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**THE SOVIET TRADE UNIONS AND RESUMPTION  
OF THE LABOR DISPUTES INSTITUTION (1953 – 1964)**

**Abstract.** *The research objective* is to identify and carry out the scientific tracing of the political component in the resumption of labour disputes against the general historical background of the trade union activities during the period of 1953 – 1964 (known as the Thaw) to define the causes and motives for the authorities' interests about labour disputes to grow. **The research methodology** is based on general historical principles; it is supplemented and concretized by the elements of the theory of social and labour relations which in the most generalized form cover the relationship between three subjects of relations:

workforce, an owner of production means and the state. **The scientific novelty** comprises the process of resumption of labour disputes which is analysed for the first time in the Ukrainian historiography in the context of forms and methods characteristic of political history based on the use of labour legislation of that period as a historical source in combination with traditional historical sources. There has been determined the nature and causes of collective and individual labour disputes latency in accordance with the political tasks of the Thaw. **The Conclusions.** The postwar resumption of the labour disputes institution which, in fact, began only in the mid-1950s, was influenced by two opposing tendencies: the need to change subject-object relations and the need to remain intact the dominant form of ownership and its political attributes. As a result of these mutually exclusive directions, collective disputes turned out to be outside the law and became the part of big politics. The trade unions that took care of these processes changed their function from social protection of workers to protection of political interests of the state.

**Key words:** industrial conflict, the Thaw, political history, totalitarianism, labour disputes, functions of trade unions.

## РАДЯНСЬКІ ПРОФСПІЛКИ ТА ВІДНОВЛЕННЯ ІНСТИТУТУ ТРУДОВИХ СПОРІВ (1953 – 1964)

**Анотація. Мета дослідження** – на історичному тлі профспілкової діяльності у період 1953 – 1964 рр. (відомий як доба “відлиги”) виокремити та здійснити наукове простеження політичного компонента проблеми відновлення практики трудових спорів з визначенням причин та мотивів зростання до нього владних інтересів. **Методологія дослідження** спирається на загальноісторичні принципи, а також доповнюється та конкретизується елементами теорії соціально-трудова відносин, що в найбільш узагальненому вигляді охоплюють взаємовідносини між трьома суб’єктами: робочою силою, власником засобів виробництва та державою. **Наукова новизна** полягає у тому, що вперше в українській історіографії у контексті форм і методів, характерних для політичної історії, на основі використання законодавства про працю “епoxy відлиги” як історичного джерела в комплексі з традиційними історичними джерелами здійснено аналіз процесу відновлення інституту трудових спорів. Визначено природу та причини латентності їх колективних й індивідуальних різновидів відповідно до політичних завдань «відлиги». **Висновки.** Відправною точкою для висновків виступають політичні компоненти державної форми власності та планового ведення господарства і командно-адміністративної системи управління, що її супроводять. Повоєнне відновлення інституту трудових спорів, що фактично почалося лише з середини 50-х рр., відбувалося під впливом двох протидіючих тенденцій: потреби зміни суб’єктно-об’єктних відносин і необхідності утримання в неперушності панівної форми власності та її політичних атрибутів. У результаті дії цих взаємовиключних чинників колективні спори фактично опинилися поза межами права і стали частиною великої політики. У зв’язку з цим професійні спілки, які опікувалися цими процесами, поглибили видозміну функції з соціального захисту трудівників на захист політичних інтересів держави.

**Ключові слова:** виробничий конфлікт, “відлига”, політична історія, тоталітаризм, трудові спори, функції профспілок.

**The Problem Statement.** The proposed topic is an integral part of the labour problem which has always included a conflict as its integral companion. Eliminating or at least reducing of a conflict severity has always been relevant to all its participants. In addition, this is not a conflict based on, according to the Marxist interpretation, private ownership of the production means, but the conflicts that arose when this so-called “obstacle” had long since been removed and what is known as socialist property dominated on its ruins. In this regard, the institution of labour disputes, as one of the elements in the fight against this evil, acquired multiple political features. As a means of disguise the results of the state ownership domination, as a form of supporting the political ambitions of the government, as a way to overcome the resistance of Stalinism’s outspoken supporters, and, ultimately, as a model of social and labour relations of the future. Under modern conditions, this issue, to some extent, is updated by the development of a new labour legislation.

The chronological boundaries of the mid-1950s – mid-1960s provide probably the best opportunities for the study of these processes due to a range of reasons. The most important of them was the new paradigm of the postwar world, in which the ideas of liberalism took a prominent place and became its main vector of development. This new vector completely ruled out the possibility to use classical Stalinism as a political form of development for the Soviet society. This message in the postwar trend was a key one and had to be fully reflected in the new development of the Soviet state known as the Thaw. And even if at that time history suddenly had taken the subjunctive mood and Stalin had been lucky to survive the terrible blow of illness and betrayal of his allies; and Khrushchev, respectively, would have failed to embody his conspiratorial plan, the change in the political course of the USSR would have still happened. Although, perhaps, in a different time dimension and with the participation of other political players. The post-war liberalization of the world was to play a key role and the Soviet Union had to adapt to the conditions of the post-war world under all circumstances, because it was, in essence, about preserving the system.

In view of the above, the Thaw, that replaced the classical Stalinism, was to offer such a paradigm for the development of the Soviet society that would allow the USSR to adapt to the postwar conditions while helping to preserve its fundamental principles in the form of state ownership of the means of production and its accompanying attributes. For the most part, this was to be facilitated by the low level of conflict in production, which would have fully justified a large-scale social experiment based on state ownership and the accessories that ensured its inviolability. The institution of labour disputes, which was traditionally subordinated to the most popular public organization, helped the ruling power to maintain a safe level of conflict.

Established in 1918 as a component of new labour relations, it had undergone a complex path of transformation carried out in accordance with the needs of the Soviet state: from the demands of “war” communism to a new economic policy and then – to forced industrialization, and later – to the firing 1930s and at last until the war, when the need for it virtually disappeared. In the first postwar years (1947), an attempt was made to resuscitate the institution of labour disputes. It was also urgently needed by the Labour Code of the USSR. Adopted in 1922, the Labour Code grew with a huge number of amendments, and according to modern experts, remained a formal rather than a real source of legal regulation of labour relations. In 1952, this Code of laws was republished with the stamp “for official use”, and a special number was assigned to each copy of it (Kiselyov, 2003, p. 34). The latter made the Code actually inaccessible to the “broad strata” for which the Bolsheviks began their historical metamorphosis in 1917.

Thus, the new political team was faced with the task to fill the Code with a new content that would correspond to the spirit of the new era and, at the same time, could liberalize the system of relations between the state as the owner of the production means and employees. The Soviet trade unions, in which sphere of competence labour relations were, also needed renewal. The new paradigm of their functioning was formed in the resolution of the December (1957) plenum of the Central Committee. There is every reason to believe that this resolution was a somewhat belated reaction of the ruling party to Convention No. 87 of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which provided for freedom of association and protection of the right to join trade unions and entered into force on July 4, 1950 (Convention № 87... (1948).

Since the Thaw predicted completely new, unknown to the USSR, the charms of liberalism, this, of course, could not help but affected the nature of the postwar change in labour legislation. According to the researcher Kiselyov I., labour legislation “modernized, freed from the most

odious features of the Stalin era, became more democratic, more in tune with the generally accepted principles of legal regulation in the civilized world” (Kiselyov, 2003, p. 34). In the context of labour relations, the institute of labour disputes was also drifting.

**The Analysis of Sources and Recent Research Works.** The above gives grounds to assert the multifaceted nature of the problem and its relevance, in addition to history, at least some more areas of humanities: labour law, political science, sociology, and, perhaps, even conflict studies. This fact significantly expands the research base and complicates the process of elaborating the issue. At the same time, this gives grounds to expect the conclusions to be strengthened.

Taking into account the political subordination of the trade unions, the analysis of sources involves not only the documents of the public organization itself, which are stored in the Central State Archive of Higher Authorities and Administration of Ukraine (CSAHA of Ukraine), but also party organizations, many of which are concentrated in the Central State Archive of Public Unions of Ukraine (CSAPU of Ukraine). However, taking into account a rather low level of their reliability, especially in terms of the trade union statistics and in the presentation of particular facts of the trade unions’ activity, priority is given to the documents of personal origin such as individual complaints of workers. The results of a comprehensive analysis of these documents, in our opinion, have significant potential to strengthen the source base. In the context of the problem, they provide sincere and, most importantly, truthful information about violations of labour rights of citizens. Many of them preceded the emergence of labour disputes, and the others, on the contrary, were the result of dissatisfaction with their decisions.

However, despite the well-structured and systematized research base and attractive scientific prospects of the outlined range of questions, the historiography cannot be considered exhaustive. We assume that this may be due to the specifics of the Soviet model of the trade union building, based on the excessive functionality of this public organization, which requires a variety of professional training from a researcher. The range of the trade union functions was indeed extremely wide, and with each new version of the Statute it increased with new details. According to our estimates, the number of the trade union functions increased by more than 30% from 1954 to 1959. We identified 51 competencies in the Statute of the Trade Unions adopted in 1959. (Dokashenko, 2008). Their diversity is impressive: social competitions, various aspects of social insurance, the care of medicine and sports, the leadership of the union of innovators and inventors, the control of pensions, catering, and so on and so forth. The resolution of labour disputes was only one of the trade unions’ functions, but they were extremely important for the state.

In our opinion, the historiography of the problem should be constructed like a layercake, which allows distinguishing several blocks of scientific works, while maintaining a close structural and logical connection between them. The first block covers the works that form a general historical background of the Thaw. Modern historians, dividing post-war historiography into three parts, single out the 1950s and 1960s as separate segments (2017, p. 128). The works by V. Baran, V. Danylenko (Baran & Danylenko, 1999), O. Pyzhikov (Pyzhikov, 2002), and R. Pikhoya (Pikhoya, 2019) are quite convincing to represent this group. Lipkan A., for example, rightly points to the cosmetic nature of M. Khrushchev’s changes. The author writes, “The history of the Soviet society was still appraised in the light of *The CPSU (b) Short Course History*. At the same time, the party’s policy was recognized as correct at all stages.” (2015, p. 85). This group also includes the sixth volume of the collective multi-volume work *Political History of Ukraine...* (2003), which adds a political component to the mosaic of Khrushchev’s decade.

The second block of scientific literature includes the works on the history of the Soviet trade unions and, first of all, those ones that are directly related to the subject of this research study. That is the researches on the trade unions' activities in resolving those issues in which an employer and employees could not reach an agreement. Unfortunately, such works are scarce, but there are some undoubted achievements. There are scientific papers summarizing the progress of the trade unions in Ukraine (Essays, 2002) and the monographs by V. Tsvikh *Trade Unions and Civil Society: Theory, Methodology, Practice* (Tsvikh, 2002) and L. Tupitsa *Trade Unions in the Political System of Modern Society: Dimensions of Functioning* (Tupitsa, 2008) which create a methodological basis for new researches.

It should be noted that the importance of the Soviet-era works must not be detracted. Of course, we do not see their value in defending the ideological postulates of the Soviet totalitarianism but in detailing its mechanism, which indirectly disavowed the whole essence of the USSR political system. Therefore, the works of that time tend to be attributed not so much to the historiography of the problem as to its source base. The collective work *Trade Unions – Subjects of Soviet Law* (Tsepin, 1973) can be given as an example which, among other things, tells about labour disputes. It does not directly concern the period of the Thaw and, of course, somewhat reduces its value as a historical source. At the same time, this work has an important advantage such as the justification of the alterations made to the legislation from the Khrushchev Thaw to the Brezhnev stagnation. Thus, the authors, logically connecting the two historical periods, allow our contemporaries to take full advantage of the principle of historicism in their research studies, and, consequently, to penetrate deeper into the essence of the problem. If it is remembered that the team of authors includes six top specialists in trade union issues, it is difficult to overestimate the significance of this publication. Hardly anyone could have explained better from a legal standpoint the essence of the state concept of the labour disputes institute, as well as the place and role of trade unions in its functioning than they had done.

It should be noted that the source value of the above studies is significantly increased by works that provide an objective analysis of the political, economic, and cultural state of the Ukrainian labour. This is especially evident in the works of the diaspora group of historians who, despite the inaccessibility of the archival database, were able to use the existing set of theoretical and methodological tools of world historical science. The result was the creation of an authentic, quite plausible concept of the situation of the Ukrainian workers (Nefedov, 2020, p.187).

The third block of researches includes the literature on labour law. These are numerous textbooks and a number of articles on the history of the formation and development of the labour disputes institution. Of course, their authors do not aim to trace the historical aspect of the problem or to investigate the political causes and consequences of the resumption of the above-mentioned institution, but characterizing labor law, they clearly show the tendency of subordination of law to politics. In the Khrushchev era, as well as after it, the distinction between political and legal aspects of the problem became increasingly illusory. Therefore, till nowadays "In the post-Soviet social space, the meaning of the rule of law is an imported commodity for both professional and general use". (Rabinovich, 2021, p. 252).

Does it mean that law and politics will be completely separated? It is doubtful. Most likely it is a matter of achieving some reasonable balance. Lawyers have long been talking about the current trend of legal sciences, which continue to drift towards the rejection of the universal idea of law and increasingly declare its socio-cultural and historical conditionality (Varlamova, 2021, p. 32).

Summarizing the above, we emphasize that in none of these clusters of scientific literature the problem of the political dimension of labour disputes was not raised by the authors, although they have managed to create good conditions for its comprehensive study, which we are going to use.

The research objective is to single out the political component of labour disputes in the historical dimension of the Thaw and the subsequent determination of basic principles of existence and its impact on the emergence and resolution of collective and individual labour conflicts officially formalized in the form of labor disputes. Based on the above, the task is to find the points of latent intersection of political state interests with the functional activities of the institution built on the coalescence of public and administrative principles. There is hope that the achievement of the objective and accomplishment of tasks will give grounds for a conclusion on the transformation direction of the protective function of the most mass workers' organization. Considering the predominance of political motives in the problem, the scientific search will be carried out on the basis of forms and methods inherent in political history.

Methodologically, this problem is considered in the light of the social and labour relations theory, its adherents interpret labour disputes as part of “various social ties between working groups and units of the organization, as well as between individual employees within them, directly related to labour activity” (Kalyna, 2012, p. 60). In the most generalized form, the theory covers the relationship between three subjects: labour force, owners of the production means, and a state. Although these views finally united their supporters only at the end of the 20th century, this circumstance is not a warning against their application in the practice of labour relations in the period of the Thaw. The reasons for this are also provided by the fact that all these subjects, although in a rather specific form, existed within the studied chronological boundaries, and the influence of the state form of ownership gave its history a specific tragic colour. There were also relationships between the subjects of labour relations, which were traced through several planes: an employee – an employee, an employee – an employer, a trade union – an employer, an employer – a state, an employee – a state, and etc. Their presence detects the causes of labour conflicts. And the latter ones, according to the experts, “can occur for various reasons and at any stage of labour relations development” (Inshin, 2006, p. 73).

**The Main Material Statement.** To fully distinguish the political aspect of the problem, it is extremely important to clarify the conceptual apparatus. It is reasonable to start with the definition of *labour dispute*. Modern authors have formulated many of its definitions. In particular, the researcher V. Kabanets found eleven interpretations of this concept in scientific literature (Kabanets, 2005, pp. 146–148). We tend to use the wording proposed by V. Smolyarchuk. He interpreted this concept as “unregulated divergences that arose between an administration and an employee on the basis of labour legislation use or the determination of workers and employees' labour conditions that are resolved as established by law” (Smolyarchuk, 1973, p. 16). This formulation of the question for the period of the Thaw, in our opinion, is optimal as it allows at least partially to bypass the discussion which continues up today between the supporters of understanding this term in the broad (V. Safronov) and narrow (I. Kiselyov) meanings of the word (Tsepin, 1973, pp. 74–75). However, the latter, in our opinion, is more significant for juridical than historical research.

For us, the fact of legal division of labour disputes into individual and collective ones is much more important. According to modern experts, an individual dispute is “a duly motivated (formalized) labour dispute between an employee and an employer based on the protection of a violated labour law, submitted to an authorized jurisdiction according to

the procedure prescribed by the law.” A collective dispute is a disagreement that has arisen between the parties to social and labour relations regarding the establishment of new working socio-economic conditions and working environment or the alteration of existing ones; the conclusion or amendment of a collective agreement; the execution of a collective agreement, contract or some of their provisions; the non-compliance with the requirements of labour legislation (Inshin, 2016, pp. 404–406).

It is significant that the Soviet legislation of the postwar period did not recognize collective disputes at all, although the mechanism of their individual counterpart had been developed since the 1920s. In the Labour Code adopted in 1922 (with amendments as of March 1929), the mention of “a group competition” was still there, although it was more of a reservation than an independent unit. According to Article 169, all violations of the Code and other labour legislation acts were to be adjudicated directly at special sessions of people’s courts. The subject of a court case could be “all individual and group competitions between employers and workers and employees” (Code, 1929, pp. 40–41). We emphasize in passing that all other forms of group conflict resolution provided by the then current legislation, neither at the level of Pricing and Conflict Commissions nor in conciliation chambers and arbitration courts did not have such a prerogative.

However, even this was enough to recognize, all other circumstances being equal, that at the end of the 1920s, the way to resolve labour conflicts was a rather democratic one. Such satisfaction could indeed have taken place if not for the political circumstance enshrined in the formula of state ownership. The fact is that, remaining *de facto* the sole owner of production means, the state could not recognize the existence of group conflicts. The methodology of the so-called socialist form of ownership did not admit them *a priori*. One of the Soviet demiurges V. Molotov, characterizing the importance for the Bolshevik government of replacing private property with state one, in his report dedicated to the twentieth anniversary of the revolution, stressed that “This is not a small change, but a radical restructuring of the society, a radical overhaul of its economical basis” (Molotov, 1937).

It is clear that the form of ownership for the Bolsheviks was the main node in the mechanism of the Soviet-type state. Therefore, if one could think for a moment about the legitimacy of collective conflicts, logical questions would arise without clear answers. For example, if collective conflicts could not be avoided, then why was private ownership eliminated and in such a bloody way? It also turns out that the socialization of production means does not resolve the conflict between workers and an owner of production (in this case – the state). In view of the above, the recognition of group conflict legitimacy, especially one that requires the development of a special mechanism for its elimination in the general system of labour relations, erases the pathos of the concept formed under the influence of the events of October 1917. And, if in the 1920s their existence could be interpreted say as growth errors, in the mid-1950s such an explanation was practically excluded. Consequently, the lawyers did not see any sense to include it in the labour relations component.

The Thaw, which inherited the recognition of collective labour disputes, on the one hand had to add liberal features to the labour relations, but on the other hand it was forced to remove even the very concept of collective conflict and collective dispute from legal circulation. Both the first and the second actions had no right to take place primarily because, although indirectly, they questioned the legitimacy of private property transfer to state ownership. Under these circumstances, the authorities could afford to admit only “individual” labour conflicts and “single” labour disputes, which, of course, “could not have” any antagonistic

features. This could not be allowed also because the concept of a collective dispute had already been in a direct contradiction with the very important Stalinist formula of “a moral and political unity of the Soviet society”, invented by the “leader” at the 18th Party Congress (Stalin, 1939). Stalin’s team desperately needed this formula, because it easily covered up the mass repressions due to which the so-called unity was achieved. Eventually, time showed that it was completely demanded by the Thaw as well. It turned out that it was quite easy to string new ideologies on the formula, even such ones as the complete victory of socialism and the development of the material and technical base of communism.

Considering this circumstance, we are not surprised by the fact that collective labour disputes were not even mentioned in “Regulation on the Procedure for Considering Labour Disputes” developed by the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions and approved by the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR on January 31, 1957. (Reference Book, 1958, pp. 319–325). Meanwhile, for the institution of labour disputes, it was the document of extraordinary importance. In fact, it began the postwar reincarnation of this institution. Soviet authors did not bother to search for special arguments in this regard. Thus, the well-known scientist of his time J. Davydovych, who gave the first doctrinal commentary on the Regulation..., did not comment on collective labour conflicts in the USSR in his work. Although one of the experts who studied the legacy of J. Davydovych, aptly and not without sarcasm, noted that he did not comment on collective conflicts, but made an effort to refute their existence in the USSR. In particular, he reduced his arguments to the fact that in the USSR, in contrast to capitalist countries, conflicts were not antagonistic in their nature, and therefore, there were no reasons for the clash of collective interests (Syrykh, 2011, p. 236).

Certainly, such explanations did not seem convincing to us. Therefore, to refute them, we tried to find documented facts and to confirm the real existence of collective conflicts, which would automatically raise the question of the need for resurgence of collective labour disputes. The latter gave grounds to claim that the absence of collective labour disputes in the above-mentioned Regulation... was politically motivated. However, since such disputes were not provided by the law, we were far from believing that there would be a chance to find at least one case of collective dispute in the archive. Although, in principle, it was possible to use other documents that would indirectly confirm our assumption. For example, it could be an official rejection to accept a plea of consideration or an issue with this wording raised at a meeting of the Factory and Local Committees (FLC), which was the next instance after the Labour Disputes Commission (LDC) to consider collective labour disputes. After all, it could be just a mention of such a dispute in the minutes of the party committee meeting. However, we could not find anything remotely close to it. Does it mean that there were no collective labour disputes?

It turned out that collective labour disputes took place and they were not sporadic cases. It is notable that they were not within the competence of trade unions and their labour dispute commissions, but within structural units of the KGB. Apparently, the collective disputes received their new name “violations of the work and rest regime” due to this organization. Each case was carefully studied by local authorities and immediately reported to the main department in Kyiv. There, all the incoming information from the field was analysed and immediately brought to the attention of the top party leadership of the republic. It was these documents that we had the opportunity to work with at the CSAPU of Ukraine.

It must be acknowledged that the vast majority of workers in towns and villages had sufficient grounds for collective protests. We have already written that in the late 1950s the output rate was increased by an average of 31% in a number of industries, which inevitably

led to a decrease in wages (Dokashenko, 2017, p. 40). It is not surprising that the majority of collective protests were related to the worsening social status of workers as the consequence of rising output rates and the parallel rise in food prices. Virtually all the collective labour disputes we have studied fit perfectly into the list of issues that could be considered by individual labour dispute commissions. But in the Regulation... the issue of “the use of established output rates and prices, as well as working conditions that ensure compliance with output rates” was placed at the top of the list of issues that could be considered by labour dispute commissions (LDC). It was the output rates that sparked off a strike of 160 employees at the Mykolaiv garment factory named after S. Kirov in October 1963. That same year, two tunnelling crews of 28 men at the mine Pioneer of the Dobropillivuhilia Trust (Donetsk Oblast) did not agree to start working because of the “impossibility of the plan”. At about the same time in Zhovti Vody, 151 workers at the Nova mine of the plant № 9 of the State Committee on Medium Engineering refused to leave the mine in response to the rudeness of the chief engineer of the enterprise (CSAPU of Ukraine, f. 1, d. 24, c. 5670, pp. 45, 61, 71).

Collective protests in the form of refusal to work were characteristic of absolutely all industries, including agriculture, regardless of an enterprise’s form of ownership. In 1962 in Artemivsk Raion of Donetsk Oblast, 40 livestock breeders did not start their work concurrently that was quite unexpected for the local authorities. In Kovel Raion of Volyn Oblast, 7 tractor drivers and 5 trailer hands did not join a sowing campaign. On the collective farm “Batkivshchyna” of Odesa Oblast, workers did not undertake their duties within 5 days, demanding the increase in payment for one working day not less than a kilogram of grain. (CSAPU of Ukraine, f.1, d. 24, c. 5670, pp. 5–6). To this can be added that the political side of the issue is quite clear in the above examples, especially given that these collective protests took place almost a year after the loud proclamation of the Program of building a communist tomorrow. The latter, at least, calls into question the expediency of its adoption. Perhaps that is why Artemivsk livestock breeders were quickly reminded of the reason for them to have been resettled from Lviv Oblast, apparently, they were alluded to the manifestations of so-called bourgeois nationalism. The tractor drivers from Volyn were also “explained” the importance of sowing for the whole country and the consequences for the people who disrupt a sowing campaign.

Thus, while the political affiliation of collective labour conflicts can be traced through their actual non-recognition by the authorities, the political side of their individual counterpart, on the contrary, is manifested in sufficient, even excessive attention to it. This conclusion arises from a careful analysis of the above Regulation... It includes absolutely everything: a deep detailing of a dispute procedure, determined stages, a carefully verified list of issues that could be submitted to the LDCs, as well as those that could not be discussed by them. In connection with the above, the natural question arises as to why the authorities of the Thaw did not recognize the existence of collective disputes in principle and clearly showed an increased interest in individual ones. The appropriateness of the issue becomes obvious when it is considered the nature of the disputes which was based on the state form of ownership and its accompanying attributes such as the command-administrative system and planned economy. That is, both collective and individual conflicts were based on the same factors, but the authorities’ attitude to these types of labour disputes was fundamentally different.

Why were individual conflicts nicer than collective ones to the government of the Thaw? To find out these details, we will try to clarify the reasons. In principle, they are the same and given in paragraph 10 of the Regulation, there are 14 cases in subparagraphs marked from “a”

to “o”. Hypothetically, each of them could be used with equal success in both individual and collective labour disputes, of course, provided that the latter are enshrined in law. Moreover, an individual conflict could instantly acquire the status of a collective one. According to modern experts, since the legal basis for conflicts was a violation of labour rights of one of the parties in the labour field (Inshin, 2008, p. 402), the simultaneous gross violation of workers’ rights for the same reason within, for example, one brigade or production unit threatened to cause a rapid growth of an individual conflict into a collective one. In essence, any such conflict could potentially turn into a collective protest. This interpretation does not just border on the possible political influence of workers on the government, but it is directly within it.

From this point of view, an individual labour conflict was no less dangerous for the authorities than a collective one. Of course, in order to prevent the latter, it was necessary to make every effort to block the possibility of the former. This approach is relevant for any type of government, and it was extremely important for its Soviet type. Under the conditions of state ownership, a conventional labour conflict between workers and administration of a factory or even a production unit was immediately filled with a political meaning, threatening the entire management system with serious political damage and the administrative chain from its bottom to the top with unpredictable consequences. Therefore, reducing the level of a conflict and, what was more important, its prevention became almost the main task of the authorities both in the centre and in the field.

For the leaders of the Thaw, it became especially relevant for another reason. Having seized power through a trivial coup d’état and built their own strategy on rejection of Stalinism, the Thaw leaders were now not only forced to overcome a sharp political confrontation with the supporters of Stalinism, but also to constantly prove the advantages of their political course over the Stalin’s one to the community. That applied equally to all activities, but first and foremost to the labour rights of workers and employees, who were especially unceremoniously despised by the previous regime. By reducing the number of individual labour conflicts through the resolution of labour disputes, the leadership of the Thaw proved the benefits of its course of development to the society and thus enlisted the support of workers and employees, that was so much needed during the fierce political confrontation. This circumstance pushed the new government to find a tool that would, on the one hand, accurately measure the mood of the working class, and, on the other hand, would restrain the manifestations of possible dissatisfaction.

There was no need to look for such a tool too far. It was always nearby and became a companion of the Soviet economic system long ago. It was simply ignored for a long time. These were workers’ complaints about working, living and leisure conditions. They flocked to the party, state and trade union bodies from all over the country, signalling mass violations of the complainants’ labour rights. They ought to have been registered, grouped under problems, analysed, executives in charge ought to have been appointed and send these complaints out as intended to have taken appropriate actions. The only thing should have been done after the above steps, was to wait for replies about the satisfaction of complaints.

These documents were extremely important to determine the real volume of workers’ claims on labour issues. Without a quantitative dimension, the study of political processes is difficult even to imagine. Moreover, the source base of this and other similar studies suffers significantly from external impurities of untruth. The fact is that the statistics of trade unions on this issue can be called a statistic with a large share of conventionality. When party or state officials had to confirm the effectiveness of labour dispute commissions or a FLC, the number

of their meetings incredibly “increased”. Conversely, when they had to attest to the high level of workers’ consciousness, which became especially relevant after the party had set the course for the development of the material and technical base of communism, the number of meetings “declined inexorably”. Therefore, no one knew the actual number of cases considered.

In addition, as acknowledged by the resolution of the All-Union Central Trade Union Council dated June 25, 1963, the records of commissions and FLC on labour disputes were unsatisfactory at most enterprises. And one more thing that is especially important for the study, it is emphasized in the resolution that “Minutes of meetings are drawn up carelessly, and they are not kept at some enterprises at all” (Reference book, 1964, p. 298). This circumstance not only weakens the source base of the study, but also significantly complicates the confirmation of our previous hypothesis about the political component of labour disputes in the period of the Thaw. It is based on the assumption that the authorities were interested in concentrating the solutions of labour disputes within an enterprise, at the level of a production unit and a factory LDC. In extreme case, labour disputes were brought to the level of FLC and in an emergency – to the level of people’s judges.

Such a warning from the standpoint of the government’s interests was not accidental and much less superfluous. Even taking into account the conditional nature of constitutional provisions for the power, it should be stated that according to Art. 92 of the Constitution of the Ukrainian SSR (1937) judges were independent and subject only to the law, and Art. 91 proclaimed open consideration of cases in all courts of the Ukrainian SSR. This greatly complicated the intervention of party or administrative bodies in the solutions of labour disputes. At least formally, it was minimized. In fact, this meant that it was not an easy task to hide some glaring cases from the public or to influence a court decision. But was such an intervention necessary?

To confirm the above opinion we can use the materials submitted to the meeting of the presidium of Ukprofrada in February 1959. The presidium discussed the implementation of the resolution “On the work of the Chernihiv regional council of trade unions with letters and complaints of workers” by the Chernihiv regional trade union (CSAHA of Ukraine, f. 2605, d. 8, c. 2027, pp. 18–22). The re-examination of the issue revealed that 360 complaints had been received in the first nine months of 1959. In terms of number, the issues of dismissal and transfer to another place of work stood first on the list (20.5%); wage issues made the second highest number (18.6%). It is certain that the results would have been even more impressive if the Stalin or Voroshilovgrad Regional Council of Trade Unions had been heard with a report on this issue.

Relevant documents also confirm the high level of conflict over wages. In our opinion, the issue was also exacerbated by the reform of the management system and unsuccessful attempts to transfer the economy to an intensive way of development. It was these circumstances that required streamlining the output rates and wages, which affected the rate of wage. As a result, the number of complaints from workers grew rapidly. The All-Union Central Trade Union Council was forced to adopt a special resolution “On the results of the inspection of workers’ letters and claims on wages” in July of 1959. This resolution included information about a group of Kharkiv machine-building enterprises, as well as the Svetlanove Station (Stalin Railway) (Bulletin of the All-Union Trade Union Council, 1959, p. 1).

The above examples show a high level of labour conflict in the workplace quite convincingly and make the political component more eloquent. Assuming that a huge number of conflicts for their resolution would have been directed not to the LDCs and the FLC meetings, but to the people’s courts, the latter would hardly have been able to hide the real state of labour conflicts. And in this situation it does not matter whose side would have been taken by the courts. The judicial statistics would have recorded the decisions of all people’s courts. As of early 1962, there

were 604 courts in rural areas and 74 – in urban ones. Such statistics would have added cases from 25 appellate instances (National Economy, 1961, p. 33) and shown a staggering number of labour disputes in the republic. The latter could have completely eliminated all the efforts of Soviet propaganda aimed at convincing citizens of the advantages of the socialist mode of production, state ownership, alongside with the planned mode of management and the centralized form of government. This would have been a complete discrediting of the entire Soviet economy system and, at the same time, under certain circumstances could have become a powerful weapon of its destruction. The fact that this destruction did not happen was the exclusive “merit” of the most popular public organization, which enclosed solutions to these important issues for the state in its structure, thus preventing their discussion by the general public.

**The Conclusions.** The analysis allows to draw several final conclusions, which are based on the political aspects in the usage of state ownership of the production means and accompanying it the planned economy and command-administrative management in the USSR. Thus, firstly, we interpret the resumption of the labour disputes institution in the mid-1950s and mid-1960s as a forced step of the authorities aimed at modernizing the system of labour relations, which was essential for the country to adapt to the postwar world conditions. Secondly, the resumption of the above processes, which were carried out under the loud slogans of Soviet liberalism, was completed exclusively within the forms and methods inherent in the Soviet model of totalitarianism. The removal of such concepts as “a collective conflict” and “a collective dispute” from the Labour Code is a convincing evidence of this. Thirdly, the localization of individual labour disputes at the level of LDCs and FLC meetings was a balanced political step of the authorities aimed at preserving the problem within the enterprise, which prevented the wide publicity of the real scale of labour conflicts in the workplace. Fourthly, in these circumstances, the trade union guardianship was not only a factor in ensuring the process, but also a driving force in distorting the protecting function of the workers’ interests in the direction of protecting the political interests of the state.

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