline and peace and at the same time protect the workers. That the workers often were not satisfied with the results is hardly surprising.

THE HANDLING OF STRIKES

Strikes presented factory inspectors and other law enforcement

¹ A directive of the Ministry of Finance of December 4, 1890 required that fines be distributed among workers in need instead of being left to the employer. This was in part an attempt to reduce excessive fines, but employers often managed to disguise fines by recording lower wages.

officials with problems that were considerably more difficult to handle than mere complaints. Strikes are a challenge to authority that an autocratic regime cannot tolerate. Consequently, in the Tsarist regime the foremost objective was always to bring them to an end as quickly as possible. The next steps were to punish the guilty and to take measures to prevent any recurrence. Most strikes that were reported were settled by the factory inspector, in a manner similar to the handling of complaints. Out of 24 strikes in the Moscow province between 1886 and 1888, only one was broken by the use of troops. It was the situations where unrest had been smouldering for a long time below the surface and then suddenly erupted with great violence that were not easily calmed. The standing directives of the government were that officials must not bargain with strikers, that the men must go back to work before the merits of their case will be examined, and that under no circumstance must they get the impression that they can gain anything by the use of force. But the workers were too well aware that they could gain nothing by suffering in silence, and they naturally feared that once they went back to work their cause would be lost. Hence it was often difficult to talk them into going back to work without making some promises of improvement.

In part the difficulty of settling strikes was related to the inchoate character of many of the strikes. The workers were not allowed to organize, and hence they had no recognized leaders with whom the inspector or the police could negotiate. Sometimes the police or the inspector would ask the workers to choose representatives to meet with them. To workers who were unaccustomed to contacts with officialdom, except when taking orders or at most when making humble requests with cap in hand, such an encounter hardly gave an opportunity to make a forceful case against management, especially if the meeting was held in the company's offices, in the presence of company administrators, as was often the case. The inexperienced worker representatives were too easily intimidated and talked out of their intentions. An illustration of this, and of its consequences, is contained in a police report to the Moscow Governor-General in 1887.¹ In a textile strike near Moscow the police asked to meet with workers' representatives and the latter agreed, if the meeting was held at a place outside the company offices. "Our explanation", the report states, "that they had no right to stop work before the end of the contract period, that they must remain quiet, and that a factory inspector will be sent to investigate their complaints, made a good

¹ Pankratova, *op.cit.*, III: ii, No. 215, 481.

impression on the workers.”¹ But, apparently, when the workers began to talk things over among themselves after leaving the police, the more courageous or hot-headed of them convinced the others that they did not want to be told about rules and regulations when they asked for an improvement of working conditions. Perhaps they were also angry that they had given in so easily. In any case, while the police thought they had calmed the situation, the workers returned in a riotous mood and attacked the offices of the company.

For such emergencies, the government, of course, had the army at its disposal. Cossacks on horseback were considered very able in these matters. They were most effective when the task was to disperse crowds, or to stop demonstrations and destruction of property. In a few such instances measures against strikers had the character of full-scale military operations, complete with occupation proclamations. Troops were good for combat but at a loss when faced with passive resistance. Not even the Cossacks with their whips could force a plant back into operation when the workers simply sat in their houses. Although employers were usually willing to let them teach the workers a lesson, they had future relations to think about. One method used was to declare all strikers discharged and have the troops drag them forcibly into the company office to accept their discharge papers and final pay, if any. This was not highly satisfactory in starting a back-to-work movement, and often concessions had to be made before calm was restored. In serious situations the provincial governor might talk to the strikers and tell them in a stern but fatherly manner that they are guilty of criminal behavior, for which they will be severely punished, unless they return to work immediately, in which case their complaints would be given consideration. If the presence of so high an official failed to overawe the strikers, as it was not unlikely to, the authorities sometimes changed tactics and massed mounted Cossacks in the neighborhood to intimidate the workers. The important thing to note in all these measures is that the employer was not allowed to handle his labor problem as he might have seen fit. A strike was not a private affair but a matter of public concern. The government would not knowingly let a frightened employer capitulate to the workers' demands. Police considerations were always uppermost in strikes, and therefore the authorities decided what measures were appropriate.

In a strike situation the police were usually interested in uncovering the leaders, which was often difficult because of the spontaneous

¹ *Ibid.*, II: i, No. 187, 547-550.

character of the outbreaks and the workers' reluctance to talk. The most likely targets were non-indigenous workers, who were sometimes removed for precautionary reasons if no valid charge could be lodged against them. Such steps, however, as well as arrests, were taken primarily in severe strikes; when officials, mainly for reasons of political security, were hard pressed to find "instigators". Mass arrests did not seem to occur frequently. Rather exceptional was the strike at the huge Morosov textile mills in January 1885 where some 600 workers were arrested and sent to their village before order was restored. The prompt settlement of strikes was probably made more difficult by the existence of the anti-strike laws. It was risky for anyone among the workers to speak for his comrades. He might be branded as a strike instigator and brought to trial. In some cases stubborn spokesmen for the workers were administered a public whipping.

It should be pointed out, however, that on account of legal technicalities not all stoppages were "strikes" punishable by law. A complaint from the superintendent of the Vladikavkazskii railroad to the Ministry of Communications in 1894 reveals such a case of a legal strike.¹ Men whom the railroad hired by the day, without specifying any contractual period, had gone on strike. They were brought to trial but found not guilty, not even the instigators. The court took the position that since the workers were engaged by the day, each day was a new contract period, and hence the strike did not violate an existing contract or previously agreed upon conditions. Neither the criminal law nor the civil statute was applicable. The superintendent, of course, made it plain to the Ministry of Communications that this state of affairs, especially the releasing of strike leaders without even the slightest punishment, would have disastrous consequences.

Although workers were not supposed to benefit from strikes, it was their most effective means of calling attention to their living and working conditions. Even if there was no hope of gaining any immediate results, a strike forced an investigation by the authorities from which the workers could expect to benefit. How to satisfy the workers' legitimate demands without encouraging them to strike again was the difficult assignment of the factory inspectors. Their reports reveal frequently a good grasp of the causes of unrest, but their suggested remedies are often colored by the official desire to restore or maintain "patriarchal relationships" in industry. They severely denounced employers who did not keep informed about

¹ *Ibid.*, 548.

their workers' material and spiritual needs, and especially those "highly paid" foreign managers who "exploited" the Russian laborer with callous indifference. As in the handling of serious complaints, the inspector usually worked out a set of recommendations for management which were not legally binding but advisable to follow. Often such recommendations were given with the advice that they be introduced at some future date in order not to let the workers suspect that their strike had advantageous results.

CONCLUSIONS

The achievement of successful control of labor protest and consequent promotion or maintenance of worker loyalty to their rulers or leaders depends on the extent to which at least three major interrelated problems are solved: 1) control of the causes of discontent; 2) prevention of existing discontent from adopting undesirable forms; 3) provision of an outlet for the harmless ventilation of accumulated discontent. The Tsarist methods of dealing with labor unrest, which present probably the most extreme example of the attempt at control "from the top down", not only failed to solve these problems but often aggravated them.

If causes of discontent during Industrialization can never be entirely eliminated, at least the possibility exists to promote an attitude of acceptance of the inevitable. But this requires, in the first instance, that inevitable hardships must somehow be made to appear purposeful and reasonable. In this, the Tsarist system failed in two crucial ways. First, whatever the achievements of the regulatory system, it failed to eliminate some of the major sources of unrest and made no attempt at gaining worker acceptance. Second, official insistence that it was the responsibility and intention of the state to protect the worker, combined with the ineffectiveness of this protection, could only make the worker more dissatisfied rather than more willing to accept his lot. Neither the secret political police, nor the increasing contingents of factory police, nor the vigilant inspectors, nor the punitive anti-strike and anti-union laws could prevent what the government dreaded most: the growth of the strike movement and of the social alienation of the workers. One of the greatest weaknesses of the system was that labor discontent was frequently not uncovered by the workers' "protectors" or if uncovered was neglected until it had led to open conflict. To some extent strikes became a means not so much to force concessions from employers but to force government officials, who were not always without secret sympathy for the workers to put pressure on the employers. The chief of police of Rostov-na-

Donu explained to the commander of the troops called into that city to crush a strike in 1894: "Although the workers are fully aware of the illegality of their present conduct, they nevertheless consider themselves in the right to a certain degree. For several years they tried by legal means to call the attention of overseers and other managerial personnel to certain oppressive measures... but their requests were either refused or not even given the slightest consideration."¹ Apparently, the workers felt that they had a moral right to strike under these circumstances, but the state, who claimed to be their protector, insisted that all strikers must be punished, even when unrest was provoked by callous arbitrariness. Although in practice the Tsarist system had a certain amount of flexibility, officially it demanded that workers, who had perhaps suffered in long sullen silence, surrender unconditionally the moment they had gathered enough strength to make a show of collective resistance. That such demands at times incited to desperation and violence is not surprising, but the only alternative was an unacceptable compromise with mass defiance of authority. Yet, it remains in doubt whether established authority suffered more from such defiance than from the occasional necessity to use the birch rod or the Cossack's knout on the backs of workers who considered their lot unjust and unbearable. Unlike the modern totalitarian organizational scheme, the Tsarist system did not seek to enroll the support of the workers or the energy of their potential leaders, nor did it provide scapegoats to ventilate the frustrations of angered workmen. Their discontent was allowed to feed on itself until their loyalty was irreparably lost to those in power.

¹ *Ibid.*, III: ii, No. 205, 473.