

(Interviewer's note: This is a B-type interview about the organization of the trade unions in Hungary. The respondent was working with the Central Council of Trade Unions from 1947 to 49. Later on, up to his escape from Hungary in 1956 he was connected with the same central council.)

The Central Council of The Trade Unions exists for about 50 years. In old times it was dominated by the Social Democratic Party and it was a voluntary organization of the different national trade unions organized on occupational lines. In 1947 and 48 when the great nationalisation of the industry took place, the Central Council was reorganized according to the patterns of the Soviet trade unions. At the same time, the Central Council as well as the other national trade unions lost their independence and came under the direction of the Communist Party. The following description depicts the situation as it existed in 1955 and 56. To understand the following description, we must make distinction among the following trade union organizations: the central council or in ~~the~~ Hungarian ~~name~~ SZOT, the national trade unions, the county and subcounty trade union organizations, and finally the *locals* or as they are called, the basic trade union organizations. The Central Council or the SZOT consists of about 60 national trade unions. The great majority of them, about 45, are organized on the basis of an industrial branch and comprise the workers of the textile, iron industry, of mining or printing and so on. Then there are 15 or 16 selected large plants which have their own trade

union organization and are direct members of the Central Council. In old times the national trade unions were the backbones of the trade union movement in Hungary. After the reorganization in 1947 their role decreased and at the present time they have only a nominal role. Actually the Central Council is running its business through the county and subcounty organizations. The Central Council is led by a board of presidents and is doing its work through 12 departments. The board of presidents consists of 57 members who represent the highest leadership of the trade union movement. The presidential board is recruited out of the leaders of the county trade union organizations as well as of the national trade unions. Sometimes the secretary, other times the president of such an organization serves on the presidential board of the Central Council. The selection of these leaders is done by the kader department of the Communist Party and it^{is} done mainly in the interest of the Party. The head of the department for trade unions at the central headquarters of the Communist Party and his 2 deputies are always members of the presidential board of the Central Council. Actually these 3 people are the leaders of the presidential board and their main duty is to keep the ideological line of the Party. Through such connections the presidential board receives direct orders from the headquarters of the Communist Party and it is not

necessary to follow the desires of the national trade unions or the suggestions coming from the lower organizations. The Central Council of the trade unions occupies a huge office building and works there through 12 departments. The 12 departments are as follows: first the urban organizations department, second, ^{the} department for rural organization, third the kader and personnel department, fourth the educational department, five the social department, six the sport department, seven the department for foreign affairs which keeps connection with the trade union^s in the people's democracies, eight press department, nine legal department, 10 department of law, 11 department of cultural affairs, and finally 12 the department of social insurance. In the following part we will take the 12 departments separately and describe their function. No. 1, the urban organization department, No. 2, the rural organization department have the same functions. The difference is that the urban department deals with the organizations in greater Budapest, while the other one deals with all other organizations. As their first function the 2 departments receive monthly reports from the lower organizations concerning membership and membership fees. Those reports furnish monthly ~~a~~ very important information concerning employment and unemployment in the country which is detailed by the branches of industry and by the provinces of the country. This information

is summarized in the offices of the Central Council and forwarded to the central planning office and to the competent ministries of the state. Altogether, they furnish a very important information which is very much regarded in planning and other policy-making activities at the highest level. As another function the 2 *organizational* departments keep record of the membership fees paid and of the expenditures of the different trade union organizations. The 2 departments had a certain right to allot definite sums for certain purposes. The 2 departments can decide how much money should be spent on the purposes of sports and sport education, on other cultural affairs and so on. As a part of this budgeting activities the 2 departments sponsored many very important researches in industrial medicine and *health care*. The 2 departments gave out important research projects to university institutions and other *research organizations*. For example, a very ambitious research program was carried out, lasting for 3 years, concerning the so-called protective food and drinks given out to workers in certain industries. The final recommendations ~~of~~ of the *research projects* are often carried out in practical programs. For example, on the basis of such researches it was decided how much soda water should be given to workers in the textile plants or milk to workers in the so-called hot plants or marmalade and so on. This research program is undoubtedly very sound and good.

On the other hand, it is true, that only few of the recommendations are carried actually out and many recommendations^s become distorted because of the great bureaucracy and red tape that can be seen all over the trade union system.

No. 3⁴ the personnel and kader department, which is the most important part of the trade union movement from the point of view of the Communist Party. To understand this gigantic organization of the kader it must be kept in mind that actually there are 2 kader systems running side by side on all levels, the kader system of the Party and the kader system of the trade unions. Theoretically the kader department of the Party headquarters and the kader department of the Central Council of the Trade Unions should be coordinated having equal rights. Practically, however, the kader department of the Party is superordinated and giving orders to the Central Council. Moreover, the kader department of the ~~the~~ Party has a direct line to all ~~organs~~ of the trade union system. In every plant there is a kader department which prepares 2 different kinds of ~~records~~^{reports}. One of the reports goes to the Central Council, ~~and~~^{and} another one through another way goes to the kader department of the Party. The kader department of the Party keeps an eye on every employee from the point of view of his general reliability from a Communist point of view. The kader department of the Central Council is supposed to select the prospec-

tive leaders of the trade union movement, but it has a right to select only the so-called small and medium kaders whereas the high kader of the trade union movement is always selected by the kader department of the Party. Thus, the kader department of the Central Council selects those people who are sent into the schools arranged by the educational department and who are supposed to become the secretaries and other trade union leaders of the future. The kader department receives many reports from all basic trade unions organizations and it has a very good knowledge of the membership and the functionaries of the trade union system. There cannot be any small local union in a remote part of the country where the membership and the personal qualities of the members would not be well-known to the kader department of the Central Council.

No. 4, the educational department organizes the different seminaries and schools where the future leaders ~~of~~ are educated. There are 4 types of courses for the members of the trade unions. The lowest grade of them is called the social course which is arranged in the after-work hours late in the afternoon. ^{It} usually lasts for 6 weeks meeting 2 or 3 times a week. The higher courses last one month, 4 months, and 6 months respectively where the students are placed in boarding schools and they participate in the courses as a full-time occupation. The students of the social courses are ~~are~~ selected by

the local trade unions and even individual applicants are accepted to those courses if they wish to attend. Out of the students of this basic course are selected, ^{those} persons who are sent further to the higher courses. The basis of ^{this} ~~these~~ selection^s is not scholastic aptitude or knowledge. They want to select people who can be influenced easily and who will become very likely the blind Party members who carry out every order without any questioning. This is the reason why so many of those disciples of the higher courses are generally regarded as blockheads. The schedule and the material of the different courses are prepared by the Party. The main subjects are Marx' work the Capital, then production, the value of ^{commodity} ~~A~~ according to Marx, then concentration, plant organization, and so on. They learn~~ed~~ pretty much about the trade union movement in the people's democracies, particularly in the Soviet Union, but they even learn~~ed~~, in a critical sense, about the great American organizations, such as AFL and CIO. They learn~~ed~~ moreover a great deal of philosophy, economic^s, particularly a comparison between the so-called bourgeoisie and Marxist economy, and finally economic history in the sense of Marxism. It is note-worthy that the students are not supposed to read the original work~~s~~ of Marx or of Lenin, but only the excerpts which are censored by the Party. The courses are run with a staff of about 150 full-time and many other part-time

teachers. The teachers, however, are selected on the basis mentioned above. Thus in many cases they don't know anything else but the so-called syllables prepared by the Party. I attended, partly as a student and partly as an observer, some of those schools. It was really a pathetic view to see the students trying to learn Marxist philosophy from a teacher who did not know about it.

No. 5, the social department manages the resort places of the workers and the different material help given to the workers. The Central Council manages about 45 resort places for the workers, although there are some other resort places maintained by the different other trade union organizations including the *hotels* of some large plants. Out of the 45 resort places managed by the Central Council 6 or 8 belong to the first class, the rest to the second class. The first class places are those at Pecs, the former Hotel Kikelet, then at Jilafured the former Hotel Palota, then at Balatonlelle the former resort Hotel Mabi, then at Gallyatetö and Kakes. The 2 ~~largest~~ last mentioned places are the show places of the trade union movement. They are reserved for Stakhanovites, for the funcionarios of the Party and the trade unions, for the managers of the plants, and finally for foreign visitors. They are often pictured in the different pieces of propaganda. They are really excellent and can be compared to the

good hotels in Austria. They are, however, forbidden for ordinary workers. The ordinary workers are sent only to the second class places which are open to every worker, to the members of the kolkhozes, to actors, doctors, and so on. All kinds of people are thrown together in such resort places and it happens often that an iron worker shares a room with a doctor and none of them is satisfied with the company. The main trouble with the resort places is that they have altogether about 50 000 rooms which is not enough for the huge membership which are entitled for having a vacation there. The accommodation at the resort places is distributed by the office of the Central Council and it is done in a bureaucratic way. ~~The~~ Certain plants get a certain number of accommodation[§] each year which are then distributed by the secretary of the local union. It means, that the friends of the secretary get in whereas some other people cannot participate in the resort and vacation system for many, many years. As its second function the social department manages the material help which is given to the members in the case of child birth, marriage, death, or at certain extraordinary occurrences. There are 2 kinds of help. One is the so-called regular which is paid out of the funds of the Central Council and the other one is the extraordinary help which is paid out of the special funds, put aside by each plant. The regular help means a very small sum, something like 65 to 100 forints. The extraordinary

help is given only in certain special cases on an individual basis and it varies between 200 and 500 forints. I know that the workers complained very much because they do not get this help when they are supposed to get it. I do not think that the Central Council would embezzle the money, however, the funds of the Central Council are insufficient to pay the help whenever it would be required. This is why the helps were reduced in 1953. From this time on, for example, one could get the 65 forints only after the third child, but nothing for the first 2 children. Furthermore I think, that there are many troubles because of the red tape. For example, if somebody is on bad terms with the secretary of the local union, the secretary does not fill in the necessary forms and the fellow does not get what is due to him. At present, the whole system of help is very unpopular with the workers and it is mainly ~~as~~ because of the burcaucracy.

No. 6, the sport department is dealing with the sport affairs. A certain percentage of the membership fees is regularly spent for sports and athletics. In every plant, which employed 50 people or more, a special sports' fund was set up which was managed by the local union. Another and larger sports' fund was established at the Central Council. Out of these funds, the different plants set up their own sport organization, their athletic fields, stadiums, and so on. The department supervised the different sports' funds through an im-

mense system of accounting and at the same time directed the athletic activities of the different plants and their athletic teams. This was undoubtedly the most popular activity of the Central Council of the Trade Unions. This is why they spent so much money on popular sports such as soccer. At the same time they neglected certain other fields of athletics, for example, gymnastics which in old times had been so popular with the independent trade unions. The same department was in charge of the sport festivals which were arranged at least once a year in every large city and which had a part in the general propaganda system of ~~the~~ Communism.

No. 7, the department of foreign affairs which had to maintain connections with the trade union organizations of other countries. It meant, of course, connections with the Soviet trade unions, the trade unions of the people's democracies. There were very few connections with the trade unions of the Western countries, except the French ones. The connections with the Western countries were limited to an exchange of certain information. For example, the department of the Hungarian Central Council issued every month a bulletin in 3 or 4 Western languages which was sent to England, France and to many other countries. This bulletin, however, was straight ~~inimitic~~ Party propaganda. It was a ridiculous reading for me or for anybody who was well ^{informed} ^

^{about}
~~which~~ the system of the trade unions since it contained so many lies. The same department was in charge of the foreign visitors who came from some other country as trade union leaders or of the trips that Hungarian union leaders and members made in foreign countries, particularly in the Soviet Union. And finally the same department was in charge of copying the Soviet system of trade unions and adapting it to the Hungarian system. This work was sometimes really ridiculous. For example, a part of it was the establishment of the so-called plant sanatoriums in Hungary. The plant sanatoriums, which allegedly worked in the Soviet Union are for workers who are still able to work but need some special treatment. That means that the workers go to work and work daily during the regular hours. But after work they do not go home but to the sanatorium where they get the treatment, get entertainment and sleep there. In such a way the Soviet trade unions claim many workers can be healed in a ~~period~~ period of one to three weeks without losing any time in work. No. 8, the press department is in charge of the press published by the Central Council and by the other trade union organizations. The Central Council has one daily newspaper in Budapest. Up to 1956 it was the Nepszava. At present it is the Nepakarat. The Central Council has a printing press and a publishing firm called Szakszervezeti Kiado Vallalat which published books

concerning trade union organization, education, and similar problems, Furthermore the books written by the so-called worker writers as well as the books of Marx, Engels, or Lenin. The same department controls the papers published by the national trade unions, for example the textile workers and miners trade union ~~has~~ *have their* weekly paper. Then there are some large plants, for example Csepel, Mavag, Villamos Gep es Kabel Gyar which have their own plant newspaper published again under the control of the press department. The head of this department is at the same time a member of the editorial board of the Nepszava or Nepakarat in order to insure the same ideological leadership in every field.

No. 9, the legal department which deals with the legal problems concerning work and the members of the trade union. This department has an important voice in all those laws and orders issued by the state ministries which affect *the* rights of the workers, the development of industries and so on. In such a way, the same department had a very important role in repairing the so-called lawbook of work which was first published in 1953 and amended three times since that time. Originally it contained about 500 paragraphs referring to labor relations in a legal sense.

No. 10 is the labor department which cooperates with the national committee for fixing wages and has an important function in establishing the wages and the so-

called working categories in each branch of the industry.

No. 11, the department of cultural affairs directs the cultural institutions of the plants such as, the choirs, the musical bands, dance groups, amateur theatre, drama clubs, and so on. The Central Committee itself has its own musical orchestra, choir and dance group and many of the plants have similar organizations of their own. The whole system is directed and supervised by the Central Council. It is this department of the Central Council which ^{generally} furnishes the program material, in other words, only such plays, musical numbers, and so on can be performed which are approved by the Central Council.

No. 12, the department of social security is in charge of the social insurance system. It took over the old institutions of the OTI and it has its offices not in the central building of the Central Council but in the old palace of the OTI on the *Financi* Street. It should be mentioned that all workers, except certain individual peasants and certain professionals who are not members of a cooperative, are now under the compulsory state insurance. Most of the workers are employees of the state and their insurance fees are paid by the state. About 1 1/2% of all the workers of the country are legally still regarded as private employees. For example, small office^s, domestics, and so on. In this case their employer is supposed to pay their insurance

fees. The members of the TSZCS and of the artisans' cooperatives can voluntarily join the social insurance system. In a statement issued in the summer of 1956 the Central Council claimed that 80% of all the Hungarian families come under the social insurance system. My opinion is that this statement is exaggerated. The charter of the SZTK clearly defines the conditions of the social insurance. The members are insured for cases of accident, sickness, and for old-age pension. The conditions of the insurance are detailed there too. For example, if somebody does not work for 6 months, he loses all his rights and all his benefits. If he begins to work again, he becomes a new member and his old rights are entirely lost. If somebody, who is a member for less than a year cannot work because of sickness, he may get 50% of his average earnings during a three months period. If somebody is a member of the insurance system for 2 years, he can get 60% , if he is a member for a longer time 70% of his average earnings over 3 months. In case of hospitalization the insured person receives only 20% of his benefits paid to his hand. The rest is paid to the hospital for the care given by the hospital. In case of an accident a special committee of doctors establishes the degree of damage suffered by a person. For example, if somebody loses one of his hands, he becomes crippled ~~at~~^{by} 33%. In case somebody loses one of his eyes, he becomes a cripple of 25%.

On the basis of such a percentage he gets a certain monthly pension. A member is entitled to old-age pension provided he worked continuously for 10 years and he has reached a certain age limit. The age limit for old-age insurance is 55 years for females and 60 years for males. They planned to lower this age limit in the fall of 1956, but this new regulation did not come out because of the Revolution. I understand that now they plan to carry out this correction. It should be mentioned that there is a special and independent so-called national pension fund which pays old-age pension to some other people who are not covered by the old-age pension plan of the SZTK. Concerning the social insurance system it is necessary to mention that it was not established on the basis of an actuarial estimation. Consequently the contributions are unrealistically low and the funds are all the time short. Moreover there is the usual red tape. Altogether I think it happens pretty often that an insured person does not get what is due to him. It happens particularly often in old-age pension. The general policy is to keep a fellow at his work as long as he is able to work. So for example a person who reached the age of 60 years is not permitted to retire if he can work. In such a case the Party secretary or the secretary of the local trade union is supposed to persuade him that he should volunteer for further work. Because of

such features the whole system is very unpopular with the workers. On the other hand, one should not forget that the system of social insurance means a great improvement to that system which existed in Hungary before 1945, but it cannot be compared to a system existing in France or England. This are the 12 departments of the office of the Central Council.

The Central Council being the peak organization of the trade unions leads all the other trade union organizations. The old national trade unions have nowadays only a nominal role. Actually no power has been left with them. The Central Council works through a network of county and subcounty or city trade union organizations which control the local unions or basic units. This administrative system coincides with the administrative distribution of the country. There is one trade union organization for each county, subcounty or city. In the summer of 1956 there were almost 12 000 local unions. ^{Then} ~~There~~ number, however, ~~usually~~ changes pretty often. The administration of the trade union system is very much centralized according to the Soviet patterns. The rule is that the Central Council gives out some orders which are forwarded to the county union organizations. From there they are forwarded to the sub-county organizations and from there to the local unions. The local unions are supposed to send regular reports on the same way. For example, after

each meeting they are supposed to send a detailed report. The situation is that after each meeting every month they send a report to the sub-county organization which forwards it with many other reports to the county-organization and from there to the Central Council. This red tape alone blocks the way of getting any useful suggestions from the local unions. The regular thing is that the report of the local unions still mirror those complaints which are brought forth by the members at the monthly meetings of the local unions. However, the sub-county organization rewrites those reports and forwards them in a rewritten form. The county organization rewrites them again. So finally the Central Council gets a perfectly distorted picture. In such a way the real complaints of the workers never get to the Central Council. In spite of the tremendous bureaucracy the real leaders of the Central Council are rather poorly informed of what is going on in the union *locals* and ~~states~~ the real situation in the plants. The whole administration is a one-way affair whereby the orders of the Central Council reaches the local unions and the members but the complaints of the members can hardly reach the Central Council.

The same red tape blocks the effective work of the trade unions in the kader system. According to Communist theory the trade unions main duty would be to select the prospective leaders of the working class.

Because of the same red tape this selection goes on rather poorly. An able worker does not find necessarily his way to higher jobs or better pays through the kader system of the trade unions. On the other hand many people who are not able but are good friends of a trade union secretary or who can pull the wires are able to get ahead and receive a good job with an important trade union organization. This is one of the reasons why workers' sons do not like to select the trade union as the field of their future career and make a success in such a way which would be in line with Communist theory. But the workers' sons if they can do so prefer to attend a university and become an independent professional. In its present system the trade unions are a part of the centralized administrative and propaganda system which rules the workers from above and is not very much interested in any suggestions coming from below. In the present system none of the trade unions can be regarded as independent.