

Belarusian Trade Unions: *Transformation and Prospects*

Seminar Materials

Minsk
2003

Compiling authors: Valyantsin Holubew, Alyaksei Khadyka

In the cover design some photos were used from “Pravsayuzniy rukh Belarusi” (Belarusian Trade Union Movement) website

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Belarusian Trade Unions: Transformation and Prospects. Seminar Materials — Minsk: Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2003. — 96 pages

An outline of the history and present status of Belarus' trade unionist and labor movement, analysis of the events, which took place in 2002, and some recommendations on support of trade unionist movement.

It also contains a brief list of trade union activists and analytical and statistic data.

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Introduction

This present publication is yet another attempt of advocating the propaganda of democratic conditions and development options in Belarus, realizing that trade unions-as organizations of employees-ultimately make important input in establishing democracy.

Since 1990, the organizations representing Belarusian workers have gone through, without a doubt, a difficult road. Their hardships were caused by scarce social and economic reforms, no clear vision of their own prospects, and also by their own opportunism. It is necessary to add that the people have not recognized trade unions as an immediate help in assisting them to find their appropriate place in society, setting goals, and in solving their problems.

Although international trade unions have intensified their attention to Belarus by undertaking a number of arrangements and have contributed to the development of critical trade unionist consciousness, they quickly reached the peak of their capabilities due to problems of a structural nature.

This book draws attention to indecisive trade union actions aimed at the fruitless struggle of the trade unions to improve labor conditions and maintain independence of external influence.

Unclear, contradictory and unbinding legal regulations have often caused additional difficulties in pursuing the policy of supporting the employees. Moreover, traditional Soviet perception of trade unions' role have often dominated their performance and some top trade union leaders have added to that, often because of their personal ambitions.

We hope that this book will contribute to more serious recognition and upgrading of the trade unions' role in Belarusian society and that the presented experience will be acknowledged in future strategies.

Helmut Kurth,

*Head of the regional office of the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation
to Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova*

Belarusian Trade Union History Overview Until 1990

*T*he first public organizations setting the task of helping workers and advocating their interests were established in Belarus at the end of the nineteenth century. The first trade union of bristle processors appeared in Belarus in 1894 and the trade union of tanners, incorporating workers from Smarhon, Bialystok, Asmyany and Krynki was established in 1898. In 1901, the trade union of printers was officially established in Homel and in 1901 — the trade union of tanners in Vitsebsk. The trade union of railway workers, post and telegraph employees and clerks of credit and commercial/industrial institutions was established in almost all Belarusian cities in 1905. The revolution of 1905–1907 gave an impetus for trade unions' growth, especially after the government had passed the law on legalization of trade unions ("Temporary Provisions on Trade Unions" as of 4 March 1906).

The first trade unions of teachers and agricultural workers were set up in Belarus in 1906. However, the aforesaid provisions precluded trade unions' legalization at post, telegraph, banking and government institutions. Moreover, railway transport workers could not legally arrange their union organizations.

In 1907, there were 101 formal trade unions, incorporating 14,533 members. At that time trade unions were both politically and socially pro-active. Therefore, by 1910 the tsarist government had closed down almost 50% of them and during World War One, actually all of them ceased their functioning.

A new up-tide of trade union organization in the Russian empire happened after the February Revolution of 1917. At that time, different political parties (BUND, Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and Socialists/Revolutionaries) were striving for politicizing of trade unions and subordination to their respective influence of individual trade unions and the whole trade unionist movement.

Such policy towards trade unions became most clear in 1917, when the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia. In January 1918, the All-Russian Trade Union Congress in Petrograd, which was attended by the representatives of Belarusian trade unions, set the task of putting trade unions under Bolshevik and Soviet control. The Congress endorsed the Bolsheviks' proposal on trade union organization based on sectoral and production/territorial principles, which

was a blueprint of Bolshevik political party organization. That was the beginning of open subordination of trade unions to the Communist Party. Thus, the Bolsheviks immediately subdued the trade unionist movement to the interests of the Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (the Bolsheviks) and Soviet administration, preventing it from safeguarding workers' interests. In the long run it became clear, that Bolshevik-controlled trade unions were their ideal collaborators in pursuing "militant communism," collectivization, and industrialization policies.

In July 1920, the Belarusian authorities initiated establishment of the Central Bureau of Belarusian Trade Unions. A few days later it was transformed into the Council of Belarusian Trade Unions, which also meant abandoning of the traditional sectored principle of trade union set up and establishing horizontal structures, which development went hand in hand with the similar communist and administrative structures.

The Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party (the Bolsheviks), which took place in March 1921, approved the task of imposing Communist Party control of the trade unionist movement and called trade unions "*the school of communism*", which they have been until the collapse of the USSR. In compliance with the Tenth Congress decision, administrative structuring of Belarusian trade unions was completed in May 1921, which was declared by the First Belarusian Trade Union Congress.

With further totalitarian strengthening of the USSR, trade unions were ever more deeply incorporated into the government system. They were openly put under government control, and received a number of executive power functions, which were not specific for trade unions, such as the providing of social insurance, "socialist competition", and culture services to the population, etc. That resulted in the situation, when trade unions were primarily safeguarding the interests of the government and of the Communist Party, not the workers' interests. The authorities pursued the open policy of promoting a government-controlled trade unionist movement by including almost all working people into the "schools of communism". In 1937, 84.1% of all working people were trade union members.

During World War Two, the neatly structured system of government-controlled trade unions in Belarus was completely destroyed. But the Communist Party and Soviet authorities could not let trade unions drift without their control. Therefore, in December 1944, the Central Committee of the Byelorussian Communist Party passed a resolution "On Reestablishment of Trade Union Organizations in the Byelorussian SSR". As a result, in January 1946 the Belarusian trade unions totaled 334,600 members, i.e. 64.4% of the total number of blue and white color workers.

The trade unionist movement was further centralized and intensively subordinated to communist and administrative leadership. In November 1948, the Belarusian Allied Trade

Union Conference established the Trade Union Council of the Byelorussian SSR (BELSOVPROF). Its branches were established in all regions and districts and were under control of local communist and administrative agencies. With no changes, the system was in place until late 1990.

Trade union membership was almost mandatory in Soviet Byelorussia. In 1980, five million people were trade union members, i.e. 52.3% of 9,560,000 Belarusian citizens (according to the 1979 census).

From the mid-sixties until the second half of the eighties, the government pursued the policy of accelerating and strengthening the process of merging trade unions with the state system. Authorities actively involved trade union leaders and rank-and-file members into Communist Party/Soviet infrastructural work and delegated some government/administrative functions to the trade unions. Former Communist and Soviet officials were transferred to the trade unions for their “strengthening”. In turn, trade union leaders always had prospects of being transferred to more prestigious and beneficial Communist/Soviet structures. Consequently, close relationships between trade unions, on one hand, and the Communist Party and the government, on the other hand, were actively promoted through further trade unions’ subordination and, sometimes even through private relationships.

Communist and government officials, local administrators and managers stimulated and supported the assignment of workers to communist-controlled trade unions. The workers, who were not trade union members, were actually dropped out from the established system. They could not be listed for getting free housing or a subsidiary plot (*‘dacha’*), have their children sent to summer camps, get vouchers for vacation for themselves or to get any bonuses.

Authorities established a special training system for trade union activists (Superior School of Trade Union Workers in Moscow with its affiliate in Minsk, BELSOVPROF and regional trade union training courses). Of course, the training was focused on contrasting Soviet trade unions with their Western counterparts and indoctrinating Soviet trade union leaders about their duty as Soviet citizens and members of Soviet organizations to promote the building of communism in the USSR. All other issues, including the protection of workers’ rights, were considered to be of secondary importance. On the other hand, who could dare to raise the issue of workers’ rights in a country, which had a state system of free use of labor of millions of political prisoners who had absolutely no rights (GULAG) and the rest were afraid to end up there?

As a result of the development of such a state organization, by the late eighties the Belarusian trade unions were completely integrated into the system and were under almost overall government control. They performed some functions, which previously were entitled to executive agencies, not public or professional structures. According to official sources of that

time, BELSOVPROF participated in drafting plans for national economic development, had the right of initiating draft laws and controlled legal provisions as to production, labor, salaries, culture and accommodation of workers, officers and collective farmers. Together with Soviet and business agencies, trade unions provisioned socialist competition and communist-style-working campaigns. They were heading the Republican Councils of Research & Development, innovation and rationalization societies, state social insurance work, leisure activities, tourism and other branches. Moreover, many important decisions were made together by the Communist Party, the government and the trade unions (they were signed on behalf of the CPSU Central Committee, USSR Council of Ministers and All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions), which were mandatory for trade unions (Quoted from the “Byelorussian SSR. Brief Encyclopedia”, vol.1, p.73. Minsk, 1979). The government allocated funds in cash and in kind for that trade union activity. For instance, trade union budget and the budget of the state system of social insurance, which was delegated to trade unions in 1985, exceeded 1 billion rubles and was equivalent to 14% of the total budget expenditure of the Byelorussian SSR.

Consequently, as of the late eighties, the Belarusian trade unions could not be regarded as independent public structures, but as tools of direct government influence on workers through their professional organizations.

Development of Belarusian Trade Union and Labor Movement in the Nineties

As has already been mentioned, in the late eighties the Belarusian trade unions were under total control of communist/government institutions and one of the major tasks, which was imposed on them, was the implementation of the “decisions of the Communist Party and the Soviet Government”. However, some changes took place at that time in Belarus’ economic, social and political life. They resulted from the policy of restructuring and reforms in the USSR (‘perestroika’), based on transition from the ideological and political monopoly of the CPSU to ideological, political and social pluralism, advocated by M. Gorbachev from the mid-eighties. At first, Belarusian communist/government and trade union bureaucrats actively counteracted reforms, which resulted in aggravation of the internal political situation and conflicts in labor teams. Workers openly expressed their distrust in communist/soviet and trade union management, as they reasonably believed that they were the links of the same chain of the monopolistic government system.

The late eighties and early nineties of the last century saw dramatic changes in the Belarusian trade unionist movement. On one hand, traditional trade unions had to undergo democratization and specialization and on the other hand, new independent professional labor organizations, which were free from government control, were established.

From the late eighties, alongside with rapid deterioration of Belarus’ social and economic situation and people’s living standards, some restructuring took place in the traditional trade union movement. The Sixteenth Congress of the Belarusian Trade Unions, which was held in January 1987, passed a decision on the radical transition of trade unions towards protecting working peoples’ interests. The next Seventeenth Congress of the Belarusian Trade Unions (October 1990) drew a conclusion that trade unions have to advocate the interests of broad categories of the population, irrespectively of their political, ethnic or religious orientation. That statement, which presently seems quite common, at that time was exclusively radical, especially the words “irrespectively of political orientation”. Under total dominance of the single party, whose public role was stipulated in the Constitution as “managing and guiding”, it could be interpreted as dissidence. That Congress determined new principles of corporate

trade union organization in Belarus. As a result, the Belarusian Trade Union Federation (FPB) was established. It incorporated sectoral organizations and six regional trade union associations. At their congress on 5 October 1990, delegates of those founding organizations signed the Declaration on establishing the Belarusian Trade Union Federation.

The Belarusian independent trade unionist movement history goes back to 1998 and is closely related to the labor movement. It was 1998 when Salihorsk miners went on strike. Their demands were both political and economic: higher salaries, better labor conditions and liquidation of the political monopoly of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union / Communist Party of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic.

In April 1990, GOMSELMASH — the biggest Belarusian producer of agricultural machinery in the city of Homel — went on strike. The strikers demanded payment of cash subsidies they were entitled to as a result of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in 1986. The strike committee was set up and made a decision on establishing the Coordinating Council of all Homel strike committees.

The Organizational Committee on establishing the Workers' Union of Belarus (RS) was set up at the initiative of some members of the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF), notably Mikhail Sobal, Georgy Mukhin, Aliaksandr Halkevich and Viktor Ivashkievich (who is now the editor-in-chief of the “Rabochy” (“*The Worker*”) newspaper and has been prosecuted for the “attempt of casting aspersions on the President of Belarus”¹ in the form of publishing articles criticizing the candidate for the Presidency A. Lukashenka during the 2001 Presidential Elections). The RS founding conference took place on 1 October 1989. The organization incorporated representatives of many enterprises of Minsk, Barysaw (Minsk Region) and Salihorsk (Minsk Region). Its core was made of the workers' groups supporting the BNF, which set the task of protecting labor and trade union movement from communist and administrative control. Salihorsk miners, whose leaders were BNF members, closely collaborated with the Miners' Union of Russia. Therefore, the first independent Miners' Union of Belarus (in Salihorsk) appeared as an affiliate of the USSR Miners' Union.

In April 1991, Minsk and other cities saw the biggest strikes of leading factories' workers. Strikes and rallies were caused by the increase of prices for food and consumer products. Everyday hundreds of thousands of workers and civil servants were protesting against price increases and were demanding government resignation.

Similar protests took place in other cities. The tensest atmosphere was in Orsha (Vitsebsk Region), where the strikers blocked the railway and for a long time interrupted railway traffic

¹ The Court sentenced V. Ivashkievich to two years of corrective labor for the “attempt of casting aspersions on the President of Belarus” and on 16 December 2002 was sent to Baranavichy for executing the sentence.

at that large railway center. Those protests were prepared and coordinated by the strike committees and some trade union committees.

On 11 May 1991, the delegates of the All-Belarusian Conference of Strike Committees put forward a number of demands to the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian SSR, while FPB top officials held negotiations with the government (see the section “Trade Union Involvement in Democratic Protest Movement Through Participating in General Political Actions”).

Later some heads of the strike committees became members or leaders of their company trade unions and the others established new professional labor organizations, i.e. *the Labor Confederation of Belarus, Free Trade Union and Independent Trade Union*. In 1993, new trade union organizations united into the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP) (for the details see the section “Belarusian Trade Union Movement Organizational Structure”).

The last rising tide of strikes happened in Belarus in the summer of 1995. It began with the strike of trolleybus drivers in Homel and was supported by the workers of some Minsk bus and trolley bus depots.

The strike of Minsk Underground workers was the peak of those events. Members of the Belarusian Free Trade Union (SPB) of the Minsk Underground decided to wage a strike on 6 July 1995, because company administration had refused to negotiate the implementation of a collective agreement and making a new tariff contract. At first there were some delays with the strike, because the workers still had hopes on a solution to the raised issues through negotiations. However, the administration resolutely refused from holding discussions and on 15 August the drivers of Minsk Trolleybus Depot No.1 went on strike and called upon Minsk Underground workers to support them. In sympathy with their colleagues, Underground workers joined the strike on 17 August. But on 18 August, trolleybus drivers got their pending salaries urgently paid and stopped the strike. With trolleybus drivers gone, the authorities could impose much stricter measures against Underground workers (trolleybuses began carrying passengers over the Underground). On 18–21 August 1995, 58 participants of the strike were fired at the order of Underground management. Threatening strike participants with using weapons, police Special Forces (‘OMON’) forced them out from the Underground. The strikers were actively supported by the SPB, but its leaders were persecuted, too. S. Antonchyk and H. Bykaw were seized by the police Special Forces and taken out of town to a military base. A few days later they were taken blindfolded to city suburbs and left there. It was another open action of public threatening (the first attempt was made in April 1995, when opposition MPs were beaten right in the Parliament). A few days later, that strike was suppressed by the Special Forces of the Ministry of the Interior and by soldiers. The authorities also used imported strikebreakers, i.e. locomotive drivers from Moscow. On 21 August 1995,

President Lukashenka signed Decree No.336, which suspended functioning of the SPB. The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Belarus twice declared that decree confronting the Constitution and international treaties, ratified by Belarus. Renewal of SPB registration (renewal of legal activity) was made possible only on 19 December 1997 due to international solidarity actions of foreign trade unions and international trade union associations with Belarusian organizations (ILO and AFL-CIO protests and diplomatic support of the USA and almost all European democratic countries).

Unlike traditional trade unions (i.e. the Belarusian Trade Union Federation), the aforesaid new trade unions in their Charters precluded employers' membership and were most resolute during the protests.

It is necessary to state, that from the very beginning of the alternative trade union movement it was under the pressure of the authorities. In the nineties, communist and soviet bureaucrats clearly realized that only through government-controlled trade unions could they impose influence on working masses. All things "independent" was almost the synonym of "unmanageable". Therefore, at that time, all organizations whose establishment had not been initiated by the authorities were called "informal" organizations (hereinafter new trade union organizations will be called "independent" organizations, like in international publications). Official press often called them "alternative" trade unions.

New trade unions enjoyed high respect during mass working protests, but since 1994, under tough government pressure they have been gradually losing their influence in labor teams.

New trade unions were under double-fold pressure. On one hand, trade union members were haunted personally and on the other hand, a trade union organization was persecuted as an entity. Company directors were actually obliged to preclude establishment of alternative trade union structures at their companies and to undertake maximum efforts aimed at their liquidation, if they had already been in place (for an example see the annex, describing a brief history of establishing and liquidating two SPB cells in Pinsk, a city with 132,000 inhabitants in the southwest of Belarus). Unfulfilled orders could mean dismissal from office for the directors. Given that directors had the right not to provide a legal address for a newly established trade union at the company (without the address the trade union would not be registered); they often refused to give them. According to B. Troschy, Chairman of the Free Trade Union of Metal Workers, primary organizations of the Free Trade Union of Minsk Truck Plant (MAZ) and Minsk Tractor Plant were deprived of the registration due to those reasons. An intensive campaign has been in progress against the quite strong SPB organization at Minsk Motor Plant. Company administration has tried to take back the room in company premises, which previously was provided to the trade union. For the trade union this could mean the loss of its

legal address with all the consequences. The trade union had applied to the Ministry of Industry, to the Court of Partizansky District in Minsk and to the Minsk City Court but the results were the same. The Courts passed verdicts on the nonsuit of the SPB organizational claim (see the “Narodnaya Volya” newspapers as of 27 July 2002). It is clear that the authorities have tried to use directors of state-owned enterprises for either liquidating new trade unions or to make them go underground. They realize that new trade unions, which advocate democracy and market relations, are the natural opponents of the current regime.

Thus, the perestroika and democratization, further promotion of labor movement, and active participation of workers in protests in 1991–1994 resulted in the real establishment of trade union pluralism and fair competition between different trade unions in Belarus.

Belarusian Trade Union Movement

Organizational Structure

Presently, there are two main trade union associations in Belarus, i.e. the *Belarusian Trade Union Federation*² and the *Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions*. The *Belarusian Trade Union Federation (FPB)* is the biggest organization and it incorporates 32 sectoral trade unions and 2 trade unions of big industrial companies (ATLANT Closed Joint Stock Company in Minsk manufacturing consumer refrigerators and IZMERITEL Plant in Navapolatsk, Vitsebsk Region) and six Regional Associations (Brest, Vitsebsk, Hrodna, Homel, Mahilew and Minsk).

The FPB Third Congress (10 October 2000) approved the Program of FPB Activity for 2001–2005. Its major objective is to improve efficiency of trade union committees and associations' activities aimed at protecting labor and social rights and interests of the workers. In order to overcome the crisis, the trade unions expressed an opinion that the economic and social policy should be amended as to promoting production and consumption, efficient employment, higher productivity and quality, and fair remuneration of labor. The resolute FPB position was also reflected in the statement on the necessity of preventing further deterioration of living standards. The FPB insisted that working peoples' interests should be maximally accounted for, when making key decisions in economic and social sectors.

As of 1 January 1999, the FPB incorporated over 29,700 primary trade union organizations with 4,400,000 members. The following two years were characterized by the reduction of FPB membership. As of 1 January 2001, there were 4,268,074 members. As of April 2002, there were 25,960 primary organizations with a total number of 4,009,648 members, according to FPB data. Out of them 3,471,720 members were working people, 338,253 — students, 197,810 — pensioners and 1,865 — unemployed. As to the coverage with trade union membership, it was 95.2% among workers and officers and 90.6% among students. The total number of trade union members was reduced by 258,426 members since the year 2000. Sixty-

²According to the Presidential Decree as of 25 November 2002, the name was changed to the Trade Union Federation of Belarus, though the Belarusian Legislation prohibits the use the official name of the country in the names of public organizations. It is clear that the exception was made because the FPB had been incorporated into the system of state organization.

eight thousand nine hundred and seventy one members left at their own will and 1,424 persons were expelled. FPB membership reduction might be attributed primarily to aggressive interference of the authorities in trade union activities in late 2001– early 2002 and to Resolution No. 1804 of the Council of Ministers of Belarus as of 14 December 2001, which prohibited the clearing of membership fees.

In our opinion, losses should be much higher. Perhaps, only the members of sectorized trade unions, which had officially left the FPB, were accounted for. When membership fees clearance was effective, it was easier to account the number of trade union members. Now the situation is the following: many rank-and-file trade union members, whose membership had been “habitual” and “as everybody else’s” actually lost it having stopped paying their fees, but they cannot be accounted for as those who had left the trade unions.

The Belarusian Trade Union Federation incorporates the following big trade unions: Belarusian Trade Union of Agribusiness Sector Workers, Belarusian Trade Union of Education and Science Sector Employees, Belarusian Trade Union of Health Sector Workers, Belarusian Trade Union of Local Industry and Utility Enterprises’ Workers, Belarusian Trade Union of Automobile and Agricultural Machine-building Workers, Belarusian Trade Union of Construction Works and Building Materials Workers, Belarusian Trade Union of Light Industry Workers and Belarusian Trade Union of Radio Electronic Industry Workers.

Afraid of losing its control of significant assets, which it had concentrated in its hands since the times of the Soviet Union, the Trade Union Federation has been seeking security through negotiations, agreements and compromises with the authorities. Indeed, there was something to lose. The FPB had had control of almost 900 clubs, over 500 libraries and over 5,000 children’s summer camps. Their proprietary funds had been used for constructing 16 leisure houses and tourist camps and 165 sports facilities (see additional information in the annex “FPB Assets”).

Undoubtedly, the repressive policy of the authorities towards trade unions has caused a lot of damage both to the traditional and new trade union movement.

Another trade union organization in Belarus is the **Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP)**, which presently incorporates the Belarusian Free Trade Union (SPB) and the Belarusian Independent Trade Union (BNP).

Up to 1993, there were two separate, new trade unions in Belarus: (i) the Free Trade Union, established on the basis of strike committees, with headquarters in Minsk and (ii) the Independent Trade Union with headquarters in Salihorsk. In May 1993, those trade unions merged and established the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP), which was registered on 13 December 1993. Presently, the total number of BKDP members is almost

20,000 persons and it is composed of the Belarusian Free Trade Union (SPB) and the Belarusian Independent Trade Union (BNP), which consists of five professional unions. Until 2001, the BKDP membership was reduced to 16,000 members, because of authorities' persecutions.

Mr. Mikalai Kanakh has been BKDP Chairman since 16 February 2002. "The work will be properly organized, because in 1991–1995 I worked in the FPB and still have many friends there," Kanakh said after his election. "The other thing is how to work with the authorities? We will need specific approach and a strategy"³.

According to its press-service, the **Belarusian Free Trade Union (SPB)** has six thousand members, while in 1995 it had almost ten thousand members. However, in 1995–1999 there was a rapid decline in membership because of the repressions of Lukashenka's regime (suppression of the Minsk Underground workers' strike, organized by the SPB and subsequent prohibition of that trade union by the Presidential Decree). In late 1999 – early 2000, there was slight increase of the membership and establishing of new structures. According to the information of the past few months, there has been some growth in membership of the regional SPB organizations (perhaps, because of the collapse of FPB structures). For instance, SPB Polatsk/Navapolatsk (Vitsebsk Region) regional organization unites eight primary cells and totals 500 members. Another primary SPB organization at Navapolatsk Forestry Estate applied for registration in August 2002. During this year, the primary SPB organization at Verkhnedvinsk Joiner Products Manufacturing Plant (Vitsebsk Region) has increased from 10 to 35 members (out of 80 workers, in total).

Mr. Hienadz Bykaw is the SPB Chairman. According to him, the SPB faces a challenging task, i.e. during the next five years it has to establish its structures at all of the largest Belarusian enterprises.

The Free Trade Union has neither sectorized division nor sectorized organizations.

The Belarusian Free Trade Union (SPB) is a national free public association of workers, which expresses and safeguards its professional, social and economic rights and interests. It includes workers from metal processing, energy, transport, petroleum, chemical and other sectors, as well as teachers and doctors.

The SPB was established on the basis of the strike committees heading workers' strikes in April and May 1991. Its founding Congress took place on 16–17 November 1991, but the

³ On 23 November 2002, the Fifth Extraordinary Congress of the BKDP elected Mr. Aliaksandr Yarashuk (ex-Chairman of the Belarusian Trade Union of Agribusiness Sector Workers) as its new President. That decision of the Council was a result of a compromise between all the parties-members to the Congress, notably of the Belarusian Free Trade Union, Belarusian Independent Trade Union, Free Trade Union of Metal-Workers and Democratic Trade Union of Transport Workers. According to the new BKDP President, the BKDP has been the only independent trade union organization in Belarus, after the FPB was transformed into a government-controlled structure. The BKDP is the last stronghold of freedom, which has to be protected, he said.

trade union was not registered till July 1992, because of authorities' counteracting. According to Presidential Decree No. 336, as of 21 August 1995, SPB functioning was illegally suspended for waging a strike at the Minsk Underground. As has already been mentioned, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Belarus two times declared that decree confronting the Constitution and international treaties, ratified by Belarus in 1995–1996. In order to survive and maintain its infrastructure under prosecutions and suppression by force of the Minsk Underground workers' strike in August 1995, the SPD decided to spin off new sectorised trade unions, i.e. the trade unions of metal workers, teachers and transport workers. On 30 July 1999, the Belarusian Free Trade Union had to undergo re-registration with the Ministry of Justice. The last SPB Congress took place on 22 April 2000 and the next one is planned for 2003.

The Belarusian Independent Trade Union (BNP) was established in 1990 at the initiative of the Salihorsk Independent Trade Union of Miners (south of Minsk Region). It has 9,848 members. Presently, it incorporates the following trade union organizations: Independent Trade Union of BELARUSKALY ('potash') Miners in Salihorsk (2,820 members), AZOT ('nitrogen') State-Owned Enterprise in Hrodna (768 members), Independent Trade Union of Mozyr Refinery in Mozyr, Homel Region (840 members), Navapolatsk Independent Trade Union (1,600 members) and the Salihorsk regional organization of the Independent Trade Union (2,500 members). Mr. Viktor Babayed is BNP Chairman.

On 29 March 2002, the Council of Representative of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union approved the list of members of the BNP Executive Bureau. Now it includes five members: V. Babayed — BNP Chairman, N. Delendik — BNP Deputy Chairman, N. Novik — BNP Deputy Chairman, M. Kosach — BNP Deputy Chairman and M. Zimin — secretary-treasurer⁴.

The Council of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions, composed of 15 members, has eight BNP delegates.

⁴ From 9 November 2002, (until the BNP Congress planned for late February 2003) the Acting Chairman of the BNP is Mikalai Zimin, who substituted V. Vabayed, who had resigned.

Belarusian Authorities' Policy towards Traditional Trade Unions (Spring-Autumn 2002)

Analysts and political observers don't have any doubts as to the evaluation of the results of the 2001 Presidential Elections, when the former FPB Chairman U. Hancharyk challenged A. Lukashenka and the open struggle between the Belarus' ruling regime and the biggest and best organized public (professional) organization was launched. The rationale of that campaign was the elimination of the slightest trade union autonomy of the trade unions incorporated into the FPB and their incorporation into the state system of total control and subordination and subsequent absolute liquidation of scanty "free" or "independent" trade unions.

The process of imposing government control over the FPB in Belarus had two distinct stages, which were characterized by the following: the first stage was specific as to the attempts of collapsing the FPB and establishing separate government-controlled trade unions (which turned out to be too difficult for the authorities), while the second stage was characterized by tough actions, aimed at putting authorities' puppets at the head of the FPB and trade unions. That stage began with the election of Mr. Lieanid Kozik the Chairman of the FPB on 16 July 2002 and had to be finalized at the FPB Congress on 18–19 September 2002.

It should be also noted that in 2001, with the assistance of state-controlled mass media, the authorities tried to launch the campaign on discrediting the trade union movement and persuading the workers about the "futility" of trade unions for them. That opinion was broadcasted on the radio and television and President Lukashenka delivered such speeches many times. However, that campaign did not get positive public feedback and was quickly stopped, without becoming wide-scale. As a result, the aforesaid scenario was applied.

Reporters, politicians, and trade union leaders often remind that A. Lukashenka has had some previous experience in suppressing trade unions. Being the director of "Haradzets" state-owned farm, he broke up its trade union organization. The first thing he did in order to get rid of the disagreeable trade union chairman, was the prohibition of clearing trade union fees through the accounting office. Presently, that experience has been blueprinted in the entire country.

Given that the FPB headed by U. Hancharyk had practiced quite independent policy (that independence was growing together with the realization by trade union leaders of the inevitability of working under the new conditions in the near future, when the main employer will be a private employer, not the government), the Presidential Administration developed a plan of discrediting the existing trade unions, expelling disagreeable trade union leaders, and establishing a parallel, or rather alternative trade union structure from the existing trade unions.

State-controlled mass media was discrediting trade unions by arguing that they have exhausted their capacity, become politicized, stopped supporting the government, opposed the President, and that the major task of trade union bosses is collecting money from “poor” workers, while the only true protector of workers, peasants and officers has been President Lukashenka. Of course, trade union leaders were deprived of any opportunity to object. In order to jeopardize FPB functioning, trade union banking accounts were several times arrested under far-fetched pretexts. Moreover, on 14 December 2001, the government passed Resolution No. 1804, prohibiting trade union members to pay their fees through the clearing procedure. Immediately, crediting of trade union accounts reduced and caused some confusion both at bottom trade union structures and among some FPB top managers. FPB management was getting convinced that the attacks on them from the authorities were caused by Lukashenka's desire to revenge U. Hancharyk — his former opponent in the Presidential Elections. Trade union activists found the simplest solution, i.e. to replace Hancharyk and restore the status-quo. Hancharyk had to accept the demands and to resign.

On 3 January 2002, the Fourth Plenary Meeting of FPB Board elected Mr. Frants Vitko as FPB Chairman. Trade union top managers hoped that following Hancharyk's resignation the Belarusian authorities would have discussions with Mr. Vitko, who was more reserved and less ambitious than his predecessor. Moreover, in the past Vitko had had close contacts with the authorities: he represented trade unions in the National Council on Labor and Social Issues, on behalf of trade unions negotiated with the government and employers' association, and proposed draft laws on economic issues in various sectors of the national economy.

However, President Lukashenka never forgives anybody who has once played in the other team and Mr. Vitko had been in Hancharyk's camp during the Presidential Elections in 2001. After his election, Mr. Vitko declared about the necessity to maintain trade union independence, alongside with the willingness to cooperate with the authorities: “The first thing we have to do is to resume the dialogue at the national level. It is necessary to restore business relations, which have been superficially damaged, to resume the work of the National Council on Labor and Social Issues, to amend the General Agreement and settle the disputes about member fees. This is our major task and its solution is the priority, since it determines the status of

field trade unions. The whole point of genuine cooperation and social dialogue is that no responsible decision can be made by the government and business institutions without consulting with and taking into consideration of the opinion of workers' organizations, i.e. of trade unions. It applies to us, too. The executive system is rigidly structured and all decisions at the top are quite effectively implemented. Therefore, without establishing a constructive dialogue at the 'top floor', it would be futile to expect that the absolute majority of trade union organizations will function properly. But the constructive social dialogue and cooperation do not mean agreeing with everything. The dialogue should be between equitable parties, providing trade union position independence. In my understanding, equality of rights does not mean substitution of functions. Trade unions cannot perform executive or employing functions. They have never been and will never be the equivalent of the authorities. Everybody has his or her own functions. The Federation has not challenged the government authority. I understand equality of rights as the opportunity of making this or that decision with due consideration of counterpart opinion, but not as thrusting somebody's opinion. On the other hand, independence does not mean isolation and alienation from the life of the country, sector, region or team. We are doomed to share their problems and to express their will."

Moreover, the FPB expressed an intention to clean its ranks of some puppet trade unions and to return to basic trade union objectives, i.e. advocating of employees' rights. Mr. Vitko explicitly said: "We have to reform the Belarusian trade union movement for the sake of the workers, not the sake of satisfying the authorities" (Belorusskaya Gazeta, 1 July 2002).

On 30 May 2002, FPB Plenary Meeting decided that the Fourth Extraordinary Congress of the Belarusian Trade Union Federation (FPB) would take place in Minsk on 18–19 September 2002. A special working group was set up for its preparation. Under Belarusian realities, the "extraordinary congress" means "emergency congress" (that was absolutely true with the extraordinary congress of the Union of Belarusian Writers, which had to dismiss its independent management and place government-loyal administrators). Of course, the main reason for the extraordinary congress was the authorities' willingness to put their "own person" at the head of the FPB, as well as increasing tension among FPB top officials.

At the Plenary Meeting, there was a distinct division between the champions of trade union independence and advocates of closer collaboration with the authorities and limitation of trade union activity within the framework of protective functions for the members.

Resulting from discussions, it became clear that the majority of trade union leaders were inclined to go under the authorities' wing, which meant that the Federation would hardly avoid the split. Either the independence faction will leave the FPB, or the advocates of returning to the trade unions of the function of a "transmission belt" for the authorities. (The issue of maintaining the "brand name", i.e. "the Belarusian Trade Union Federation" was cleared on

16 July 2002, when the conservatives won at the Plenary Meeting and Mr. Lieanid Kozik was elected FPB Chairman.)

“Trade unions are under the condition, when with the changes of the system of social and political relationships, particularly social and economic relationships, the subjects of social/labor relationships experience the strongest influence and pressure. In such opposition, the authorities have more resources than the trade unions”, FPB Chairman Vitko said at the Plenary Meeting on 30 May.

According to “Zerkalo” (*The Mirror*) sociological service, public opinion has not favored government interference into trade union affairs. “The government attempts to influence the trade unions, united in the Federation, are approved by only 14% of the respondents, while 33% are most negative to them. We have received some support, or if you wish, credit of public confidence for the Federation to remain an independent labor organization”, added Vitko. According to him, the Plenary Meeting on 30 May specified three potential scenarios of situation development. “The first scenario will mean trade unions’ restructuring by government order. The authorities set some framework for the restructuring under strict control and intensive pressure. A few trade union activists and officers suggested self-disbandment of trade unions in order to establish later classic-type trade unions. Some activists from Homel Region went even further by suggesting self-disbandment and sale of trade union assets in order to remunerate the fired trade union workers. Finally, the third scenario will mean trade union internal restructuring, but by order of rank-and-file trade union members, not the authorities,” FPB Chairman said.

According to Vitko, the forthcoming Congress would amend the FPB Charter and change the Board of the Federation by incorporating into it some rank-and-file trade union members (the current Board was composed mainly of the chairpersons of sectorized trade unions). Incidentally, Valery Zhdanovich, Chairman of the Trade Union of Light Industry Workers, resigned from the Board right on 30 May and called upon all other members to follow his suit.

Important staff changes also took place at the FPB Plenary Meeting as of 30 May. Yauheny Burak, Chairman of the Trade Union of Aviation Workers, was elected Deputy Chairman of the Federation. Mikalai Bielanowski, who had been in charge of organizational issues, culture and sports while being the Head of the Minsk City Trade Union Association, was relieved of his position of FPB Full-Time Deputy Chairman. However, as the head of the biggest trade union association, he maintained the position of the Deputy Chairman, but without being a full-time officer. By the way, it was the city of Minsk, where the process of establishing the so-called “yellow” trade unions was most active. Later Bielanowski was among those members, who initiated Vitko’s resignation and reversing FPB policy.

In practice, new realization of trade unions' role in public life did not match with the approaches of the President of Belarus and his administration. In order to subordinate the trade unionist movement and to get rid of stubborn trade union leaders, the authorities developed a system of establishing the so-called "yellow" ("parallel" or "director-controlled") trade unions. According to SPB Chairman Bykaw, directors of Minsk companies had to establish such trade unions within 15–20 July 2002. While FPB top management in May-June 2002 was split into conservatives and reformers, Presidential "vertical" structures, regional and district administrations, and directors of big enterprises and associations have intensified their work on establishing "yellow" trade unions. (See the annex "Chronicle of Establishing "Yellow" Trade Unions".)

It should be noted that after the change of FPB management those "parallel" or "director-controlled" trade unions turned out to be useless and even harmful. Without informing their members, some of them got incorporated back into the FPB.

In our opinion, all those trade unions will be gradually restored in their FPB membership after the FPB Congress, which will take place on 18–19 September 2002. Mr. L. Kozik said: "Being faced with a tremendous infrastructure challenge, we have to settle the current disputes in order to get *all Belarusian primary trade union organizations under the FPB wing*" (highlighted by us. — *V.H., A.K.*). According to Kozik, the best solution would be, if all primary organizations could elect their delegates to the Congress. Of course, the delegates will be elected in director-controlled trade unions and thus, they will join the ranks of the FPB. No doubt that administrative pressure will be applied to the dissidents in order to make Kozik's suggestion a reality.

Alternatively to FPB infrastructure, the authorities first attempted to establish district-city-region-structured hierarchy for regional trade union organizations, with mandatory preclusion for newly established trade unions against becoming FPB members. Their objective was clear, like in 1920 when trade unions were established in-parallel with the Soviet and Communist professional structures, i.e. the establishment of trade unions under district, city and regional administrations and making them actively collaborate with the authorities unless being put under their total control. Of course, there will be no such professional solidarity in newly established trade unions as in sectorized unions and it will be easier for the authorities to control them. However, with the election of Mr. Kozik, the new FPB Chairman, that model will hardly be implemented.

It is interesting that director-controlled trade unions as a rule were not established at those enterprises, where there had already been SPB structures. One should not exclude an opportunity, that if the workers there had been put under the pressure, they might have joined the Free Trade Union. Perhaps, the authorities had learned their lesson with the failure of

establishing one of the first “yellow” trade unions at the Minsk Truck Plant (MAZ), under protection of Director Valiantsin Holubew and management of Vasily Dybal. On 4 April 2002, MAZ Trade Union Conference, which was attended by the members of company primary cells of the Belarusian Free Trade Union and the Trade Union of Automobile and Agricultural Machine-Building Workers (which is a FPB member), seemed to put an end to one-way expansion of the “yellow” trade union. (However, the authorities have not surrendered and according to “Zerkalo”, which polled MAZ workers at company gates, they managed to force 72% of the workers into the “yellow” trade union.)

In the regions (especially in Brest Region) most of the “old” trade union leaders traded off maintaining of their positions and salaries for government-proposed trade union restructuring. Their collaboration with the Presidential “vertical” structures they excused with the willingness to maintain their trade unions, otherwise they would have come under more repressions from the authorities. Therefore, most of the regions puppet trade unions were established very quickly, without considering opinion of rank-and-file members.

Alongside with establishing regional trade unions, the authorities were actively discrediting and calling for the closing down of sector trade unions, as they were relatively independent, autonomous and reluctant to follow government orders. Heads of many sector trade unions resolutely opposed government intervention into the trade union movement organization. According to Aliaksandr Bukhvostaw, Chairman of the Belarusian Trade Union of Automobile and Agricultural Machine-building Workers (ASM), it happened not because they had recognized the current lawlessness but rather that they had realized that there would be no seats for them in the new trade union model”. (“Rabochaya Solidarnost”, No.28. 15–21 July, 2002.)

In June-July 2002, one could hope that FPB member trade unions would overcome authorities' infringements, focus their major efforts on advocating workers' rights and ask for workers' support for maintaining independent trade union movement. Chairman Vitko's actions and speeches added to that hope.

However, when Mr. Ural Latypov, Head of the Presidential Administration, had declared that sector trade unions and the whole Belarusian Trade Union Federation would be maintained exclusively under the condition of FPB Chairman and Board resignation, some sector trade union managers and headquarters' “old” officers came over to the authorities' side and demanded Chairman Vitko's resignation. They formed a majority at FPB Board and decided to convene a special Plenary Meeting of the FPB in order to make the FPB Chairman resign and thus fulfill the assignment of the Presidential Administration.

Before the Plenary Meeting, regional administrations began influencing FPB Board members. (Authorities have gained profound experience in that. In exactly that way, they

influenced the MPs of the Supreme Soviet of the Twelfth Convocation before voting on a government-drafted text of the 1994 Constitution and the MPs of the Supreme Soviet of the Thirteenth Convocation, making them revoke their signatures for impeachment of the President and in many other cases.) Authorities' task in that case was to make trade union activists vote for Lieanid Kozik, the Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration, who was running for the post of FPB Chairman. The pressure was imposed not only through representatives of the Administration but as well through company management (many directors were horrified by illegal arrests of their colleagues and ready to fulfill any order of the authorities). Threatening and blackmailing were most common. Thus, the springboard for Vitko's resignation and Kozik's election was well prepared in the regions before the Plenary Meeting.

In that tense atmosphere before FPB Extraordinary Plenary Meeting, when the authorities decided that the pressure on the activists of newly established "yellow" trade unions had been insufficient, the new scenario of undermining the largest trade union was proposed. The stake was put on the "coup d'etat" from the top, which promised quick success, given the weakness, irresoluteness and bureaucracy of FPB medium-level management, which by the way, made over 80% of the delegates to trade union plenary meetings. As is known, Lukashenka made a political decision on appointing his confidential person the Chairman of the Federation.

Mahilew Regional organization, whose representatives had had secret negotiations with the Presidential Administration, had to act like a Trojan horse in breaking the resistance of the reformist faction in FPB management. Soon the Homel regional trade union organization, headed by Anatoly Kabanets, openly showed its discontent. It had already showed its weakness in supporting U. Hancharyk's campaign during the 2001 Presidential Elections and in counteracting authorities-sponsored idea of establishing "yellow" trade unions, based on the territorial principle, in spring 2002.

An information bomb, which gave light as to the new plans of the government, was exploded by A. Kabanets himself on 11 July 2002, at the extraordinary plenary meeting of Homel Region Trade Union Association reviewing the status of the trade unionist movement in the region and in the country. A. Kabanets expressed his dissatisfaction with FPB management and accused it in politicizing trade union activities, causing damage to the trade union movement, and in neglecting initiatives of the Homel Region organization. But the most important element of his speech was that Kabanets had definitely consented in advance with the Presidential Administration and the government. It related to the program of establishing "yellow" trade unions, favored by the Presidential "vertical" structures. Kabanets criticized that initiative, which was hostile to the FPB, for its low efficiency, not for undermining and splitting of the FPB. According to him, new "yellow" trade unions won't attract all FPB members and thus won't put all members of traditional trade unions under control of the "vertical" structures.

As the best solution, Kabanets proposed substitution of FPB Chairman Vitko by a candidate, which would be consented with the authorities, and thus changing FPB policy. In his opinion, imposition of government control on the FPB would subsequently lead to peaceful settlement of the conflict between the government and trade unions. A. Kabanets informed the participants that the representatives of Mahilew Region Trade Union Council had already reached separate agreement with the Head of the Presidential Administration U. Latypov. Mahilew trade union representatives asked the Presidential Administration to appoint a government candidate for FPB Chairman. They proposed Lieanid Kozik, Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration, and guaranteed suspending of the campaign aimed at trade unions' disintegration through establishing "yellow" trade unions and its complete abandonment, if L. Kozik were elected FPB Chairman.

Resolution of the Homel Region Trade Union Association on that issue contained three paragraphs: (a) expressing distrust to FPB top officials, (b) supporting L. Kozik as a challenger to the post of FPB Chairman and (c) advising Homel delegates to the Plenary Meeting to vote for Kozik.

The next day, on 12 July 2002, Frants Vitko, Chairman of the Belarusian Trade Union Federation, informed the FPB Board Presidium about his resignation, despite his resolutely declared previous intentions of counteracting authorities' pressure. A similar statement was made by his deputy Vadzim Bulhak and by I. Sheveleva, Chairperson of the National Committee of the Belarusian Trade Union of Defense Industry Workers. A new candidate for the post of FPB Chairman was announced — Mr. Lieanid Kozik, Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration, supervising economic issues. F. Vitko argued that he made his decision independently, but not — as it may seem — under the pressure of the authorities and some of his colleagues. However, the words about an independently made decision may be called into question, given that a few days before the FPB Board Meeting the trade union organizations of all six regions and the city of Minsk had unanimously decided to demand resignation of FPB officials, notably of the Chairman and his deputies. At the meeting of the Board, preceding the FPB Extraordinary Plenary Meeting, they also unanimously voted for Vitko's resignation. Thus the acceptance of F. Vitko's resignation at the FPB Extraordinary Plenary Meeting was merely formal.

In our opinion, one of the most important reasons of a fatal turning point in FPB evolution towards its transformation into a democratic public organization should not be neglected.

For too long, counteracting of external pressure provoked a growth of tension inside the FPB. At the same time the pressure of all administrative "vertical structures" was getting stronger. Let's consider it in more detail.

During the year, the FPB went through several aggressive campaigns, which were launched against it by the Council of Ministers and Presidential Administration.

At first, the social dialogue was stopped, violating the Constitution and legal documents, as well as ILO Conventions. From May 2001, there were no meetings of the National Council on Labor and Social Issues (which makes and controls implementation of the General agreement between the government, employers, and employees represented by trade unions) in all its aspects: growth provision of Grade One tariff rate and, consequently, of wages and salaries; indexing of households' income accordingly with the inflation; tariffs control of housing, utilities, and transport services; unemployment and salary arrears. The next meeting of the National Council on Labor and Social Issues took place on 9 August 2002, i.e. after the election of L. Kozik the new FPB Chairman (the Government was represented by S. Sidorski, First Deputy Prime Minister).

As a continuation of its war with trade unions, the government passed Resolution № 1804 as of 14 December 2001, which prohibited clearing of trade union fees. The FPB managed to survive then: gradually alternative ways of making payments were developed and direct communication trade union managers with rank-and-file members at the bottom level provided organizational improvement and strengthening. However, U. Hancharyk had to resign, because a considerable portion of medium-level trade union leaders believed, that such a sacrifice would facilitate restoring of the status-quo in relations which the authorities. But the authorities were inclined to get much more for themselves, i.e. to get the Federation under overall control. They attempted to set up "director-controlled" (or "yellow") trade unions in the companies but failed. Then they initiated establishment of "yellow" regional structures in order to undermine the sectorized principle of FPB structuring. Those maneuvers' low efficiency was determined by their efforts intensity. Moreover, not all the workers, who had left the FPB, became members of "yellow" trade unions (though at such big companies as Minsk and Mahilew Truck Plants up to 50–70% of workers were temporarily made to join the new "yellow" trade union). In spring 2002, the Belarusian Free Trade Union (SPB) got a considerable increase of its membership (by almost 20%). Thus, the FPB maintained its capacity of opposing the authorities and the tense situation even promoted some rehabilitation of the trade union movement. The authorities were absolutely unhappy with such a development, because they planned to put trade union movement under their total control.

The tense situation inside the FPB (especially at medium-level, which managers felt that their positions were shaky and they may lose some of their privileges), made F. Vitko announce at the press conference on 26 June 2002 the program of reforms, which would be presented to the Fourth Extraordinary Congress of the Federation (on 19 June, FPB Board even set a new date for the Congress — 31 July – 1 August 2002, while on 30 May the Congress was set for 18–19 September).

Then, 26 June 2002, F. Vitko emphasized that preparatory work for the Congress was focused on determining the functions, tasks, structure, working forms and methods for FPB

member trade union. The preparatory group, composed of sectorized trade union representatives, was divided into four sub-groups. The first sub-group was drafting amendments of the FPB Charter, the second — trade union movement development strategy and FPB platform, the third — Congressional documents and the fourth — the report. According to Vitko, the Federation managed to establish proper feedback with its primary organizations, which presented suggestions, concepts and proposals. He resolutely rejected government-sponsored trade union regionalization. “We believe that the Federation, as a national trade union center, has to include exclusively sectorized national trade unions... We also believe that the sector-based principle of the FPB organization has to be based on and this has to be clearly stipulated in the Charter”, he said.

It was intended to maintain federal principle of the national trade union center, which would mean equivocal representation of all sectorized trade unions in the Federation. Based on the group's proposal, it was decided to make an entry to the Charter on mandatory realization by bottom-level structures of the decisions made by superior trade union bodies.

However, the willingness to improve FPB structure provoked aggressive counteraction of medium-level (Region) managers, who practically buried FPB restructuring and democratization. That counteraction was caused by the following. In order to improve control and structuring of the FPB, Vitko proposed to make effective the status of regional trade union associations as FPB representative bodies, with a small number of permanent staff at the regional level. “It will mean strengthening of the centralizing principles. But it does not mean that we will neglect democratic principles. Democracy will be most broad and all the issues will be discussed in primary organizations. After making a decision we will insist on its responsible and disciplined implementation. Both sectorized trade unions and the Federation have to be transparent from the bottom to the top,” he said.

The most threatening to medium-level managers became Vitko's proposal on staff rotation. “We need to shed the old skin. Active trade union members should be more involved in the work and put the stake on when undertaking reforms. If it happens, the Belarusian trade union movement would benefit from fresh blood, would become much stronger and would be able to irreproachably fulfill its set tasks”, Vitko said at that decisive press-conference on 26 June.

Those absolutely correct restructuring tasks, which FPB top management should have announced two or three years earlier, were set at a time of active confrontation with the authorities. They crystallized and consolidated conservative opposition to Vitko and his group among the medium-level managers, i.e. regional and sectorized divisions of the Federation. As already said, those managers in two or three weeks managed to plot with government and Presidential representatives and to curb democratic reforms in the FPB.

By 16 July 2002, the day of FPB Plenary Meeting, trade union “slough” had become maximally consolidated. It managed to subdue reformers’ willingness for further struggle. The FPB Plenary Meeting results were predetermined.

The meeting was swift; it lasted less than one hour. Actually, there were two issues on its agenda: (i) setting the date of the Extraordinary FPB Congress (again the Congress was set for 18–19 September instead of 31 July – 1 August; with Vitko gone two or three weeks before the Congress, the hurry with the Congress became senseless). (ii) re-election of the leadership of the FPB. F. Vitko was one of the first who declared about his “voluntary” resignation and gave the name of L. Kozik as his potential inheritor. Before that, M. Bielanowski, Head of the Minsk City Trade Union Association, who had actively plotted with the Government and Administration, presented the most favorable credentials of L. Kozik.

One phrase was very specific in Vitko’s superficially conformist presentation. It revealed the essence of the compromise; its conditions against which Vitko had agreed to resign without any resistance. “The price of my resignation is the maintenance of sectorized trade unions”, he said. Thus, FPB ex-Chairman confirmed that the authorities promised to stop establishment of “yellow” (territorial-based and director-controlled) trade unions in exchange for the election of their nominee as the head of trade unions.

However, even that minute victory of Vitko for the benefit of maintaining a functional FPB turned out to be ephemeral. Newly elected FPB Chairman Kozik quickly disavowed the illusions about maintaining democratic pluralism of opinion in Belarus’ trade unionist movement. According to him, “separate trade unions are the weak link and it is necessary to stop the tendency when the integrity of the country’s trade unions is ruined because of personal ambitions of some leaders”.

In addition to advocating the merge of trade unions into a single organization (which a year before had been disintegrated through the efforts of the Government itself), L. Kozik said that he knew what to do in order to ensure that “the authorities work for strong trade unions”. However, that phrase should be interpreted absolutely the other way. As evidence, there may be quoted a demonstrative event, which took place a week after Kozik’s election. Among 12 officials, delegated by Lukashenka to six Belarusian regions to supervise harvesting in state-owned agricultural enterprises, 11 were top government officials and the twelfth was L. Kozik, the head of the biggest public organization. Such violation of trade union rights could not have happened either under Vitko or Hancharyk. All the country was shown that from now on the Government would be giving trade unions direct orders and trade unions would be its tool of influencing the workers.

Another two important topics of discussion at the Plenary Meeting should be mentioned because they determine situation development inside the FPB and around it.

In parallel with Vitko's resignation, some speakers demanded resignation of the entire FPB Board, motivating it by the principle of collective responsibility. Making a decision on that was postponed till the Extraordinary FPB Congress on 18–19 September 2002. According to several sources, collective resignation was considered as a tool of one-off elimination of opposition to L. Kozik and his policy of putting the FPB under government control (despite that it was a minority in the Board). Another way was to get rid of opponents at board meetings or congresses of their respective trade unions, but it would require much more effort. However, that method could be neglected during the period preceding the Extraordinary FPB Congress.

On the other hand, there were presentations calling for counteracting government pressure (by A. Bukhvostaw, Chairman of the Trade Union of Automobile and Agricultural Machine-building Workers, and H. Fiadynich, Chairman of Belarusian Trade Union of Radio Electronic Sector Workers). One of rank-and-file trade union members sarcastically asked, "Well, will we struggle or lie under the authorities, as usual?" A. Bukhvostaw drew attention to FPB Charter violation (there is some discrepancy between Para. 5.7.6 and Para. 5.12.6), effected at the Plenary Meeting: election of FPB Chairman was the competence of the Congress, not the Plenary Meeting. Consequently, legitimacy of the FPB Chairman election was doubtful. It would have been much fairer, if Kozik had been appointed by a Presidential Decree, with still holding his position of the Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration.

According to A. Bukhvostaw, Plenary Meeting results would considerably reduce FPB international status. He quoted ILO Convention №98 and Convention №87 "Any interference by state authorities and ruling political parties into determining a candidate for the position of the chairperson of a central trade union organization of the country shall be incompatible with the principle, stipulating that organizations have the right of free electing their representatives", that "Any government interference into trade union elections may be regarded as a tyranny and thus may be considered as an interference into activity of those labor organizations, which shall be incompatible with the provisions of Article Three of the Convention №87, recognizing for them the right of free election of organizations' representatives".

As to the prospects, A. Bukhvostaw forecasted a growing FPB crisis and reduction of its members, because the Federation "would — as always — acknowledge the situation and together with the authorities and employers would impose pressure on workers".

A. Bukhvostaw also commented on the reasons of F. Vitko's resignation. "Vitko was constantly reporting about his work (to FPB Board members), writing petitions and knocking on administration doors. Yet, even then it was clear that nothing would happen. There were no skills or, perhaps, willingness of working differently, i.e. visiting companies and workshops,

listening and talking to the people, seeking their understanding and support. All that has to be done now. Of course, Frants [Vitko] could have stayed till the Congress, but he could not stand that confusion with all those conferences, board and other meetings demanding his resignation and expressing their distrust in him”, he said.

Bukhvostaw addressed the advocates of trade unions’ alternative development: “Everybody, who stands for an autonomous and independent trade unionist movement should unite. The process should start from the primary trade union organizations and groups, from individual members, because they, the workers, are the backbone of the trade union and unionist movement. One should ask himself or herself whom they are with and which trade unions they stand for. The union should be among those, who would like to be a free citizen, having the right of selecting their own way in life and of the alternative of being or not being a trade union member and selecting such a trade union”.

Consequently, **the two tendencies or prospects of FPB development** became clear at the Plenary Meeting:

Firstly, the general line of putting the leading trade union under government control and making it a tool of implementing government policy and a mechanism of government manipulation of workers’ professional organizations. Actually, the FPB has not got too far from that role and the return to it might be swift. However, it would be endangered by further splits and reduction of FPB ranks, which the Government would try to avoid by administrative measures.

Secondly, opposition (democratic) forces inside the FPB may consolidate and their subordinate organizations may set up an independent democratic trade union or a new association of democratic trade unions. However, this prospect may be weakened by some opposition members, who have got accustomed to the convenient and comfortable FPB structure, or in other words to “tame” the opposition of “democrats” inside the FPB.

Interesting is the comment and forecast by U. Hancharyk, former candidate for Belarusian Presidency from democratic forces, experienced trade union leader, FPB Chairman until December 2001 and since then the Deputy Chairman of the General Confederation of CIS Trade Unions on the eve of the Plenary Meeting. He expressed his confidence that the authorities would provide complete and comprehensive support to L. Kozik’s trade unions. But he also expressed doubt that even under those circumstance the new trade union leader “would be able to neglect the realities. Even the most pro-active leaders, who had come to the trade union from government structures, had to consider the growth of prices and worsening of living standards”, he said. U. Hancharyk reminded that a similar situation had already been at the times of the Soviet Union, when the pro-Bolshevik trade union had to oppose the “militant communism” policy.

According to Hancharyk, L. Kozik “can potentially become a trade union leader because he was trade union chairman at a clothing factory in Barysaw”. He did not exclude that “Kozik will surrender trade union property, which the trade unions and the Government have been struggling for. But, it will be a bad solution, including for the trade union leader personally. L. Kozik may get minimum support inside the FPB, if he provides for the return to the previous system of clearing trade union fees through company accounting offices and final decision on assets in favor of the Federation”, he said.

Vitko’s dismissal wasn’t the best option, either. “Much depends on Vitko himself, whether he is going to fight for maintaining an independent trade union movement or to join government service”, Hancharyk said. (As the events showed, F. Vitko preferred a compromise with the authorities and left without any resistance. Answering the question whether ex-FPB leader Hancharyk had tried to help the FPB newspaper “Belaruski Chas”, Iryna Hermanovich, which after A. Sarykievich’s dismissal was the acting editor-in-chief, said the following: “Nobody has even seen him or heard from him. His successor Vitko behaved the same way. He had to stay in office for two weeks only, until the FPB Congress. But he resigned and thus surrendered the whole federation. Perhaps, Vitko received a tempting proposal as to his further employment” (Belorusskaya Gazeta, 19 August 2002).)

In his comment, U. Hancharyk stated that he would not preclude international recognition of “Kozik’s trade unions”, if they took adequate measures on protecting workers’ rights but they would still be considered government-controlled trade unions.

After the election of the new FPB Chairman, most reporters stated that the FPB acquired the tendencies of a closer rapprochement with government structures and elements of authoritarian methods applied by the top officials. As a result of demonstratively pro-government actions and the fact that new FPB Chairman had still been working in the Presidential structures, assertions, that Kozik was not “a trade union leader, but the “Presidential regent in the trade unions” began appearing in the press (for instance in “Narodnaya Volya” on 20 August 2002).

Particularly, as had been predicted by analysts, on 8 August Kozik “persecuted” A. Sarykievich, editor-in-chief of the “Belaruski Chas” newspaper. Sarykievich had no doubt that his dismissal was politically motivated. He answered the corresponding question in the following way: “I think that was the true reason. At least, there were no professional claims to me” (“Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta”, 13 August 2002).

According to “Narodnaya Volya” as of 13 August 2002, A. Bukhvostaw, Chairman of the Belarusian Trade Union of Automobile and Agricultural Machine-building workers, sent a protest to FPB Chairman Kozik because of the dismissal of A. Sarykievich, editor-in-chief of FPB newspaper “Belaruski Chas”. “By this decision you have ignored the opinion of the

FPB Board, which at its meeting on 25 July had not given you the right to dismiss A. Starykievich in conformity with the Article 257, Part 2 of the Labor Code of the Republic of Belarus. Your actions confronted FPB Charter, which is inadmissible. Being a member of the FPB Board, I express my resolute protest against your arbitrary actions. I believe it necessary to consider this issue at the FPB Board meeting”, wrote A. Bukhvostaw.

Open discrediting or preparations for dismissal from senior positions of those FPB activists, who directly or indirectly had expressed their discontent either with Lukashenka’s policy, or opposed Kozik’s policy, or had just been active members of the democratic movement in Belarus, has been pursued.

Most intensively those methods have been realized in Brest Region. At first, at a meeting in the Brest Region Executive Committee chairpersons of the city and districts committees were assigned “to provide by 1 July exodus of trade union organizations from existing trade unions and their incorporation into the newly established government controlled trade unions”. On 11 July, Uladzimir Mirochnyk, Chairman of Brest Region Trade Union Association, who had objected to that, was distrusted at the Plenary Meeting of Brest Oblast Trade Union Association. He was accused “of having no contacts with the Chairman of the Brest Region Executive Committee” and “neglecting decisions made by the Board”. U. Mirochnyk at first announced that he would not leave at his own will, but after “the appropriate work” with him he asked for resignation on 26 July at the Extraordinary Plenary Meeting of the Brest Region Trade Union Association.

A similar scenario was applied for dismissing Aliaksandr Yarashuk, Head of the Trade Union of Agribusiness Sector Workers. On 7 August, the Board of the National Committee of the Trade Union of Agribusiness Sector Workers decided to hold on 10 September a Plenary Meeting and, inter alia, consider Yarashuk’s dismissal. According to the trade union Charter, the decision on Chairman resignation had to be made exclusively by the Congress. Therefore, Kozik’s and administration puppets intended to amend the Charter as to authorizing the Plenary Meeting to dismiss the Chairman. Yarashuk did not attend the meeting and did not resign at his own will, unlike Hancharyk, Vitko and Mirochnyk.

Valyantsina Palievikova, Chairperson of the Belarusian Women’s party “Nadzeya”, an active member of U. Hancharyk’s election team and ex-head of the FPB data/analytical center, has been subject to discrediting, too. First, she was accused of misappropriation of some funds. On 17 August 2002, an extraordinary meeting of the party was convened with the authorities’ support. In V. Palievikova’s absence it elected Valyantsina Matusievich the new Chairperson. Many observers believe that the Congress was illegal (V. Matusievich had not been a party member and the pseudo-congress was attended by the representatives of a definite minority of primary organizations, mainly those of the Mahilew Region). On 24 August 2002,

V. Palievikova held another Congress of the "Nadzeya" party, which was attended by 1,280 party members out of the total number of 1,511 members)⁵. Perhaps, the attempts of disintegrating the party and discrediting its leader have been endorsed by government structures. N. Kalyada, "Nadzeya" Board member, believes that "today Matusievich is serving Kozik and tomorrow she will be serving somebody else" ("Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta", 21 August 2002).

However, certain events prove that some FPB top officials have maintained hopes about resisting government pressure on trade union movement. At least, among the members of the FPB Board (in addition to democrats/reformists H. Fiadynich, A. Bukhvostaw and some other members) there are activists who try to maintain trade unions' independence even under such difficult circumstances. That became clear when L. Kozik had tried to dismiss A. Strykievich, editor-in-chief of the "Belaruski Chas" trade union newspaper, a journalist, who is well known for his democratic and anti-Lukashenka views.

Kozik fired A. Strykievich through violating the law but the majority of FPB Board members refused to implement the first order by the new Chairman immediately and without any comment. According to the press, L. Kozik argued that he would not work with A. Strykievich and "hinted that Strykievich's resignation could be traded off for the return of trade union fees' clearing procedure" ("Narodnaya Volya", 27 July 2002). However, despite such hints on 25 July 2002, only 12 members out of 34 members of FPB Board voted for dismissing the editor-in-chief.

Undoubtedly, the Presidential Administration, wherefrom L. Kozik came to the post of FPB Chairman has used maximum opportunities for dismissing the opponent trade union journalist. However, any attempts of counteracting government pressure on trade unions leave some hope about the potential transformation or at least about the possibility of cooperating with the FPB Board, through which it might become possible to influence all Belarusian trade union movement (schools, lectures, conferences, workshops, trips, international trade union exchange, legal assistance and press). Of key importance there will be the so-called "personal factor" (the list of active trade union movement participants, both from the traditional and new trade unions the annex).

In our opinion, a trade union leader, enjoying workers' confidence and respect, may do a lot for the development and strengthening of the trade union movement. Moreover, he or she may lead the people, who have been seriously disappointed by a feeble and impotent FPB, not only in protecting trade union members' interests but also in maintaining the Belarusian Trade Union Federation as a non-government organization.

⁵ The authorities declared illegal the Congress, which delegates represented the majority of party organizations.

Historical and Current Relations Between Traditional and New Trade Unions and Labor Movement Structures

(Dissociation Reasons and Collaboration Opportunities)

All activists of both new and traditional trade unions note that from the very renaissance of new independent trade union structures, their relationship with the FPB was one of challengers and competitors and sometimes even opponents. This is true for both parties. Representatives of new trade unions criticized the FPB for its collaboration with the authorities, while the FPB was waging active resistance and competition at company and national level without leaving hopes of incorporating “alternative” trade unions into the FPB. At the early stage of establishing new trade unions, there was not any chance of their collaboration and cooperation with the FPB, because the establishment of new trade unions had been based on the conflict with traditional trade unions and criticism of FPB performance.

Many leaders of the independent trade union movement state that in the early nineties, the FPB tried to choke the competitors in its “embrace”. New trade union leaders were invited to various conferences, meetings, receptions, etc. but they were by all means prevented against establishing their own structures. In other words, there were attempts of “dissolving” them in the FPB.

Some new trade union leaders nourished the idea of remaining in traditional trade unions in order to head them after some time. For instance, V. Babayed was a champion of that approach (see lower about the tendency).

According to some facts, the confrontation between the labor movement (within which new trade unions were subsequently established) and the FPB emerged before the formation of the independent trade unionist movement. According to A. Halkievich, one of the organizers of the labor movement in Belarus, “the first large-scale action undertaken by the FPB for the neutralization of the emerging labor movement was undertaken in September 1989 together with the Communist Party.” On 28–29 September 1989, the authorities initiated a conference

of labor teams' representatives in Minsk, which established the Council of Labor Teams. The conference was attended by the First Secretary of the Communist Party, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet and FPB Chairman. There were also invited M. Sobal and G. Mukhin, members of the organizing committee of the Workers' Union. The main objective of the conference was the establishment of a new government-subordinated organ through which the authorities would beat down the wave of workers' discontent, take up the initiative, and prevent self-organization of workers. Such actions were mandatory for the FPB at that time. It had to fulfill all orders by the Communist Party and report to it on counteracting measures against the emerging labor movement.

Collaboration with labor and independent trade unionist movements was doomed by traditional trade unions' behavior during and after the strikes in April 1991. After spontaneous workers' protests, the Supreme Soviet, Council of Ministers and Trade Union Federation of Belarus passed a joint document assigning "ministries and agencies, together with law ensuring agencies, to sue and undertake other legislation-stipulated measures against persons, who have arbitrarily left their working places or whose actions have resulted in economic loss, jeopardizing production and/or movement of transport and violation of public order..." On behalf of the FPB that document was signed by U. Hancharyk. Instead of protecting workers' rights by all means, the trade union together with the Government blessed full-scale repression against strike participants. Without commentary, under such circumstances the labor movement could not consider the FPB as its social partner.

In its attempt to slow down the growth of the independent trade unionist movement, which had been taken up the initiative from traditional trade unions, the FPB made it difficult for FPB members to join other trade unions. The Board of the FPB Council approved the "Recommendations on transfer procedure of FPB members into other trade unions, which are not members of the Trade Union Federation of Belarus". Adoption of those recommendations was motivated by "drawing more attention from trade union agencies to every member." The FPB organizational department issued the provisions stipulating a number of mandatory bureaucratic actions, aimed at restricting a smooth transfer into new trade unions from the FPB (Information Bulletin of the Trade Union Federation of Belarus, No. 8, page 68). Those provisions were confronting the principle of free inclusion into and leaving public organizations, specified by the Belarusian Legislation.

Many leaders of the independent trade unionist movement believe that counteracting the establishment of SPB primary organizations at enterprises in many cases was actively supported by FPB local organizations.

It should be noted that in 1990–1991, when there was considerable growth of the labor movement, the FPB and emerging independent trade unions got an opportunity of dramatic

increase of their officers by incorporating the leaders of strike committees, which had been set up in the cities, at factories, plants workshops and individual units. Usually, leaders of strike committees had prestige among the workers. If those people had then joined new trade unions, most of the workers would have followed them. But it did not happen.

According to SPB leader H. Bykaw, in the second half of 1991 an attempt was made to take control of traditional trade unions with the help of strike committees. Their members were active at trade union meetings and often got elected into local trade union committees. The Minsk Gear Plant was the first enterprise where the strike committee actually became a trade union committee. The same scenario was applied at Minsk Electric/Technical Plant, Minsk Plant of Automatic Lines (MZAL) and other companies. Strike committee leaders became company trade union heads or deputy heads. Out of 25 members of the Minsk strike Committee, 22 became trade union leaders.

It was a time of very close cooperation between the labor movement and traditional trade unions. But only 12 months later former strike committee members, who had joined FPB trade union at the MZAL, managed to establish the Belarusian Free Trade Union, headed by H. Bykaw (out of 4,400 workers 1,100 joined the new trade union in four months). If that tendency had become predominant at least at the largest enterprises, new trade unions would have become the most important segment of the professional movement in Belarus.

In reality, having joined traditional trade unions, ex-leaders of strike committees were no longer willing either to leave them or to establish new trade union organizations. Admittedly, having changed their workshops for clean offices, receiving 100–150%-higher salaries, participating in mass rallies, enjoying recognition and participating in distribution of bonuses, free housing and vocation vouchers, ex-workers loved the comfort that they had achieved for themselves. They usually argued that they intended to transform traditional trade unions from inside out. Yet, in reality those people did nothing either for the benefit of free trade unions, or for the objective of FPB transformation.

Indeed, it was a period of close cooperation between the structures of labor and trade unionist movements. However, in reality those activists did not participate in the establishment and promotion of a free trade unionist movement. The FPB could not use them for its restructuring, either. At that time, traditional trade unions were facing the task of liquidating labor and independent trade unionist movements. So those activists received maximum endearment and most of them became FPB ordinary bureaucrats.

There were almost no official contacts between different trade union associations. Their representatives met only when signing General Agreements with employers. A representative of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP) was there, too.

At the same time, there were attempts of undertaking joint actions by labor movement structures, democratic trade unions and the FPB after A. Lukashenka had come to power and established an autocratic regime of suppressing democratic rights and freedoms. According to some participants of those events, quite often the FPB could let its partners by refusing, for instance, to take part in the pre-declared joint action of protest and arguing that it would manage to solve the problems through negotiations, without any demonstrations. That not merely resulted in cancellation of the arrangement, but in regarding the FPB by both the public and the Government as a reasonable, manageable and collaborative force unlike the chaotic and destructive labor and independent trade unionist movement contacting with the West, which from the times of the Soviet Union had had a stigma of dissidence. Despite that, rating of trust in independent trade unions definitely exceeded the rating of trust in the FPB, both with general public and public opinion leaders. It was clear that most of the Belarusians associated reasonable prospects with new trade unionist movement development, but not with FPB restructuring (see the tables of public opinion polling results). Surprisingly, but in all the polls in 1998–2002 the number of respondents with positive opinions on new (free) trade unions was by 3–7% higher than the number of FPB champions. In other words, the public saw the FPB, despite its much more numerous membership, as an unclear and amorphous structure. Similarly, less people would speculate on its prospects and significance.

Competition between trade unions has often been determined by the fact that, traditionally, FPB managers at company level have been a sort of deputy directors on relationships with workers and have played the same tune with the administration. As a rule, traditional trade unions (their leaders) sided with administration (especially) during conflicts with new trade unions. A new trade union could be in a better position as it was autonomous of anybody and advocated exclusively workers' rights.

Many trade union leaders drew the attention to the following. At the companies, which had both new and traditional trade unions, the latter quickly and clearly turned democratic and often beneficially collaborated with the first.

Limited cooperation and dialogue between the FPB and BKDP became possible in the second half of the nineties mainly through participating in various training programs, particularly within the TACIS Program.

Interviewed representatives of both of the trade unions emphasized that there had been almost no real contacts between them, but personal contacts. It might be another argument that there will be enough capacity for promoting both corporate and personal cooperation, including professional cooperation, if the country follows a truly democratic course.

The 2001 Presidential Elections may be taken as another example of cooperation. Then new trade unions were supporting U. Hancharyk even stronger than some FPB member organizations.

However, it should be noted that any FPB restructuring towards democratization and transition towards genuine trade unionism was potentially “harmful” to existing new trade unions and challenging to their interests, including financial interests. It is clear that absolute matching of approaches of the FPB and alternative trade unions would have meant strengthening of the first and shrinking of the social basis for the second.

When ex-Deputy Chairman of the Presidential administration L. Kozik had been elected FPB Chairman, even phantom expectations of possible cooperation (as well as of competition in democratization process) between traditional and new trade unions vanished. According to new FPB leader, an Extraordinary FPB Congress would be aimed at the unification, “We have to put together all those who left the Federation due to some reasons”, he said. L. Kozik argued that that there should not be many nation-wide trade union centers, i.e. free and independent trade unions should join the FPB (“Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta,” 17 July 2002). Of course, neither the SPB nor NPB will accept such a proposal, especially given the overall antidemocratic orientation of the “new” Belarusian Trade Union Federation.

On 12 August 2002, L. Kozik had a second meeting (after his election FPB Chairman) with President Lukashenka. According to the Presidential press service, they discussed “the issues of cooperation between the State and trade unions”. Observers said that one of the major topics was Lukashenka’s recent assignment for the new trade union leader to put back under the FPB umbrella some unincorporated trade union structures. It is probable that with administrative tools, L. Kozik will try to re-establish a single government-controlled trade union like in the USSR.

Trade Union Involvement in Democratic Protest Movement Through Participating in General Political Actions

*T*rade unions' (mainly new independent trade unions') participation in political actions and democratic public protests was closely associated with labor movement development and increased activities of democratic parties and public organizations and, primarily with the activities of the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF).

First attempts of establishing an independent trade unionist movement were made in the capital city. In 1989, based on BNF activists' initiative (at that time the BNF was not a political party, it emerged as a broad democratic public movement), working groups composed of BNF members were set up at Minsk enterprises. BNF set the task for its members of maximum promotion of self-organization of various public structures, including groups of workers. The major task was to establish multiple radical social organisms, independent from the Government, i.e. samples of what we presently call structures of the civil society.

In Minsk, the first organized city group of democracy-oriented workers consisted of thirty persons and managed to actively participate in the election to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in 1989. Those people formed the core of a support group in Zavodskoy District in Minsk for M. Ihnatovich, a democratic candidate to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, who managed to get elected due to their support. That group became the first open contact point with broad working media. Its activists were M. Sobal, G. Muhin, A. Halkevich, H. Bykaw, V. Ivashkievich and others, who later initiated the set-up of a steering committee for establishing the Workers' Union of Belarus (RS).

It is interesting, that most of the labor movement activists had mostly a humanitarian university education (they were historians, journalists, philosophers, etc.). That could be easily explained: in the USSR intellectuals never earned as much as workers, that's why many young people tried by all means to get a job at a plant after graduating from a University or a college. Communist party bodies opposed that tendency, because they reasonably believed that those people, who were mockingly called "working aristocracy", could in a critical moment become public leaders and structurally and legally organize protest moods of workers. Historically, that came true.

Incidentally, most of the present small and medium businessmen may also be attributed to intellectuals, because they usually have higher, mostly humanitarian education. Perhaps, this is the reason why their trade union is so well organized. This may be confirmed by the fact that on 31 July 2002 it waged a one-day nation-wide preventive strike and announced the preparation of new protest actions.

According to its founders, an idea of establishing an organization under the name “Workers’ Union of Belarus” (RS) was expressed at the meeting in Moscow between activists of local labor movement and a group of Belarusian workers, while the name was prompted by K. Suoka, a member of the USSR Supreme Soviet, who was the head of an organization with a similar name in Lithuania.

The RS Establishing Conference took place in Minsk on 1 October 1989. The new Union incorporated representatives of Minsk, Barysaw and Salihorsk companies (all from Minsk Region). Its core was made of the workers’ groups supporting the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF), which set the task of establishing labor and trade unionist movements, which would be free from communist and administrative control. Most of those people headed the first strikes, which spontaneously broke out at many Belarusian enterprises.

The city of Salihorsk was the true leader of the protest labor movement in Belarus. At local potash mines there were well-organized workers’ groups (they still remain there), which had close relationships with miners’ organizations in the USSR. The Salihorsk miners’ strike in 1989 was the springboard for strikes all around Belarus.

Next year, in 1990, a powerful strike broke out at GOMSELMASH (agricultural machinery) association in Homel in Eastern Belarus. It augmented the strike movement to a new, higher stage. After it, spontaneous strikes spread almost all around Belarus. Hrodna and Lida in the West and Orsha and Mahilew in the East were actively involved. Those strikes were caused by overall deterioration of living standards and natural willingness of the people to improve the situation. In public opinion, changes were associated with democracy, introduction of private property, opportunities of earning accordingly with performance, freedom and public order. Though there was clear understanding that such benefits would not be achieved, if the Communist Party maintained its power. Therefore, alongside with economic demands the workers also had political demands, notably increase of salaries, improvement of working conditions and liquidation of the political monopoly of the Communist Party of the USSR/Byelorussian SSR.

It should be emphasized once more, that according to RS activists themselves, who in most cases headed strike committees, RS cells in the companies were actually BNF cells and usually the same individuals worked in both.

However, that link had its weaknesses, too. On one hand, activists of labor, subsequently independent, regarded the trade unionist movement as a self-transformation into a democratic organization through contacts with democratic parties and initiatives. On the other hand, there was a threat that a new democratic trade union movement may get under too strong an “influence of an already existing democratic party”. As a result, the close relationship of the labor movement and trade unions with the national-democratic political wing played its positive role at the beginning of establishing the free trade union movement. At that time, different parties (actually, the BNF, only) could assist the movement in organizing arrangements, writing leaflets and appeals, providing their own activists and helping with establishing workers’ cells in the companies.

On the other hand, official propaganda later used close relationships between the independent trade unionist movement and the national-democratic forces for their discrediting. That became most clear in 1994, when A. Lukashenka was elected President of the Republic of Belarus. He waged an open struggle against all national, democratic and independent from the authorities and that in turn affected new trade unions.

As already stated, in 1990 workers’ protests took place in many Belarusian cities, not only in Minsk, Homel and Salihorsk. It reached its peak in the workers’ protest in Orsha, where the people paralyzed the functioning of the largest railway center for quite long period of time. Strike and trade union committees coordinated preparation and implementation of the rallies.

Totally, the peak of the strikes campaign was in April 1991. On 3 April, the strikes began in Minsk. A spontaneous meeting broke out at the Minsk Electric/Mechanical Plant, following the decision of the Central Government in Moscow on dramatic increase of prices. The same day the workers of Minsk Automatic Lines Manufacturing Plant and Minsk Gear Plant joined the strike. On 4 April, the Minsk Truck Plant and some other companies stopped. That very day, the workers marched to the Houses of Government and held a meeting of protest at the central square. Over 50,000 people attended that meeting. They demanded salary increases accordingly with the growth of prices, resignation of USSR President Gorbachev, USSR and Belarus’ Governments and recall of those members of parliament who had not justified people’s confidence. The National Strike Committee was established. S. Antonchyk, H. Bykaw and G. Mukhin were elected its co-chairmen. It incorporated representatives of 98 Minsk companies. Strike committees were also set up in Orsha (Vitsebsk Region), Maladzechna, Barysaw and Salihorsk (Minsk Region), Lida (Hrodna Region), Homel and other cities. On 10 April, the workers of other Belarusian cities joined the Minsk strike and it grew up into a national strike. As a result, the Council of Ministers of the Byelorussian SSR satisfied most of the economic demands. However, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet refused to consider the political demands and the National Strike Committee resumed the national strike, beginning

from 23 April. The paralysis of railway traffic in Orsha was the peak of the April protests. After those events the intensity of strikes lowered.

The strikes resulted in recognition by workers of their strength, not merely in meeting economic demands. The Union of Workers' activists won tremendous prestige. They gained much experience and many of them later became leaders of the Belarusian independent trade unionist movement.

Workers' political struggle did not stop, either. On 11 May 1991, the All-Belarusian Conference of Strike Committees demanded from the Supreme Soviet: the increase of salaries, pensions, various bonuses and compensations according to the growth of government-controlled prices; starting with immediate implementation of the Declaration on state sovereignty of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic; drafting and adopting a new law on elections on a multi-party basis; extradition of Communist Party committees from companies; 30%-reduction of costs for maintaining administrations, etc. It is interesting to note, that directors at that time were indirectly and sometimes even openly supporting the strikers and their demands. Company directors believed that it would be beneficial, if "organizing, supervising and controlling" committees of the Communist Party were expelled from their companies. They also were in favor of slogans about greater autonomy of enterprises, and their economic and financial independence. Therefore, most of them did not object to the establishment of strike committees at their companies.

Salihorsk Miners' New Trade Union, headed by Ivan Yurhenich, was the most well-organized and powerful trade union. Salihorsk workers continued their strike when the entire strike movement in the country had practically reached zero value in 1992–1993. That produced results. Salihorsk miners managed to obtain the highest salaries among all the workers and they have had respect in Belarus till now. Salihorsk New Trade Union has enjoyed high prestige both at the mines and in the city.

Taking advantage of the situation with mass strikes, FPB management negotiated with the Government. The negotiations resulted in 20–70% increase of wages and salaries and some other issues were solved. Admittedly, FPB member trade unions were getting stronger, too.

In 1991–1994, the National Strike Committee periodically resumed its actions. In Minsk and other cities it organized meetings, marches and pickets demanding Government resignation, new elections and establishment of trustworthy Government. However, even fewer people attended those arrangements.

Even now some activists of the working movement believe that future changes in Belarus will be possible exclusively as a result of the new increase of the labor movement, which will make the authorities introduce large-scale transformations in economics and politics.

Particularly, S. Antonchyk, an activist of the Belarusian labor movement and a Member of the Supreme Soviet of Belarus of the Twelfth Convocation have advocated this point. In his opinion, “the establishment of the National Strike Committee may serve a signal for mass protests against tyranny. One should understand that workers’ protests ignite the mechanism of authorities’ degradation. That happened in 1991, when the Communist Party lost its support in labor teams and actually disappeared from political horizons in Belarus ” (Antonchyk S. Working Movement in Belarus // Non-Violence and Belarus. B.m., 1999, p. 200–201).

In 1999, Antonchyk and his confederates tried to renovate the labor movement, using their experience of the early nineties. On 23 January 1999, there was a meeting of the representatives of the regional strike committees of Minsk, Homel, Hrodna, Mahilew, Babrujsk, Vitsebsk, Orsha, Salihorsk, Navapolatsk and Barysaw. They decided to establish a National Strike Committee, which function would be preparing and launching strikes all around the country. However, no other active actions followed, but under some circumstances the National Strike Committee may be able to perform organizing and coordinating functions.

It should be noted, that with the establishment of political parties in Belarus, employees have come under the influence of different ideological and political trends. At first, the generation of the independent labor movement was under BNF auspice. Then other parties have become influential, primarily the United Civilian Party and Social-Democratic Hramada.

Moreover, in the mid-nineties some newly established parties declared as their goals the support of working people and protection of employees’ interests in hope of getting mutual support from the workers at elections (Belarusian Party of Communists, Belarusian Labor Party, Belarusian Socialist Party, etc.).

In the early nineties, many workers stood for privatization, since they believed that they would become owners and start getting some dividends. When they realized that they would be duped anyway, some them began floating towards “socialist equality”, i.e. to what had been in the past. A. Lukashenka skillfully used that mood at 1994-Presidential Elections by promising to seize all wealth from the rich and “to divide it into equal parts”.

Three Parties have been constantly fighting for the working movement in Belarus: democracy-oriented parties, left-wing communist parties and government structures.

The First Congress of Belarusian Workers, which took place on 25 February 1995, attracted delegates from mainly left-wing parties and movements. The Congress issued the program statement of the newly established Workers’ Union and its appeal to Belarusian workers, which specified the main objective of uniting workers — termination or the reforms, deteriorating working people’s standards, and the introduction of such public relations, under which workers may become real masters of their life and products of their own labor.

On 27 July 1997, the Second Congress of the Workers' Union took place in Minsk. One hundred and ninety five delegates attended it from 34 Belarusian cities and regions. It approved a new Charter and a program, which among the Union's objectives specified the struggle for political power, the establishment of renewed socialism, and termination of privatization. The Congress elected the Board of the Workers' Union and its auditing committee. No other results of that organization could be traced. It should be seen as a mere political declaration of left-wing political forces about the working movement, while their organization never matured.

On 10 July 1999, on the eve of Parliamentary Elections, the Communists staged a government-sponsored National Congress of Workers in Minsk. Representatives of 284 Belarusian enterprises attended it (out of total 19,000 enterprises). The Congress discussed the issues of living standards' deterioration, growth of prices and reviewed the social/political situation. It decided to set up an "Alternative Employment Office" to support the unemployed.

It should be remembered, that from the mid-nineties FPB member trade unions have been ever more active in the protesting movement. Their members took an active part in mass rallies against worsening of living standards, arranged by other public and political forces. By itself, the FPB was arranging meetings and demonstrations on the International Labor Solidarity Day (1 May), posted pickets in support of workers' demands and intensively worked with the Parliament and the Government.

Since recently, the most important protest actions organized by the FPB were the following: a nation-wide meeting of the representatives of labor teams and trade unions against rapid worsening of the situation in economic and social sectors (1 May 1998) and the protest of FPB member trade unions under the slogan "Entitled to jobs and adequate salaries" (30 September 1999). Over 30,000 workers and officers participated in them in Minsk and all around Belarus. Later, over 300,000 people signed the resolution passed at the meeting in Minsk. On 14 February 2001, the FPB waged a meeting in Minsk under the slogan "Match the salaries with the level of prices!" It was aimed against trade union rights' violation and making short-term employment contracts, only. In their resolution, meeting participants demanded curbing of prices and increase of real salaries. On 5–6 April 2001, a national meeting of the representatives of member trade unions of the FPB and BKDP took place. It reviewed the results of the claim sent by the Belarusian trade unions to the International Labor Organization. The delegates from the ILO and other national and international trade union centers and organizations also attended that meeting. The participants demanded to put an end to unprecedented interference of Belarusian authorities into trade union activity and the attempts to ruin the trade unionist movement and the entire system of social partnership. On 28 March 2002, there was a national protest under the slogans "No to the growth of prices! Yes to adequate living standards and trade union rights!"

However, according to the labor movement and new trade union leaders, there was not much cooperation between them and the FPB in holding joint actions. Moreover, quite often at the last moment FPB management breached the consented agreements and refused from participating in in advance declared actions of protest. Usually, it claimed that the FPB had managed to reach an agreement with the Government. Often that resulted in cancellation of the arrangements.

Since recently, like in the nineties, the protest movement has been closely related with political parties and purely workers', not trade union movement. On 31 July 2002, a one-day preventive strike of entrepreneurs took place in Belarus. The Belarusian Strike Committee and unregistered trade union of entrepreneurs (headed by V. Lievaniewski) organized it. It was well organized and was joined by entrepreneurs from Minsk, Brest, Baranavichy (Brest Region), Vitsebsk, Orsha (Vitsebsk Region), Homel, Hrodna, Mahilew and Babrujsk (Mahilew Region). Totally, over 150,000 people participated in it. Its main reason was the forthcoming amendment of the Presidential Decree as of 17 May 2001, which, if adopted, could significantly worsen entrepreneurs' status.

On the other hand, the strikes confirmed an assertion that the rights could be safeguarded in struggle, only. According to the "Belorusskij Rynok" as of 12–18 August 2002, "A large-scale national strike of entrepreneurs and vendors, trading at open-air markets, exhibitions and fairs, on 31 July made the authorities to open a dialogue with the unregistered strike committee. However, it has yet resembled the talk from a position of strength." A few days after the strike, its organizer, Lievaniewski, and Minsk entrepreneurs' head A. Shumchanka had a meeting with the Deputy Minister of the Economy, A. Tur, and Head of Entrepreneurship Department, A. Likhachewski. Strike committee representatives' arguments that the measures undertaken by the Government towards entrepreneurs would be of no benefit either to the budget, or to the state, or to the customers, while business would be destroyed, did not find understanding with government representatives.

At that meeting the parties could not decide on the topic of further talks, though they did not reject the idea. According to the press, entrepreneurs' leaders in the meantime planned a waging of new protests. Particularly, they declared that a permanent strike of entrepreneurs was being prepared and a preventive one-day national strike of entrepreneurs would take place on the 11 September. They did not preclude that the strike would have some political demands, notably, resignation of A. Lukashenka and some ministers, who had provoked the deterioration of small and medium-scale business in Belarus. According to BelaPAN agency, the strike committee had not chosen that date incidentally. "Protest action by Belarusian entrepreneurs will, firstly, show their solidarity with the American people, who had suffered so much on that day from international terrorism, and secondly counteract the "economic

terrorism of the Belarusian Government”. The strike committee argued, that most entrepreneurs supported the demand on A. Lukashenka’s resignation, regarding him and his administration “as initiators of creating an unfavorable atmosphere for small and medium-scale business development in Belarus” (“Narodnaya Volya”, 20 August 2002).

The salary payment schedule has been strongly violated at many Belarusian enterprises. At Homel Staring Engines Manufacturing Plant in July, the workers had not yet received their salaries for March, April, May and June. The trade union committee in its letter to FPB Chairman Kozik wrote that the “dissatisfaction among the workers is so high that nobody can guarantee that new meetings and strikes would not spontaneously break out in the company” (“Narodnaya Volya”, 1 August 2002). It is interesting that traditional trade union leaders did not threaten L. Kozik with a strike (which would be reasonable), but warned him that the strike could be spontaneous. This is a good example of the nature of traditional trade unions.

Nobody would dare to imagine an FPB protest movement headed by L. Kozik. A person, so much devoted to A. Lukashenka, would do his best to suppress any potential protests of individual trade union organizations. He declared that he would find ways of cooperation with the authorities and there would be no need to march along the streets. He has been often quoted on that: “I will neither go myself, nor let you go!”

Finally, it should be stated that realization of the rights related to participation of workers’ public associations in developing and implementing the national policy has been precluded because the mechanism of their contacts with administrative and managerial government agencies has not been developed, yet. Government policy, when the authorities exclusively give orders, resulted in cancellation of the contacts established between the FPB and the Government in the nineties. Highly probable that by the end of 2002, the authorities will try to put the trade union movement under their total control, while the working resistance movement will be definitely suppressed through repressions.

Trade Unions' Place and Role in Belarusian Society

It should be acknowledged that trade unions have not been popular in Belarusian society. From the times of the USSR until now, they have been perceived by public opinion as some charity organization, which may provide a voucher to a sanatorium or a children's summer camp or to provide some cash assistance in need, etc., but not a structure striving for the rights and interests of employees.

In our opinion, recent events have clearly shown that to great extent, the FPB was a phantom structure and speculations about it as a strong and numerous organization did not correspond to the reality. Moreover, it was somehow split into three pieces, i.e. into top trade union management, mid-level managers and rank-and-file members, and their own attitudes to the FPB and its perception from the outside were different.

Therefore, FPB radical politicizing during 2001 Presidential Elections was a surprise not only for rank-and-file members, but for many FPB officials and the politically agitated public, too.

It should be noted, that the return of the FPB under the government's wing found "understanding" and even caused joy among the majority of its bureaucrats. It also means that that with current officials no real changes will be possible in the traditional trade unions.

When in 2001, FPB ex-Chairman U. Hancharyk was nominated by the Belarusian opposition as a challenger for Belarus' Presidency, a reasonable stake was put on FPB infrastructure. That decision on using trade union, not parties', infrastructure was primarily determined by the number of trade union members (over 4 million members).

However, an attempt to win by number did not bring a success. The main reason of failure was that many people regard their FPB membership as a tradition inherited from the times of the Soviet Union. Moreover, many of them still remember trade unions having been the "school of communism" and the FPB, which followed it, was mainly the tool of implementing government and employers' policy among the workers.

Presently, the absolute majority of Belarus' working population does not understand the public role of trade unions. The most common public (workers') opinion about trade unions

is the following: they don't give us anything, but everybody is there and I'd rather stay there. Moreover, people still believe that trade unions are the structures for cash reimbursement of holiday vouchers, for free medical care, and for assistance in settling social issues. Perhaps, unconsciously they still have in their minds the USSR-imposed idea of mandatory implementation of government recommendations. It should be recognized that, in present, Belarus' manipulations with public opinion, threats of immediate dismissal for the opposition of the regime, etc. have become common reality.

Public opinion is quite confident that trade unions have been an offspring of company administration (and that one of the authorities at the national scale), not an independent organization, which primary task is the protection of employees' interests.

Therefore, the 2001 Presidential Elections were a catalyst of FPB organizational and ideological capacity. U. Hancharyk's loss was also the loss of trade union structure and an indicator of its poor self-organization.

Most democracy-conscious citizens have a similar opinion of trade unions. But they still join trade unions and trust them (see the annex "Statistic-Sociological Data"), since they believe that thus they may primarily work for democracy and oppose the authoritarian regime.

Such an attitude to trade unions and other government and public institutions may be motivated either by historic traditions or by current Belarusian reality. Authoritarian style in management with its superficial support of low-income groups at the expense of the groups with higher income has been promoted and intensively advertised in Belarus. As is argued, only "the State" represented by the President can help and has helped the people. Traditionally, huge masses of the population (primarily, rural population and pensioners) not only sincerely believe in that, but also regard such policy as the only correct one. Such social and economic behavior is not habitual, but is also motivated by the fact that there is almost no private property and the population has relied on intensive social support from "the State". Naturally, expectations for government provisioning have been growing among the entire population, not only in socially vulnerable categories.

Not only workers, but most of the people don't even expect that through professional or other organizations they can pro-actively and in a structured manner protect their own interests, but not only get temporary concessions and have the steam gone. In public opinion, protective functions have been initially delegated to "the State". Belarus has entered the new millennium with the population, which considerable portion has been accustomed to privileges and social transfers and the other portion has been earning money for subsidies-oriented social and economic groups. A sort of social dependency has grown in the country and the authorities have intensively made use of it.

Objectively, traditional trade union (FPB) leaders have not been advocates of workers' interests, but transmitters of the directors' opinion. Actual opposition of traditional trade unions was the reflection of directors' opposition to the current regime. FPB organizations were oppositional to the extent that company management allowed them to be. With their hands, Communist Party organizations were closed down at enterprises. They were traditional trade unions, which were directors' herald on granting companies (and their management) greater autonomy, etc. On the other hand, FPB opposition mood was going down together with the reduction of dissident ideas among directors. Company directors were most shocked by the unmotivated — in their opinion — arrests of the directors of the ATLANT Company and Minsk Tractor Plant, and the Head of Belarusian Railway. From now on, any of them can follow suit, if opposing the authorities. Therefore, when the authorities assigned them with putting an end to strikes at their companies, directors, in turn, have launched “the work” with trade unions. In reality, those trade unions have implemented administration assignments and demonstrated their dependency on employers. Moreover, company administrations were assigned to establish “director-controlled” trade unions. All members of FPB member trade union organization had to leave it and a new “independent” company trade union organization had to be registered. That was done with the aim of disintegrating and disorganizing working and trade union movement. Establishment of a “yellow” trade union at the Minsk Truck Plant might be a good example of such policy.

However, according to some reporters, most of directors and company trade union organizations have been in latent opposition to the current regime.

Alternative (new) trade unions believe that there should be a single government-independent employer in the country. Therefore, they stand for privatization. There is no doubt those new trade unions are politically-engaged and that their members have been threatened with repressions or even have already undergone them. Consequently, speculations on trade union development prospects cannot be free from political aspects. For instance, V. Ivashkievich, editor-in-chief of the “Rabochy” newspaper, argues that with the completion of the privatization process, politically motivated dismissals will be over, because in its course privatization liquidates political repressions. First of all, a private owner cares about workers' qualifications, not their political views. On the other hand, after privatization, owners will have to settle all issues with trade unions without any assistance from the authorities. (A classic example for Belarus might be given. There was a delay with paying salaries at Minsk Truck Plant. Angry workers threatened to wage a strike and blocked the traffic at a street close to the plant. The authorities gave an order and immediately a state-owned bank delivered money to the company, salaries were paid in a few hours and repression was imposed on the new trade union. New trade unions believe that such things would never happen after privatization.)

So, new democratic trade unions, which advocate liberal economy and society, can exist only under democratic conditions. Freedom for new trade unions is a prerequisite of their existence. They are new trade unions, which have demonstrated their readiness for flexible actions in the process of privatization, corporatization and other methods of changing government ownership into private individual or corporate property, which have been in progress in Belarusian petroleum, and chemical and food sectors (in the sense that there is readiness to negotiate with company management and skills to safeguard labor team interests). For instance, in May 2002, the SPB trade union organization at Polatsk Fiber Glass Manufacturing Association proposed their own economic conditions for the intended privatization of the company. They included transfer of 5% of company equity to the team and promotion of the company's top and medium-level management through the transfer to them of some equity on preferential terms, etc.

An absolutely different situation has been in the FPB. After making L. Kozik, ex-Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration, the new FPB Chairman, there has been asked a reasonable question, whether trade unions will be able to fight for workers' rights and advocate interests of the organizations, which had not merely agreed to collaborate with the authorities but had also gone under total subordination of both the authorities and employers.

Unfortunately, the decisions passed now by trade unions' current top officials have not accounted for the opinion of trade union rank-and-file members, which often does not correspond with the opinion of the bureaucrats.

However, FPB top officials' opinion fully corresponds with the opinion of the Belarusian administration. As is known, A. Lukashenka believes that a trade union has either to be a government-controlled structure, or has no right to exist. He has been most explicit on that. Demonstratively, despite having been elected public structure head, L. Kozik continues to fulfill some duties of a government officer. For instance, he attends almost all government meetings with the participation of the President. He was assigned by the authorities "to supervise" harvesting at Vitsebsk Region as well as with other duties. Moreover, L. Kozik has maintained his post of a Co-Chairman of a Working Group on Drafting the Constitutional Act of a Union State of Belarus and Russia. There is no doubt that L. Kozik has become a government officer in trade union structures and will try to subdue the FPB to the Government through administrative tools and will serve the interests of "the State", not the worker.

Social / Political Forecast on Trade Unions' Role in Transforming Belarusian Society and Economy

Analysis of the Belarusian professional movement development, based on performance review of both traditional and new, the so-called “independent” trade unions, comments by some leaders of trade union and labor movement (S. Antonchyk, H. Bykaw, V. Ivashkievich, Y. Anisim, M. Kanakh, A. Starykievich, Z. Barbakadze, H. Homich, S. Kalasowski, A. Bukhvostaw, F. Vitko and others) and conclusions drawn on the basis of sociological research materials confirms that in practice there is no trade unionist movement in Belarus in its traditional understanding. A real social basis of both the FPB (4 million declared members and 3,000–5,000 attendants of the biggest meetings) and new unions is small. Traditionally, there have been several “promoted” trade union brands in Belarus (FPB, SPB, NPB and some individual trade union organizations), but realistically they are exclusively top structures. Under present conditions, the FPB is unable to undertake self-restructuring and trade unionist development prospects are mainly associated with strengthening of the independent trade unionist movement. Hopes for potential restructuring of the trade union movement on the basis of the FPB (which would be an ideal solution!) have almost vanished after the election of L. Kozik, Lukashenka’s champion, the Chairman of the FPF. It seems that *the authorities recognized that transformed trade unions can become the strongest oppositional democratic force and tried to choke it at the very beginning of the restructuring process. Perhaps, it was their serious mistake.* It is clear that the prospects of FPB radical transformation, voiced at FPB Plenary Meeting by a group of innovators headed by F. Vitko, were ephemeral due to strong anti-reforms opposition (which resulted in Vitko’s resignation in a month and a half). Moreover, the FPB has always been regarded as a less powerful social force than new “non-government” trade unions, despite the higher (partially, superficial) number of its members. In reality, under U. Hancharyk and F. Vitko the FPB was primarily a convenient valve for reducing social tension in society and preventing pressure on Lukashenka’s regime. Several times through negotiations with Prime Minister Yermoshin and obtaining minimum concessions for different working groups, U. Hancharyk prevented much more radical public/political protests, i.e. meetings, strikes, set up of coalitions of democratic parties and further politicizing of trade unions. Even the most “critical” situations were resolved inside FPB

headquarters or by getting permission to hold a small-number picket somewhere at the city's periphery. With L. Kozik's election and FPB transformation into a "drive belt" of the authorities and administrations of individual enterprises and companies, the function of "exhausting steam" becomes null and void. That may result in growing tension in bottom FPB organizations and even reduction under some circumstances of FPB membership because of people's flight into the ranks of "non-government", pro-active and free trade unions.

If the situation with the "official" trade unions does not change for better and they are totally subdued by the authorities (facts have proved that), the only asylum for them might be a wide-scale discussion among trade union (FPB) members on the ways of further existence and development. It should be emphasized again that in this case some people will leave trade unions, some will join "independent" trade unions and some will try to establish new free trade unions and trade union associations within FPB scope and thus influence the policy of FPB top officials. Consequently, *those structures and incentives should rely on extraordinary support.*

The first difficulty on that way is almost absolute absence of independent trade unionist press. In order to subdue the "Belaruski Chas" newspaper despite the resolution of FPB Board, L. Kozik dismissed its editor-in-chief Starykievich by his order. The FPB press service explained that as follows: "Starykievich's dismissal was motivated by the necessity of providing real pluralism of opinions when presenting and discussion the most important issues of trade union, government and public activities and putting newspaper contents into conformity with the current policy of the FPB and its member organizations". There is no doubt that from now on the newspaper will reflect the position of FPB top management, only. A. Starykievich was FPB newspaper editor-in-chief when FPB Chairman U. Hancharyk was challenging A. Lukashenka at 2001-Presidential Elections. Then the "Belaruski Chas" was clearly demonstrating its independent and democratic nature. The FPB new management rejected that attitude. "Rabochy" newspaper, which was quite popular, has no longer been published and circulation of some trade union newspapers-leaflets has been minute (see the annex "Statistic-Sociological Data", 'What Newspapers Do You Read?').

On the other hand, such development will probably result (similarly to the suppression of Minsk Underground workers' strike and prohibition of the Belarusian Free Trade Union in 1995 and other cases in social/political life of Belarus) in application by the authorities of different types of pressure — including force — against new trade unions. That, in turn, may result in temporary curtailment of the trade union movement, given that the workers have been threatened with dismissals and other punitive measures.

Expectations on international solidarity and the influence of Russian trade unionist (and political) leaders cannot be a determining factor for Belarus. In our opinion, A. Lukashenka

deliberately pursues autonomy and limitation of trade unions and their subordination to the authorities, so he will resolutely counteract any external attempts in establishing genuine free trade unions. Moreover, official Belarusian diplomacy has achieved some success in misguiding the international trade union movement about trade unions' status in Belarus. That might be proven by the fact of electing Belarus the deputy-member of the Administrative Council of the International Labor Organization (ILO) at its session in Geneva in June 2002, which was most unexpected for Belarusian trade union leaders, including the FPB.

On the other hand, trade unions' participation in the Presidential Elections provided recognition of not only structural weaknesses and organizational deficiencies, but also of broad prospects in the country's public and political life.

Consequently, review of these events, consolidation of opinions of representatives of the authorities and trade union leaders, comments of ordinary people and rank-and-file trade union members, shows the conclusion that the role of trade unions in restructuring of socio-economic life of the country and its democratization will be significant. It will be significant only if the entire political situation changes, i.e. if current regime is gone or starts floating toward the rule of law principles. According to some facts, prior to the establishment of the authoritarian regime in Belarus, the FPB had imposed some influence on the country's life through its contacts with the Government and work in the Parliament (the FPB had the right of legislative initiative). Presently, trade unions are not represented in the Parliament, while the FPB was assigned with the task of becoming an organization, which will curb workers, protests and subordinate them to the authorities, not to protect them and teach them on the ways of safeguarding their interests.

Some Recommendations for Enhancing The Trade Unionist Movement in Belarus and Strengthening Its Public Role

The trade unions' status review could draw a conclusion that information is a key element of providing support to the Belarusian trade unions: promotion of trade union press (regional and local trade union newspapers, the "Rabochy" national newspaper and other leaflets and bulletins). Moreover, it would be appropriate for new trade unions to establish a network of public centers with specialists on mass media, organizational trade union work, and legal issues both at the national and regional levels (Minsk and the six Regions).

On the other hand, intensive education is required for overcoming negative public opinion of the role that trade unions play. The reason of trade unions' low importance in Belarus' social, political and economic life is not so much determined by low efficiency of trade union management. On the contrary, most of the reforms towards genuine trade unionism were initiated from the top (by U. Hancharyk and F. Vitko). However, bottom trade union organizations and the general public have not recognized that restructuring, or have at least been indifferent to it.

It should be emphasized that there is very low level of perception of trade unions as a public institution. Particularly, the FPB has always been regarded as a semi-government structure. There is a widespread wrong public opinion about trade unions as an organization providing holiday vouchers, cash assistance, etc. Workers don't understand that trade unions have to advocate their rights *together with them but not instead of them*.

Perhaps, this problem can be cushioned (quite a long time will be required to overcome it) through lectures, workshops, training courses, etc. among various categories of population in different Belarusian regions and settlements. Together with other stakeholders, that task could be solved through the Peoples' University Program because its management has clear understanding of the issue. (For instance, the Peoples' University has received proposals on such work from Mahilew Chemical Fiber Manufacturing Association, which may partially cover the costs.)

As to comprehensive cooperation with and support of the current Belarusian Trade Union Federation by international trade union structures, they are hardly possible. Any potential

contacts or meetings will be used by the Belarusian authorities for the propaganda of assertions that only after “state institutionalization” of trade unions they began developing in the right direction and that has been welcomed and supported by the international community, international trade union organizations and other agencies.

Of course, complete breeching of contacts with the FPB would be impossible and counterproductive. A minimum required cooperation level should be maintained, with explicitly stipulated priorities in support and future promotion of the Belarusian trade unionist movement towards of its genuine trade orientation and democratization. In our opinion, a bottom threshold should be set. It may be the training of trade union activists with mandatory participation of international trade union experts, various-type monitoring, conferences (with mandatory participation of new trade unions’ representatives), etc. It should be remembered that the absolute majority of FPB top management, which had been generated at the time of the USSR, not only regarded the actions on putting the FPB back under government control and appointing L. Kozik their new leader as a normal thing, but accepted that with great enthusiasm. Those people will work for employers (the State, A. Lukashenka, etc.), but will never conflict with them because of some workers or rank-and-file trade union members.

New, alternative trade unions have faced the same problems and public attitude to them as FPB member trade unions (public skepticism that they would protect members’ interests and specific understanding of trade unions’ role as distributors of in-cash and in-kind assistance, vouchers, etc.). Moreover, a subjective factor has been applied to FPB non-member trade unions (threats, lay-off, reluctance to be distinguished, etc.).

Given the aforesaid and summarizing the review of the current status and prospects of Belarusian labor and trade union movement, the following should be stated:

- under present conditions of a stagnating economic and social/political situation in Belarus, there is almost no demand of trade unions by the public (as well as of other structures of civil society) as organizations advocating workers’ rights. Currently, there are neither large-scale workers’ protests nor rapid growth of the labor movement. However, it is known that European trade unions were established under conditions of a growing labor movement for better working conditions and higher salaries. The Belarusian independent trade unionist movement in early nineties got its start from the same basis;

- the aforesaid is predetermined by the fact that due to many reasons there is no public understanding either of trade unions’ important role in establishment and development of civil society, or sometimes even of major democratic values;

- trade unions are facing a paradox: their weakness does not attract people (how the FPB could have protected workers’ rights, if it was ignored at all levels), but they will be weak and non-influential unless they have human input;

– many citizens are in the process of self-identification and are looking for their niche in civil society infrastructure, but they do not associate consideration of their social needs with trade unions. They see neither themselves in the trade union movement, nor the existing trade unions within the civil society;

– undoubtedly, the situation is influenced by unclear FPB and new trade unions' positions and by the lack of trade union leaders (or by their weak performance), who are able to distinguish, explain and present to the public the tasks, which trade unions have to set and achieve in Belarus.

Given the fact that (perhaps, temporary) there are no workers' protests in Belarus now, most of their prerequisites (i.e. low salaries, continuous growth of prices and neglecting by management of workers' demands and requirements) have been in place. The following factors might influence the change in the trade union movement in Belarus towards its future democratization, capacity promotion and strengthening:

– broad advertising of trade union importance and values through rallies, mass media, lectures, training courses, etc;

– establishment of regional data/analytical centers (with an expert on mass-media, a lawyer and an expert on trade union corporate relations) in all six regions and analytical headquarters in Minsk;

– introduction of training courses on the trade unionist movement organization and promotion for top managers of all types of Belarusian trade unions, under control of and with assistance from international trade union organizations and with participation of their experts on methodology;

– establishment of an influential national newspaper, which will obligatorily highlight trade unionist and labor movement but will be absolutely independent of any trade union. (It may originate from the existing “Rabochy” (*The Worker*) newspaper (editor-in-chief V. Ivaskievich) or a new initiative by A. Starykievich on establishing a national mass newspaper with mandatory emphasis on trade unions as a real power.)

*By Valyantsin Holubew
and Alyaksei Khadyka*

ANNEXES

A Brief Dictionary “2002: Who is Who in The Belarusian Trade Union Movement”

Aliyeva Marya Ryhorawna (b. 1 January 1953). Secondary education. Worked as a controller at Minsk Motor Plant (1970–1971) and coil winder at Minsk Electric/Mechanical Plant (1971–1975). Deputy Chairperson of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (1993–1995), its logistics manager (1995–1997) and Chairman of the Belarusian Free Trade Union. From May 1999, she is the Chairperson of the Belarusian Organization of Working Women, whose establishment she initiated in 1996, and Vice-President of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions.

She has experience of participating in the labor movement, particularly the women’s movement and has established prestige there.

Antonchyk Siarhiej Antonavich (b. 1 April 1956). Secondary education. Worked as a galvanizer and operator of mechanical devices at Minsk Industrial Association named after Lenin (presently BelVAR instrument building plant). Actively promoted labor movement from its naissance in 1989. Member of Parliament (Supreme Soviet) in 1990–1995, belonged to Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) faction. Member of anti-corruption Parliamentary Committee headed by A. Lukashenka. In December 1994, made a report about corruption of President Lukashenka (elected in 1994). Sued for that by I. Tsitsyankow, Head of Directorate of Presidential Affairs, was found guilty for aspersion and his property was partially confiscated. He was among those opposition MPs, who on 12 April 1995 went on hunger strike, protesting against the Referendum, imposed by A. Lukashenka.

In May 1999, he actively participated in the Presidential Elections campaign, launched by the Belarusian opposition. He does not belong to any political party and is the Head of the Public Foundation for Supporting the Unemployed.

Recently he has debarred from the political and trade union movement. Actually, he has no contacts with democratic parties and trade unions. However, many times he tried to give an impetus to the labor movement, based on his experience of the nineties (actually, he tried to become its head and his last attempt was in January 1999, when the National State Committee was established). However, neither Committee, nor Antonchyk, personally, has undertaken any active actions. During the 2001 Presidential Elections campaign he first proposed himself as a candidate and then supported another challenger — M. Marynich. Antonchyk's nomination was nothing but self-advertising, not a well-thought over and prepared action.

Babayed Viktor Siarhieyevich (b. 25 June 1950). Graduated from the Belarusian Non-Government Law Institute (1998). Worked as head of blasting operations at Ukhta Geophysical Seismological Prospecting expedition (1971–1976), head of blasting operations at the Central Geophysical Expedition (Minsk, 1976–1977), blaster expert at “Shahtspestroy” Trust (Salihorsk, 1977–1991). He was Vice-President of the International Miners' Association (Moscow, 1991–1993), President of the Executive Bureau of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (1998–2002). Chairman of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union.

He is a pro-active and resolute person, who can organize and lead the people.

Bielanowski Mikalai Aliaksandravich (b. 24 December 1954). Graduated from the Superior School of Trade Union Movement under the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (VCSPS) named after I.M. Shvernik as an economist (Moscow, 1984) and from the International Institute of Labor and Social Relations as a lawyer (Minsk, 1995). First worked at “Logoza” state-owned farm (1973–1974) and then served in the army (1974–1976). Later worked as a metal craftsman, adjuster of molding machinery (1976–1986), chairman of trade union committee of metallurgical production (1986–1990), economist at Minsk Truck Plant (1990), Deputy Chairman of the National Council of the Trade Union of Automobile and Agricultural Machine-building Workers (1990–1995). Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Trade Union Federation.

Bielanowski can quickly switch over his attitude an opinion, depending on the situation and can quickly adjust himself to new circumstances. When F. Vitko was elected FPB Chairman, he demonstrated devotion to him personally and his plans for FPB restructuring, advocated strengthening of trade unions and their independence from the government. Under intensifying pressure on the FPB and F. Vitko personally from summer 2002, Bielanowski openly sided with the authorities and became one of the initiators of Vitko's dismissal and Kozik's election. He is a typical sample of old conservative wing in the FPB.

Bulhak Vadzim Antonavich (b. 8 November 1939). Graduated from Minsk Financial/Economic Vocational School as a financier (1957), Belarusian State Institute of the National Economy as an economist (1962), Superior (by correspondence) Party School under the Central Committee of the Communist Party (1974). Served in the army (1958–1961), worked as an inspector of government revenues at Zelva district financial department in Hrodna Region (1957–1958), inspector of Vileika district financial department in Minsk Region (1961–1962), instructor of communist youth ('komsomol'), organizer of Minsk Region Committee of the Belarusian Leninist Young Communist League of the Byelorussian SSR (LKSMB) (1962–1963), First Secretary of Myadzel district LKSMB Committee (1963–1964), authorized organizer at LKSMB Central Committee (1966–1968), instructor of Minsk Region Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus (CPB) (1968–1971), instructor of CPB Central Committee (1971–1974), First Secretary of Vileika District City CPB Committee (1974–1983), inspector of CPB Central Committee (1983–1985), First Deputy Chairman of Vitsebsk Region Council of People's Delegates (1985–1987). Secretary of the Belarusian Trade Union Council (presently, the Belarusian Trade Union Federation) since 1987.

Bukhvostaw Aliaksandr Ivanavich (b. 22 November 1944). Graduated from Minsk Radio Technical Institute (1968), finished postgraduate apprenticeship of the Institute of Technical Cybernetics of the Academy of Sciences of Belarus (1982). Served in the navy (1968–1971). Worked as a hammerman at road workshops at Staubtsy, Minsk Region (1962) and as an engineer, head of computer center, deputy chairman of communist party committee and trade union chairman of "GOMSELMASH" Manufacturing Association. Co-chairman of Homel Strike Committee (1990–1992), Chairman of the Trade Union of Automobile and Agricultural Machine-building Workers (from 1990), Co-Chairman of the Belarusian Independent Association of Independent Trade Unions (from 1992).

Chairman of the Belarusian Labor Party (1993–1999), Member of Parliament (Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus of the Thirteenth Convocation).

Active dissident in the FPB, but his opposition usually does not go beyond FPB framework. Organizer and participant of numerous training courses, workshops and conferences on trade union movement matters. However, according to the Charter of the Trade Union of Automobile and Agricultural Machine-building Workers headed by Bukhvostaw, company directors may be its members. This is the evidence of some of his conformism.

Bykaw Hienadz Aliaksandravich (b. 1 August 1957). Graduated from the History Department of Belarusian State University (1987) and the Belarusian Law Institute (1999).

Served in the army in 1976–1978. Worked as a grinder, trade union chairman at Minsk Automatic Lines Plant (1978–1992). Chairman of the Belarusian Free Trade Union (1991–1996 and from 1999). Chairman of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (1996–1999).

From the early nineties has been most popular in Belarus' labor and trade unionist movement. Showed himself as a skillful organizer, who managed not only to maintain but also even to strengthen new trade unions under conditions of strong pressure from the authorities.

Vitko Frants Piatrovich (b. 3 September 1951). Graduated from the Belarusian Institute of Agriculture Mechanization (1972), Minsk High Communist Party School (1987) and Academy of Social Sciences (Bulgaria, 1991). Ph.D. (economics). Worked as a chief engineer at “Ushachsky” state-owned farm in Vitsebsk Region (1972–1975), secretary of Ushachy District LKSMB Committee (1975–1978), instructor of LKSMB Central Committee (1978–1980), secretary and second secretary of Vitsebsk Region LKSMB Committee (1980–1983), instructor of Vitsebsk Region Communist Party of Belarus' (CPB) Committee (1983), second secretary of Postavy District CPB Committee (1983–1985), instructor of CPB Central Committee (1985–1988), senior researcher, personnel department head in the Academy of Management under the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus (from 1991), Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Trade Union Federation and after U. Hancharyk's resignation till 16 July 2002 — Chairman of the Belarusian Trade Union Federation.

He is a skillful and experienced trade union leader, who under proper conditions could have restructured the FPB as to its democratization. However, like any representative of former Soviet style management system, he turned out to be too weak to authorities threats and resigned at his own will, instead of counteracting them.

Hancharyk Uladzimir Ivanavich (b. 29 April 1940). Graduated from the Belarusian Institute of the National Economy (1961), finished postgraduate studentship of the Academy of Social Sciences under the CPSU Central Committee (1976). Ph.D. (economics). Worked as an economist, deputy chief accountant at “10 Years of the BSSR” state-owned farm at Luban District of Minsk Region (1961–1965), first secretary of the Belarusian Communist League (LKSMB) Committee of Luban District (1965–1970), instructor of Communist Party of Belarus (CPB) of Minsk Region Committee (1970–1971), second secretary of Dzerzhinsk District CPB Committee (1971–1973), first secretary of Cherven District CPB Committee (1976–1982), instructor, deputy head of Party organizational work of CPB Central Committee (1982–1984), second secretary of Mahilew Region CPB Committee (1984–1986). Chairman of the Belarusian National Trade Union Council (1986 – December 2001), Chairman of the Belarusian Trade Union Federation (from 1990), member of the Executive Committee of the

General Trade Union Confederation, Member of Parliament (1986–1990) of the Byelorussian SSR and of the Republic of Belarus (1995–1996). In 2001, candidate for the Presidency of the Republic of Belarus supported by the union of democratic forces. After the forced resignation from FPB Chairmanship, is the Deputy Chairman of the General Confederation of CIS Trade Unions.

A typical representative of the soviet-style bureaucracy, who had realized advantages of democracy and national independence. Having lost the 2001 Presidential Elections, abstained — according to a former Soviet scenario — from active participation in opposition work and resigned from the post of FPB Chairman.

Ivashkievich Viktor Antonovich (b. 21 September 1959). Graduated by correspondence from the Journalism Department of the Belarusian State University (1991). Worked as a strapper at Minsk Railway (1981–1990), executive secretary of the Board (‘*Uprava*’) of the Belarusian Popular Front “Adradzhenye” (1990–1995), executive director of “Belaruskaya Perspektiva” Public Research/Analytical Center (1995–1999). Editor-in-chief of the “Rabochy” (‘*The Worker*’) newspaper (from 1997) and Vice-President of the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (from 1999).

In the early eighties, he actively participated in informal youth associations of national/democratic orientation, such as “Maistrownya” and “Talaka.” He initiated the march of protest along the Western Dvina/Daugava (together with his confederates from Latvia) against the construction of Daugavpils Hydro Power Plant (1987) and the march of environmental protest along the Prypyat, which was one of the first protests about Chernobyl-accident consequences (1988). He also initiated the strike of Minsk city bus drivers (1989) and set up strike committees at Minsk enterprises (1991).

Subject to numerous administrative prosecutions, arrests and fines (beginning from 1988). During arrests, two times was on hunger strike (15 days).

Prominent participant of labor and trade unionist movement, analyst, resolute activist, skillful organizer of different arrangements. “Rabochy” newspaper, which editor-in-chief he has been, could be one of the major tools of mass information of restructuring trade unions.

Kanakh Mikalai Uladzimiravich (b. 3 January 1953). Began his labor career in 1970 as a locomotive depot worker at the Belarusian Railway. Graduated from Ufa Industrial/Pedagogical Vocational School (1976) and served in the army (1976–1978). In 1978–1983 worked as a master of industrial training at a vocational school and in 1983–1995 worked at

Minsk Underground. Simultaneously (1986–1991) he got training at Moscow Academy of Labor and Social Issues, in the Institute of Trade Union Movement (labor economist). His labor record in trade union makes 21 years. In 1995, he was fired from the post of the Chairman of the Trade Union Organization of the Belarusian Railway at the pretext of layoffs for launching a strike. In 1996–1998, he was a workshop head of the “Zabudova Ltd.” and in 1998–1999 he was Deputy Director on Training the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions (BKDP). In 1999–2002, he was the director of information/legal center and then Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Free Trade Union (SPB).

On 16 February 2002, he was elected BKDP President. On 23 November 2002, the Fifth Extraordinary Congress of the BKDP elected Aliaksandr Yarashuk the new BKDP President instead of M. Kanakh.

Kozik Lianid Piatrovich (b. 13 July 1948). Graduated from the Belarusian State University (1977), Belarusian State Institute of the National Economy (1989). Ph.D. (economics) wrote a thesis on “Organizational/Methodological Foundations of Developing Inter-Government Economic Programs”. Worked as a turner, driver, technological engineer, Chairman of Young Communist League (LKSMB) organization of Barysaw Plant of Auto/Tractor Electric/Mechanical Equipment (1996–1976), Barysaw City Procurator assistant (1976–1977), Chairman of the Trade Union Committee of Barysaw Plant of Automobile and Tractor Electric/Mechanical Equipment (1977–1985), director of Barysaw Clothing Factory Popular Enterprise (1985–1990), Plenipotentiary Representative of the Republic of Belarus in the Collegium of CIS Inter-Government Economic Committee with the rank of Minister of the Republic of Belarus (1995–1998). Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus (from 1998). Authorized Representative of the President of the Republic of Belarus — member of the Executive Council of the Union of the Republic of Belarus and Russian Federation (from 1996), Deputy Chairman of the Integration Committee (from 1999), Deputy Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Union of Belarus and Russia (from 1999) and Representatives of the Republic of Belarus in the Council of Ministers of the Union State (from 2000). Member of the Belarusian Parliament (1990–1995), member of the Presidium, Chairman of the Committee on Economic Reform, Achievement of Economic Autonomy and Sovereignty of the Republic.

Representative of a conservative wing in the Belarusian social/political and trade unionist movement. With his election as FPB Chairman, open restoring of soviet/communist model of trade union organization with full subordination to the government and working for the government has been launched.

Lievaniewski Valiery Stanislavavich (b. 15 August 1963). Graduated at the top of his class from chemical vocational school (PTU-49) in Hrodna (1985), finished four courses of the Belarusian Institute of the National Economy. Served in the Soviet Army (1981–1983). Worked as a metal craftsman at mechanical workshops in the collective farm "Road to Communism" in the Hrodna District (1980–1981), radio instruments adjuster, mechanic processor of control/metering units and equipment at Hrodna enterprises (1985–1991). Entrepreneur (from 1991). Head of Hrodna Public Association on Protecting Taxpayers' Rights "LION" (1996–1999), Hrodna City Center on Protecting Consumers' Rights (from 1998), Chairman of the Belarusian Union of Entrepreneurs (1996–2000), Head of Hrodna Information/Legal Center (from 1996), editor-in-chief of the publications "Predprinimatel" ('*Entrepreneur*') (from 1998), "Nash Gorod" ('*Our city*') (from 1998), "Izbiratel" ('*Elector*') (from 1999), "Novy Partiyny Bulleten" ('*New Party Bulletin*') (from 2000). Chairman of the Belarusian Trade Union of Entrepreneurs (not registered), Chairman of the Strike Committee of Belarusian Entrepreneurs. Member of the United Civilian Party (OGP).

Many times he organized local and nation wide protests, including entrepreneurs' strikes and initiated a charity campaign, called "Our City" (from 1998). Subject to repression from the authorities (arrests, perquisition, summons to Procurator's Office, police, etc.). His attempt to become a member of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus was ceased through rejection of candidate registration (2000).

Palievikova Valiantsina Tsimafieywna (b.1950). Graduated from Belarusian State University, specialized in applied mathematics (1972). Worked at radio electronics sector enterprises (1972–1992). Became known in April 1991, when she was the only chairperson of Minsk enterprises' trade unions who headed a column of workers, protecting at the meeting against government social policy. From 1992, worked in the Belarusian Trade Union Federation (deputy head of Organizational Department, Secretary of the Executive Committee of FPB Board and head of information /analytical center). Chairperson of the Committee on Working with Women of the Board of the Universal Labor Confederation (ex VCSPS).

Chairperson of the Belarusian Women Party "Nadzeya" ('*Hope*'). On 24 August 2002, she was elected Chairperson of the United Social-Democratic Party, which was formed through merging of the newly established (on that very day) Belarusian Social-Democratic Party (faction of N. Statkevich Party) and a faction of Social-Democratic Hramada of S. Shushkevich (its Charter does not preclude dual party membership). The organization strikes for becoming the biggest in social-democratic segment of political forces, most close to trade union movement.

She enjoys much prestige in Belarusian trade union and social-democratic movement. She is a good organizer and it is possible that she would get more voices than many male candidates in challenging a top post.

Starykievich Aliaksandr Antonavich (b. 28 October 1972). Finished Minsk secondary school No. 145 (1989). Began his journalist career in 1990 as a correspondent of the Belarusian “7 Dney” weekly newspaper. Worked in Belarus as an assigned reporter of a number of Russian newspapers, notably “Kommersant” (November 1991 – August 1993), “Novaya Ezhednevnyaya Gazeta” (*New Daily Newspaper*) (August 1993 – February 1994) and “Izvestiya” (February 1994 – October 1997). Assigned correspondent of the newspaper “Novye Izvestiya” in Belarus (from 1997), editor-in-chief of “Belarusky Chas” newspaper (from 2000). Does not belong to any political party. Member of the *Rada* (Council) of the Belarusian People’s Republic.

Active participant of Belarusian social/political life, talented and popular journalist. Many times showed his ability to struggle in everyday life and in mass media sector. One of the most promising candidates for the post of editor-in-chief of the national democratic or trade union newspaper.

Fiadynich Hienadz Fiodaravich (b. 31 July 1957). Graduated from the Belarusian Polytechnic Institute (1980) as a mechanical engineer. Worked as an engineer, chief engineer of design bureau of precise electronic equipment building (1980–1988), deputy Chairman of the local Communist Party Committee and Chairman of Trade Union Committee of PLANAR Research/Manufacturing Association (1988–1990). Chairman of the Board of the Trade Union of Radio Electronics Sector Workers (from 1990), Co-Chairman of the Association of Independent Trade Unions of Industrial Sector. Member of Minsk City Council of Delegates (1990–1994). Member of the Belarusian Labor Party, its Deputy Chairman (from 1993). Member of consenting National Council of the Republic of Belarus.

Chobatava Tamara Iosifawna (b. 22 February 1939). Higher education. Worked as a head of accounting and statistics department at Voroshilov District Committee of Young Communist League (1960–1961), teacher of biology at Minsk secondary school No. 63 (1961–1963), tutor at Gomel residential school No. 2 (1963–1967), organizer of extra-curricula activities at school No. 6 (1967–1971), director of school No. 20 (1971–1978) in Minsk, inspector of educational department in the Ministry of Education of the BSSR (1978–1980) and head of popular education department of Minsk City Executive Committee (1980–1984), Chairperson of the National Committee of the Belarusian Trade Union of Education and

Research Sector Employees (from 1984). Member of the National Council, Presidium of the Belarusian Trade Union Federation, Congress of the General Trade Union Confederation (VKP), VKP authorized representative in the Educational Council of CIS countries.

In 1993, her trade union passed through all legally stipulated stages, preceding a general strike, which was cancelled because the Government had made significant concessions.

Honorable teacher of the Republic of Belarus, USSR top of her class in education.

Awarded by the Silver Sign of the General Trade Union Confederation for the "Merit to Trade Union Movement".

FPB Assets

Up to 1992, the Belarusian Trade Union Federation (FPB) did not possess any assets. The All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (VCSPS) owned all trade union assets. After the disintegration of the USSR, the General Trade Union Confederation (VKP) inherited VCSPS duties.

In 1992, the VKP passed a decision on transfer of assets located in ex-USSR Republics to the trade-union establishments, incorporating, at least, 50% of the population. Consequently, the FPB got 145 facilities, among which there were big administrative buildings and small stadiums, culture clubs, sanatoriums, resort facilities, swimming pools, etc.

Up until 1995, the Federation controlled social insurance funds. That provided financing of sport schools, children amateur circles and other loss-making but important areas. When the FPB had lost control of some of its authority over social insurance funds, it was no longer able to finance children sport schools. As a result, 46 facilities were freely reallocated to local governments' balance sheets, including stadiums in Navahrudak and Mahilew, a sports center in Brest and "Neman" center in Hrodna. The only condition set by the FPB for the reallocation was maintaining of sports facilities operating profile without charging rent.

Presently, all FPB assets are distributed among the balance sheets of several unitarian enterprises, established by the FPB. For instance, "Belarusturist" has more tourist camps and nine tourist hotels (for instance, "Turist" and "Orbita" hotels in Minsk), recreation facilities at Narach, Braslawskie and Lesnye lakes and "Vysoky Bereg" tourist village. "Belaruskurort" manages 11 sanatoria for adults ("Pridneprovsky", "Narach", "Krinitsa" and others), 2 children's sanatoria, 2 recuperation facilities, 2 recreation facilities and "Belarusachka" sanatorium for mothers with children. Totally 6054 persons may be accommodated and treated there. Almost 100,000 people improved their health there last year.

A company with a construction profile was established for FPB-managed facilities rehabilitation. Construction workshops are located in Fanipal. Among its educational/culture facilities the FPB may be proud of the Institute of International and Social Relations (with 2 affiliates), 2 training centers in Homel and Vitsebsk and three palaces of culture.

In each regional capital city there are FPB administrative buildings (e.g. at Masheraw Avenue in Minsk). FPB also manages sports facilities, for instance “Spartak” center at Berut Street, “Orlenok” and “Volna” swimming pools and children’s sport camp at the Minsk freshwater reservoir (“Minsk Sea”).

In order to maintain the buildings, some space has been rented. For instance, some space at the Palace of Culture at Skaryna Avenue in Minsk has been leased to cafeterias and casinos. However, if you enter the building from the back door you will still find there a lot of amateur circles. Their fees are symbolic and they are hardly enough to cover expenses for the trainers.

“Belorusskaya Gazeta” as of 21 January 2002, wrote that, according to the FPB Chairman Hancharyk interview with “Interfax” Agency on 15 July 2002, “L. Kozik will surrender trade union property, which has been fought for many years”. Hancharyk emphasized that it would be “a bad scenario for the trade union leader personally”.

Answering to polls’ initiators A. Starykievich, ex-editor of “Belaruski Chas” newspaper, in his interview on 15 August 2002 was also inclined to believe that L. Kozik was personally interested in redistributing ownership rights for trade union property.

According to A. Lukashenka’s press-service (19 August 2002), L. Kozik informed the President about the first-trade union’s initiated-meeting of the National Council on Labor and Social Issues, which reviewed the implementation of the General Agreement between the trade unions, employers and the Government. Moreover, the issue of transferring social infrastructure facilities, notable orphanages, into government property was discussed at the meeting. In this respect President Lukashenka expressed his support to trade unions, meaning that social sector workers’ interests should not be suppressed “It will be intolerable, if somebody loses a job or gets a smaller salary,” the President said. In his opinion, the process of transferring kindergartens and other social sector facilities should be painless and gradual, not within an overnight”.

It should be noted that deliberate maneuvers of top officials, aimed at relieving the FPB of its assets, might result in turnaround of the organization, which will have to follow purely trade union tasks in future.

Statistic Sociological Data

(According to public opinion polls undertaken by the NISEPI in 1997–2002)

Distribution of answers to the question about trust/distrust in government and non-government institutions

	FPB, Formal trade unions	Free and independent trade unions	President	National Assembly	Political parties (opposition)
1998, annual	-0.143	-0.126	+0.258	-0.077	-0.320
1999, annual	-0.198	-0.181	+0.162	-0.184	-0.409
07.2000	-0.198	-0.113	+0.135	-0.154	-0.371
10.2000 (leaders of GOVT and non-GOVT structures)	-0.143 (-0.167)	-0.087 (-0.074)	-0.017 (-0.630)	-0.270 (-0.741)	-0.402 (-0.019)
11.2000	-0.159	-0.048	-0.017	-0.235	-0.369
2000, annual	-0.077	-0.055	+0.064	-0.207	-0.315
2001, annual	-0.147	-0.109	+0.051	-0.225	-0.391
04.2002	-0.198	-0.136	-0.179	-0.328	-0.391

Trust index may have values from +1 to -1. It is calculated as a quotient of the sum of total positive answers (“do trust”) and negative answers (“don’t trust”) and total number of the respondents, who gave answers.

Awareness of polls’ participants was important parameter. If in 1998, as to the question on trusting the FPB and independent trade unions difficulties in answering (did not know what to answer) had 55.9% and 49.2% of the respondents, correspondingly, in 2002, the proportion of those who were not sure (did not know) reduced to 33.7% FPB and 31.4% (independent trade unions).

**Distribution of answers to the question about trust/distrust
in government and non-government institutions in 2000**
(Leaders in general and leaders of GOVT structures in brackets)

	June 2000	September 2000	October 2000	December 2000	December 2000 trust/distrust, %
FPB, Formal trade unions	-0.491 (-0.524)	-0.268 (-0.277)	-0.167 (-0.240)	+0.105 (+0.091)	32.4/ 22.0
Free and independent trade unions	+0.074 (-0.048)	+0.222 (0.0)	+0.074 (-0.200)	+0.303 (0.0)	44.2/ 14.7
President	-0.784 (-0.381)	-0.702 (-0.304)	-0.630 (-0.320)	-0.767 (-0.647)	8.8/ 83.8
National Assembly	-0.765 (-0.333)	-0.796 (-0.524)	-0.741 (-0.520)	-0.758 (-0.697)	4.4/ 78.0
Political parties	+0.037 (-0.143)	+0.154 (+0.100)	-0.019 (-0.292)	(Opposition) +0.256 (-0.125)	44.2/ 19.1

**Rating of "trade union" parties, according to the question
"which party candidate you would vote for, if the election were today?" (%)**

	November 1999	April 2000	October 2000	April 2002 (local elections)
Labor Party (A. Bukhvostaw)	1.4	1.7	0.6	1.4
Women's Party "Nadzeya" (V. Palievikova)	8.4	5.8	2.9	4.3

What newspapers do you read? (%)
(Quotation by trade unionist newspapers)

	June 1997	July 2000	October 2001	April 2002
"Belaruski Chas"	-	-	5.2	2.6
"Rabochy"	2.0	2.4	2.4	1.6

Distribution of answers to the question about trust/distrust in trade unions, based on NISEPI polls in October 2002 (%)

Types of answers	10.1998	11.1999	10.2000	10.2001	10.2002
FPB member trade unions					
- Trust	14.9	17.8	18.6	22.2	21.0
- Distrust	29.2	33.0	32.3	36.7	39.4
Independent and free trade unions					
- Trust	14.5	19.8	18.9	25.5	27.5
- Distrust	27.1	28.5	27.4	36.2	34.0

Distribution of answers to the following question “Recently FPB Head F. Vitko, who criticized current social/economic policy, was replaced by the Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration L. Kozik, who — as many respondents believe — will be providing support by the trade unions of A. Lukashenka’s policy. Some people agree with the change and others don’t. What do YOU think?”

(In percentages, NISEPI polls as of October 2002)

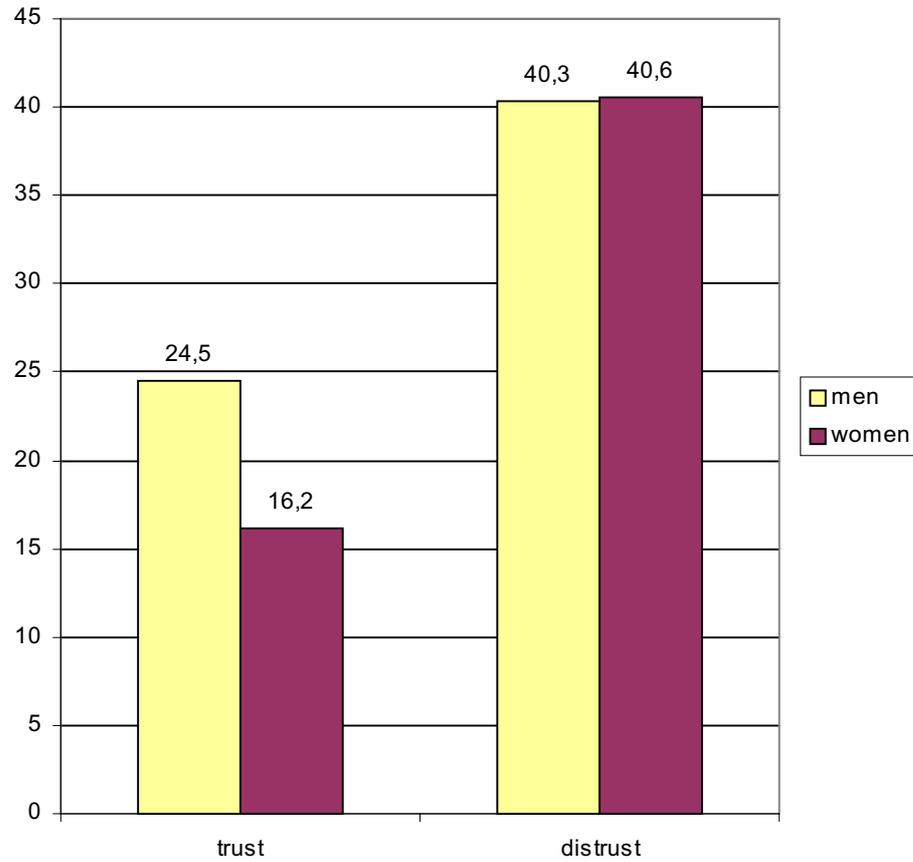
Types of answers	All respondents	A. Lukashenka’s champions	A. Lukashenka’s opponents
I agree. i.e. trade unions must support Presidential policy, if it answers workers’ interests	26.5	69.2	7.9
I disagree. i.e. trade unions must not support Presidential policy, if it violates workers’ interests	50.9	8.3	76.9
No answer/not sure	22.6	22.5	15.2

Sociological data presented and commented at the discussion of present publication draft on 15 November 2002 by A. Pantsyaley, a representative of NOVAK Customized Research Private Company (e-mail: novak@solo.by)

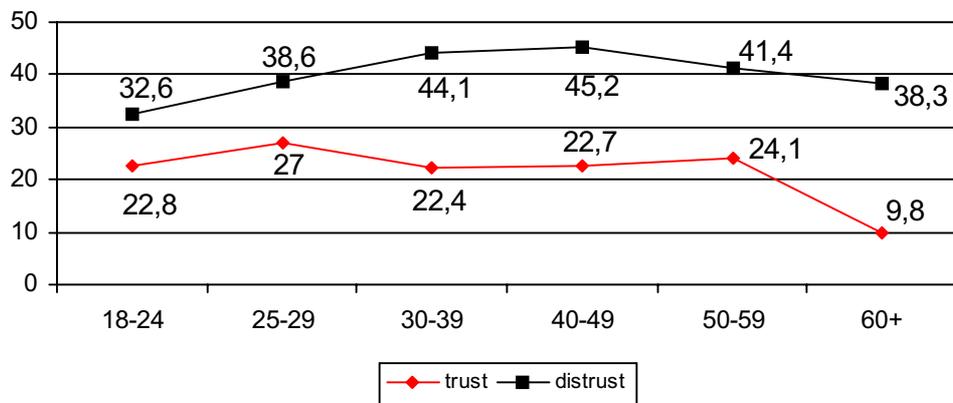
On a monthly basis, NOVAK sociological laboratory monitors public opinion, including the question about the extent of public trust in state and public institutions and agencies. The following is some data as of June 2002.

Extent of trust in traditional trade unions was 25.4%, distrust — 53.3%; no answer/not sure — 21.3%, while 19.9% of the respondents trusted in independent trade unions. Distrust in independent trade unions was lower (40.4%) and “no answer/not sure” was 39.7%. Correlation of social and demographic status of the respondents can also be seen from the answers to the questions about trust. For instance, more men trust in independent trade unions than women, while the share of distrust is equal. As to age groups, the two groups may be distinguished: (i) 25–29 years, in which trust is higher than distrust and (ii) over 60 years, in which the proportion of trust is much lower but on the other hand there is no increase of the proportion of distrust in independent trade unions. There is a clear correlation between trust and education, i.e. extent of trust is proportional to education level. As to household income, two groups may be distinguished: (i) a group with less than 200,000 Belarusian Rubles (BYB) monthly incomes and (ii) over 200,000 BYB. Extent of trust is slightly higher in the second group.

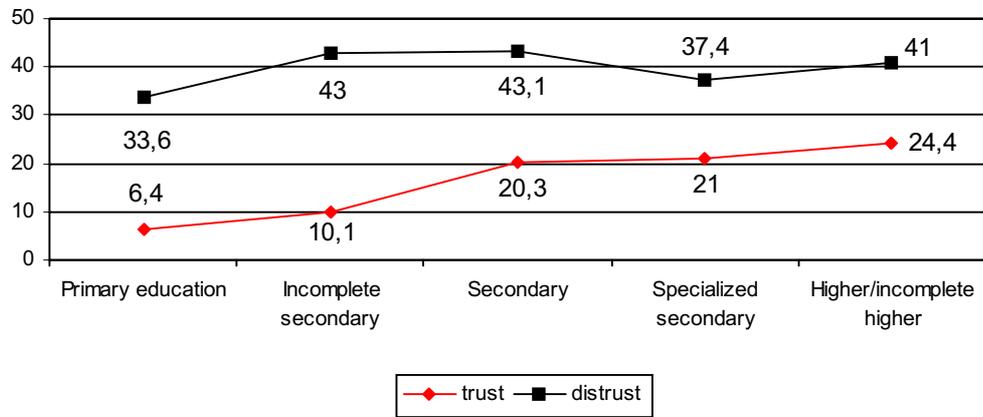
Extent of trust in independent trade unions by sex



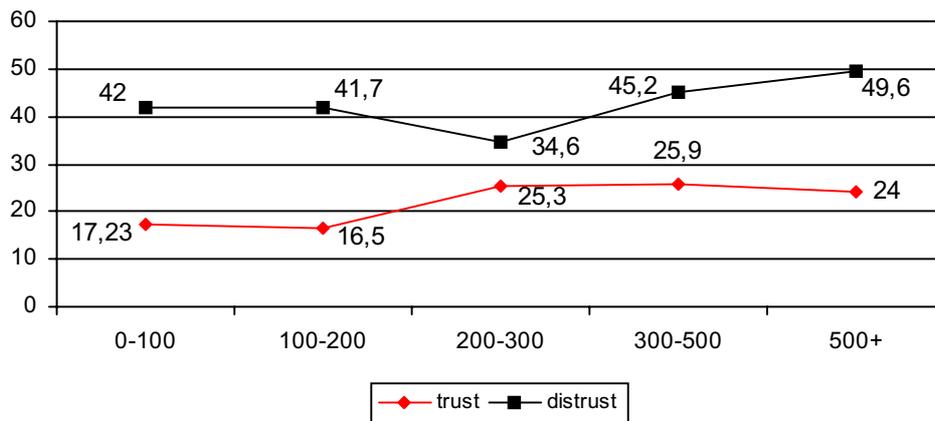
Extent of trust in independent trade unions by age



Extent of trust in independent trade unions by education level



Extent of trust in independent trade unions by household income



History of Establishing and Liquidating SPB Cells in Pinsk

*(City of Pinsk, 132,000 inhabitants, Brest Region,
southwest of Belarus)*

In 1999, within the scope of Wojtek Lovec (Poland) project, a number of trade union workshops, sponsored by US trade unions (AFL-CIO) took place in Belarus, including Pinsk. Those were five-day workshops, based on interactive training methods with an aim of enhancing trade unionist movement in order to set up and develop primary organizations of new trade unions.

Some of those workshops took place in Pinsk. I was the local organizer of those workshops. As a result of such trade unionist training, over 100 persons from Pinsk labor teams received knowledge about labor and legal relations with employers. Moreover, my partners from the “XXI Century” and “Pinsk Philomates Club” non-government organizations got an opportunity to attend various workshops and meet representatives of city labor teams.

As a result, in June-July 1999, two cells of the Belarusian Free Trade Union (SPB) were established in Pinsk:

1. Primary trade union organization of “Dnieper-Bug Waterway Enterprises” (almost 300 employees; and 5 persons, according to SPB lists made public). Those 5 persons are the managers of the SPB trade union primary cell and the whole member list was decided to be kept secret for a while in order not to put the people under administrative pressure.

As it turned out, precautions were not unjustified. The administration imposed pressure in the following way: by imposing more intensive control over SPB cell members, refusing them in receiving premises and pressure on their relatives.

All SPB cell members had to resign “at their own will”. SPB Head Hennadz Homich had undergone three successful court arbitrations with the administration as to getting compensation for labor injury and restoration of his position after illegal dismissal (court sessions were attended by the following SPB representatives: Uladzimir Maley (lawyer), Viktor Yarashuk (Belarusian Helsinki Committee), Vasily Matskievich and Aliaksandr Morhal (Pinsk division of “Vesna” Legal Center).

However, company administration managed to persuade the team against SPB presence in the company.

2.Primary trade union organizations of “Pinskdev” furniture manufacturing factory (5,000–6,000 employees; though the SPB trade union officially registered 3 members, only. Of course, they were SPB managers. At the consent of the Homich organization, they decided not to make public the list of all SPB union members).

Having been notified, company administrations and authorities took a number of measures towards the activities of the new trade union, including psychological pressure, threats and money-motivated pressure on new trade union activities.

Therefore, directors of the largest two companies in the city did everything possible and even impossible to kill labor initiatives in Pinsk in their conception. Administrators thrust unjustified claims on trade union leaders. Through provocation and fraud the administration managed to achieve the desired result — primary organizations ceased their existence.

Presently, none of SPB activities is working at those companies. Directors were not concerned to see their employees leaving and refused to realize that principles of partnership and cooperation lead to the development of civilized and equal relations and, consequently, to the development of civil society, which, in turn, would facilitate making rational managerial decisions and, finally, result in improvement of company financial status.

4 September 2002

Hennadz Homich

Chronicle of Establishing “Yellow” Trade Unions *(Extracts from www.praca.by site)*

In February 2002, an initiative group was established at Minsk Truck Plant (MAZ) — one of the largest factories in the country. It initiated the set up of a “new” autonomous trade union organization subordinated to company management. The main idea was to split one of the strongest sectorized trade unions, i.e. the Trade Union of Automobile and Agricultural Machine-building Workers headed by Aliaksandr Bukhvostaw. As is known, that workers’ association has continuously advocated workers’ interests and called upon them to unite in order to get appropriate salaries. It has rejected compromises aimed at reducing workers’ living standards. Company administration hated the bellicose trade union. MAZ administration impeded trade union fees collection and nourished the idea of establishing a pocket trade union organization.

On 28 February, the Board of the Belarusian Trade Union Federation (FPB) passed a decision on conducting a nation-wide protest on 28 March 2002 under the slogan “No to the growth of prices!” and “Yes to adequate living standards and trade union rights!” However, not all sectorized trade unions agreed with that decision. For instance, the Trade Union of State and Other Institutions’ Employees voted against the campaign. Moreover, its Chairman Aliaksey Zabalotsky stated that the expanded Board of the Republican Committee had negatively evaluated the performance of FPB previous leaders and the current policy of its present management, especially its collaboration with the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions in implementing ILO Project “Protecting Workers’ Rights and Promoting Democracy and Economic Reforms in Belarus”. If the FPB did not change its policy, the civil servants’ trade union would suspend its membership in the Federation, he said.

Aliaksandr Bukhvostaw argued that on 6 March 2002 the Board of the Trade Union of Automobile and Agricultural Machine-building Workers would expel from its ranks those MAZ trade union members who had initiated establishment of a “new” trade union. Actually, it was initiated by company administration. Therefore, it would be director-controlled or rather a “yellow” trade union.

On 12 March 2002, the Board of the Trade Union of Automobile and Agricultural Machine-building Workers passed a decision on expelling from its members Valyantsin Hurynovich, MAZ General Director, Vassily Dybal, MAZ Trade Union Chairman and their deputies. That decision was motivated by MAZ administration's continuous attempts to set up a director-controlled trade union in the company.

Another trade union will soon be established at MPOVT Unitarian Enterprise (ex-plant named after Ordzhonikidze). Its trade union conference passed the corresponding decision on 14 March.

MAZ trade union leaders, who had defected to the administration, tried to collect trade union fees on behalf of the Trade Union of Automobile and Agricultural Machine-building Workers, with member lists in their hands. They managed to collect 30% of the total. That index might be interpreted as a real rating of Vassily Dybal team. By April 2002, there was a unique situation at MAZ: there were three trade unions, i.e. the director-controlled union, the Free Trade Union of Metal Workers and the Trade Union of Automobile and Agricultural Machine-building Workers (ASM).

The ASM Trade Union Presidium established an initiative group for electing a new trade union committee at Minsk Truck Plant. A Trade Union conference took place on 4 April and elected new trade union committee/members. Uladzimir Karpukhin was elected Chairman and Syarhey Sheremet — his deputy.

Mid-April 2002 saw further purposeful dismantling of the sector-based principle of trade union organization. Deputy Chairman of Minsk Municipality, Mikalai Petrushin, recently had a meeting with the heads of educational departments and deputy heads of city districts' administration and set a tough and unequivocal task for them. As soon as possible they had to hold conferences and put together initiative groups for establishing an "alternative" trade union in the educational sector.

In late April 2002, ex-Chairman of Mahilew Automobile Plant Trade Union (incorporated in the Belarusian Trade Union of Automobile and Agricultural Machine-building Workers) Vassily Titow surrendered to plant Administration most of the trade union achievements in the protection of workers interests. Based on administration initiative, he established a "yellow" trade union here. Sectorized trade union of agricultural machinery workers knew about the forthcoming "coup d'etat". But it didn't provide any assistance to company union. Over 4,000 workers were indignant. Why had their team been neglected by the Federation? (As they say,

working with people was insufficient. Workers were also displeased by Bukhvostaw, who “had neglected trade union work and plunged into politics”, according to them). It should be noted that there was a second challenger at the establishing conference of the “new” trade union. Workers’ candidate Aliaksandr Karytkin lost to the winner by 40 votes, only. It meant that the situation in the company was tense enough. It is interesting that the company’s previous trade union organization did not leave the sectored trade union and is legally effective. There is also a primary organization of the Free Trade Union, a sort of trade union mishmash. Some people are surprised and others are embarrassed, but most of the workers are indifferent.

In late April 2002, a decision on self-liquidation of the city organization of the educational and research sector trade union and establishment of a new organization was passed in the city of Baranavichy without any notification of the majority of primary organizations and union members. It was absolutely confronting provisions of the trade union charter.

After the decision, Mikalai Kowsh (Regional department of the Educational and Research Sector Trade Union) went to Baranavichy together with the Chairperson of the Belarusian Educational and Research Sector Trade Union Tamara Chobatava. But they were deprived of an opportunity of meeting teachers’ teams.

MAZ-PO BelavtoMAZ (“yellow”) trade union committee delegated its functions to ASM Trade Union Council and the new MAZ-ASM trade union committee and ceased existence from 19 June 2002. Presently, the ASM trade union at the MAZ is headed by MAZ trade union Chairman Uladzimir Karpukhin, an adjuster of the press workshop. It was the first big victory over “yellow” trade unions.

Late May 2002 saw pro-active realization in Minsk of authorities’ plans on establishing “yellow” trade unions. Teachers and cultural sector employees submitted to administrative pressure. Construction workers were selected to be the next. MINSKSTROY (*‘Construction’*) State-Owned Production Consortium was assigned with the most important task, i.e. the establishment of Minsk construction workers trade union, which won’t be the member either of the national sectored trade union, or the FPB. Presently it is the backbone of the Minsk Construction sector and incorporates almost two dozens of city biggest organizations: MAPID, MINSKPROMSTROY (*‘Industrial construction’*) and construction trusts, which employ over 20,000 workers.

In late May 2002, top managers of Homel Region Trade Union Association opened a strange game with their colleagues — heads of regional sectored trade union committees. As

is known, all decisions have been passed there at the meetings of the board, which provides transparency, taking into consideration of all opinions and development of consented trends of future policy. Sectorized trade union leaders were astonished, when they learned that behind their back Homel Region Trade Union Association top managers had almost completed their work on establishing coordinating councils of trade union chairpersons in all districts of the region. Based on those councils the first step towards establishment of a new allied trade union infrastructure would be made.

By generating new structures in parallel with the existing system, Homel Region Trade Union Association (which in turn had also been set up by regional trade union committees) has not merely exceeded its authority but has undermined the current sector-based principle of trade union organization and thus playing into the hands of those, who are interested in establishing a new trade union under government control.

Sectorized trade union leaders wrote a letter to the FPB and demanded clarification of the situation and review of the behavior of those trade union officials, who have been executing the order on liquidating trade unions.

On 30 May, FPB Plenary Session relieved FPB Deputy Chairman Mikalai Bielanowski of his duties. He had been in charge of organizational issues, in addition to being the head of Minsk City Trade Union Association. He had had neither enough capacity nor time for combining the two positions. In April and May, only, "yellow" trade unions were set up at Minsk Truck Plant, Mahilew Automobile Plant, and in the educational sector (Minsk and Baranavichy). Another one was being established at Minskstroy Consortium.

Minsk City Executive Committee policy might be an example of trade unions' "recoloring". Capital city officials launched the process of forced subordination of existing trade unions to the authorities. "Authorities may set up a parallel national trade union center prior to the Congress. If there is spinning-off from the trade union federation, if there exist primary "yellow" trade union organizations and alternative teachers' organizations in Minsk and Baranavichy, the authorities may unite those organizations and establish an alternative trade union center. As to its structure, one should ask the ideologists, who have been pursuing such policy," Frants Vitko said.

In June 2002, Belarusian authorities continued jeopardizing sector-based type of trade union organization. In all regions local trade union leaders were invited to local administrations and advised to leave the Belarusian Trade Union Federation. They were promised to have back the previously effective system of trade union fees allocation and maintaining of their current positions. With no obtained confirmation, some trade union leaders were said to receive a package of documents required for the establishment and registration of a "new" trade union. They were even promised to be exempted of a state duty for re-registration.

In mid-June 2002, Pinsk experienced the threat of losing its trade union organizations, incorporated into the Belarusian Trade Union Federation. Pinsk authorities got closely involved in establishing their own pocket trade unions. City trade union leaders were invited into the municipality and informed that soon they had to hold meetings of their primary organizations and elect delegates to the city conference on establishing new trade union organizations in Pinsk, precluding them from being FPB members. After the talk, trade union leaders were given all necessary documents for new trade unions' registration. Packages included new charters and templates of minutes of meetings of primary and city organizations.

The Belarusian Trade Union Federation requested General Procurator of the Republic of Belarus Viktor Sheiman to take measures against the officials, who violated the rights of trade unions. FPB Deputy Chairman Yawheny Burak said that at the press conference in FPB headquarters today (13 June). It was also said that since recent violation of trade union rights in Belarus have been massive.

Three weeks ago there was an attempt to take airmen trade union away from the Federation. But the union Board decided to maintain its sector-based principle of organization and membership in the FPB. However, sectorized trade unions of medical workers and Academy of Sciences' employees at their Board meetings decided to suspend their membership in the Federation.

Commenting that, FPB Deputy Chairman Burak reminded trade union leaders about their unions' charter provisions, stipulating that decisions on entering and leaving the trade union association could be made exclusively by the superior body, i.e. the Congress.

Citizens' right of uniting into trade unions, their set up and registration procedures are stipulated in Article 41 of the Constitution, the Law of the Republic of Belarus "On Trade Unions" and by the other legal documents.

The Republic of Belarus is a member of the International Labor Organization. Having ratified ILO Conventions, including Article 87 and Article 98, Belarus is committed to observe the main rights of the workers, i.e. to get united into trade unions for protecting their interests and freely negotiate living and occupational standards of trade union members.

Authorities have been provoking disintegration of the FPB and sectorized trade unions. The country's top officials and company directors have initiated establishment of company corporate trade unions, or "yellow" trade unions as they are called in the international trade unionist movement. Promoting establishment of alternative trade unions, which could weaken positions of existing trade unions, tempts the government. This is contrary to the principle of free associations, stipulated in ILO Convention No.87 "On Freedom of Associations and Organizational Rights Protection".

Based on principles and rights, pertaining to the freedom of association, the workers are entitled to make decisions on establishing their own trade union organizations and becoming members of such organizations, without any pressure from either employers or government agencies. According to the charter, they are also entitled to leave the organization, if they want.

Instead of protecting the existing and newly established trade unions from any discrimination of employers, the government has applied double interference. Firstly, it has interfered with employers by making them to establish "director-controlled" trade unions, and, secondly, with trade unions' proper business by trying by all means to divide traditional organizations and to put them under government control. With the participation of some trade union leaders, the authorities have crushed the sector-based principle of trade union organization. In parallel, territorial-based models of trade union organization have been developed at regional administrative level.

On 17 June 2002, the Trade Union of the Academy of Sciences suspended its membership in the FPB. According to the official information, it is a temporary measure. Six members of the Presidium out of nine participants supported proposal by local trade union leader Natalia Aliaksandrava.

On 18 June 2002, an experiment with trade union disintegration has begun from Brest Region, according to Brest Region Trade Union Association. Brest authorities set the task to establish "new" trade unions within the period of time, i.e. by 1 July 2002.

Beginning from June, a real terror against all-level trade union organizations has been launched in Brest and district centers alongside with the campaign for establishing trade unions subordinated to administrative agencies. Chairpersons of district executive committees first and then their deputies on informational/educational work were called to the Regional Executive Committee with leaving their current trade unions by 1 July and becoming members of newly established trade unions. Structural charts and registration applications to legal departments were drafted. Deputy Chairman of the Brest Region Executive Committee L. Tsouprik, Information Department Head N. Shpak, and Deputy Chairman of Brest District Executive Committee L. Gritsko are considered to be the chief organizers of the trade union movement disintegration. According to the Head of the Brest Region Trade Union Association Uladzimir Mirochnyk, "A genocide is committed against Belarusian trade unions, although we have not yet reached the level of a real trade union movement. Who needs pro-active and unsubdued public organizations, which call for appropriate living standards for workers? They simply hamper the authorities in realization of their objectives. Therefore, the task was set to remove a barrier in the form of a powerful trade union and replace it by a "yellow" trade union. Then there will be enough time for dealing with privatization and the next referendum".

The wave of establishing “yellow”, government-controlled trade unions reached the most numerous trade unions, i.e. the agribusiness sector. The Minsk City Committee headed by ex-chairperson Zoya Kavalyova left the trade union and initiated establishment of a new one. A corresponding resolution was passed on 19 June at the establishing conference. A newly born child was called Minsk City Trade Union of Workers of the Agribusiness Sector and Catering Industry. (APK&PP). The Conference passed a decision on incorporation into the Minsk City Association of Sectoral Trade Unions and making primary organizations of APK&PP Trade Union the inheritors of the previous trade union. Representatives of the Agribusiness National and Minsk Region Trade Union Committees were turned out from the establishing conference.

Kavalyova has been working on Agribusiness Trade Union disintegration for the long time. On 17 October 2001, at the Fifth Plenary Meeting of Minsk City Committee she initiated a resolution on leaving the Minsk Region Committee. The Regional Committee cancelled the resolution because it confronted the Charter. Then Kavalyova stopped allocating fees to superior organizations. For the past eight months, the City Committee has been using all fees collected in the city at its own discretion.

On 19 June 2002, FPB Chairman Frants Vitko commented on the status of the trade unionist movement in Belarus as follows: “Authorities would like to enhance FPB member trade unions’ “restructuring”. It means nothing, but liquidation of sectoral trade unions. Given that they are founding parties of the Federation, the FPB will be liquidated, too. Authorities thrust an idea of establishing regional organizations of sectoral trade unions, which in the future might set up some associations. It means establishment of trade unions by territorial principle and completion of their centralization at that level” However, it would be difficult to achieve this, if the authorities do it by themselves. Vitko was confident that much depends on how regional structures will act under such circumstances. They may either implement such plans hand in hand with the authorities through primary trade union organizations, or hold to the position of integrity and independence of the trade union movement and maintain the sectoral principle of trade union organization.

On 19 June 2002, the Board of the Belarusian Trade Union Federation passed the following resolution “On Situation Development in FPB Member Trade Unions”:

1. Actions of Government agencies and administrations and some trade union workers, aimed at changing the status and organizational structure of FPB-member trade unions should be denounced. Any attempts aimed at destructing sectoral principle of trade union organization and disintegrate trade union movement should be resolutely suppressed.

2. Any participation in an authorities-instigated campaign on trade unions' disintegration should be considered incompatible with regular employment in FPB organizational structures and sectorized trade unions. Persons facilitating liquidation of the independent trade unionist movement should be relieved of their duties.

3. FPB member trade unions are advised:

- to enhance their work on advertising the magnitude of trade union membership, explaining real objectives of trade unions' restructuring campaign organized by the government and business agencies;
- to arrange as soon as possible meetings with trade unions leadership of industrial enterprises and discuss the issues of trade unionist policy and tactics.

4. Resolution of the Board of the Republican Committee of Employees of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus as of 6 June 2002 "On the Situation in the Trade Unionist Movement in the Republic of Belarus" should be considered confronting the charters of the trade union and of the FPB (Para 1.10 and Para 3.3). The Board of the Republican Committee of Employees of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus (N.N. Aliaksandrava) is advised to cancel the aforesaid resolution.

5. Preparatory work of the Extraordinary Fourth Congress of the FPB should be accelerated. Through interviewing FPB Council members the opportunity of holding the Extraordinary Congress of the FPB on 31 July – 1 August 2002 should be considered.

6. List of members of the Preparatory Committee for the Fourth Congress of the FPB shall be approved.

F.P. Vitko, Chairman of Trade Union Federation

On 21 June 2002, the Board of the Republican Committee of the Trade Union of Agribusiness Workers passed a decision on excluding the former chairperson of the Minsk City organization, Zoya Kavalyova, from trade union members for actions against the trade union and because of joining another organization. They also sent a letter to the Chairman of the Minsk City Trade union Association N.A. Bielanowski with the request "not to make a decision on the registration of the Minsk City Trade Union of Agribusiness and Catering Sector Workers because of its illegal establishment".

On 4 July 2002, the Plenary Meeting of the Republican Committee of the Trade Union of Railway and Transport Construction Workers passed a decision on suspension of its membership in the Belarusian Trade Union Federation. It was the third FPB member sectorized

trade union, which passed a decision confronting the Charters of the trade union and Federation. Those actions were motivated by the trade union leadership dissent with the “politically orientation of FPB activities”. Plenary Meeting participants expressed their dissatisfaction that the social dialogue between the FPB and the authorities had not been maintained. The FPB was declared guilty.

According to Mikalai Novikaw, Chairman of the Minsk Oblast Committee of Agribusiness Workers, on 1 July 2002 Leninsky District Executive Committee in Minsk held a meeting with the heads of trade union committees of locally located enterprises, notably: “Elema”, Worsted Fibers Factory, Motorcycles and Bicycles Manufacturing Plant, Plant named after Kirov, Cold Storage Factory, “Krystal”, “Kommunarka” and other factories. Their trade union leaders were advised to begin the trade union “restructuring” process, i.e. to establish “new” trade unions.

On 28 June 2002 at the Plenary Meeting of trade union district committee, Rahachow district organization of the Belarusian trade union of educational and cultural sector employees made a decision to leave the Homel Region Organization of the sector trade union. That decision counteracted the decision of Homel Region Trade Union Association on leaving the Belarusian Trade Union Federation, which was passed under the pressure of Homel Region Administration. The Resolution of the Plenary Meeting of the district Committee “denounced the actions of A.V. Kabanets, Chairman of Homel Region Administration and V.A. Sabko, Chairman of Homel Region Association of Educational and Cultural Sector Trade Unions, aimed at destruction of the principles of integrity and independence of the trade unionist movement and to express distrust in them for gross violation of the Charters of the sectoral trade union and the Federation”.

In late June 2002, the “Zerkalo” (*The Mirror*) sociological service polled 500 MAZ workers at four gates of the company with the aim to clarify the details of establishing “director-controlled” trade union there and to find out workers’ attitude to that process and to trade unions, in general. The sociologists drew the following conclusion: “The process of establishing a “yellow” trade union at MAZ makes us believe that it is being establishment by MAZ administration, applying the stick-and-carrot principle but pretending that the process was initiated by the workers. Violations, pertaining to union members’ transfer from the Trade Union of Automobile and Agricultural Machine-building Workers (ASM) to pocket trade union are accompanied by absolute neglect of the Resolution No. 1804 of the Council of Ministers on member fee payments”.

Answers received during the polls provided for a conclusion that the establishment of the "yellow" trade union had not been the news of the day in the company: 51% of the respondents either had not heard about that, or were indifferent, or did not have any definite opinion on that matter. 26% of the workers supported the actions of MAZ administration, while 23% of the workers denounced them. Among the recipients 72% called themselves members of the "newly" established trade union and only 21% stated their membership in the previous (ASM) trade union.

As to establishment methods, 16% said that "nobody asked us, we were just transferred into the 'new' trade union", 26% said that "administration (boss, workshop manager, brigadier) forced us to join it", and 52% said that they "did it at their own will".

Those, who were forced to join the new trade union, had experienced the "stick" method. The threats (of lay-offs, salary payment delays, salary reduction and transfers to less paid jobs) resulted in 28% of the transfers; the promises of salary increase found response among 14% of the new members and promises of qualification grade improvement — among 9%. Fifty percent of the respondents based their "free will" on boss order to join the "new" trade union.

Of specific interest might be distribution of the answers on the question who — in respondents' opinion — initiated the establishment of "new" trade unions. 18% thought that the workers initiated them; 57% — by Presidential Administration; 10% — by city authorities; 4% — by Presidential "vertical-structured" agencies and 6% — by the President of Belarus.

Every nine out of ten new members wrote applications for joining the "new" trade union, but 46% of them did it at personal request of the administration. As to member fee payments, 94% of the respondents answered that their fees were deducted through the company accountant's office. It should be reminded that that procedure was forbidden by the Resolution No. 1804 of the Council of Ministers. Its violating is subject to prosecution but in reality, when there is a need...

Almost all respondents (98%) believe that trade unions have to work actively for improving workers' living standards. However, only 18% of them were sure that the "new" trade union would do it better against 17% who gave preference to the former one. As to the rest, they either did not expect anything from both, or did not know what to expect.

Generally, the situation was traditional both in former and "new" trade unions. However, the organizational work has been in progress...

In early August 2002, trade union organizations of “Palessie” Public Joint Stock Company (JSC) and Pinsk Artificial Leather Manufacturing Plant JSC with almost 7800 members in total, made a decision on further joint work within Brest Region organization of the Belarusian Trade Union of Light Industry Workers. It should be reminded that in early June those organizations evaluated FPB performance as unsatisfactory and decided to establish their independent trade unions. As a BELTA reporter was told in FPB press service, those organizations decided to come back to the Belarusian Trade Union Federation after the program declaration of the new FPB Chairman Lieanid Kozik on the necessity of consolidating and improving the work of trade unions with the authorities and employers.

“Belarusian Trade Union Movement” site has been in place since January 2001. The International Labor Organization opened it due to the implementation of the project “Establishment of the Belarusian Trade Unions’ Web Site.” The founding parties of the site are editorial boards of four Belarusian trade union newspapers and ILO Moscow Resident Office. Editors of the “Belaruski Chas”, “Rabochy”, “Salidarnasc” and “Rabochaya Salidarnasc” newspapers are the members of the Editorial Board, which determines site policy and development strategy.

Operational management of the site is provided by Natalia Ladutka (editor) and Yury Palevikow (web-master).

Primary Organization of Rechytsa Entrepreneurs of the Belarusian Free Trade Union

***(City of Rechytsa, 78,000 inhabitants,
Hemel Region, southwest of Belarus)***

The decision of establishing a primary organization of Rechytsa entrepreneurs of the Belarusian Free Trade Union (SPB) was made at a meeting of over 70 entrepreneurs in November 2000. On 9 January 2001, it was registered in the Belarusian Free Trade Union and with Rechytsa City Executive Committee (entry No. 03-046/110 dated 15 May 2001). Presently, it incorporates 235 Rechytsa entrepreneurs (60–70 members are paying fees).

Its major activity trends have been the joining of efforts for common protection of members' rights and interests, struggle for fair salaries, safe labor, health and other social guarantees. The trade union tries to promote entrepreneurship and private initiative development, business incubators, development of market economy, in particular, and of civil society, in general.

At the 2001 Presidential Elections, primary organization of Rechytsa Entrepreneurs of the Belarusian Free Trade Union actively participated in mobilizing the campaign. Its members participated in election monitoring.

With its 78,000 population, the city of Rechytsa is considered to be a large industrial center. It has a number of plants, particularly metal hardware plant, “Rechytsadrev” wood-processing factory (in August 2001 SPB primary organization of entrepreneurs conducted a training workshop there on trade union organization), hydrolysis and yeast factory, gas condensing factory, plastic items manufacturing plant, ceramic and vessel building plants as well as large refineries (43,000 workers, in total). Unfortunately, there have not been any structures of free trade unions at those enterprises. The workers are totally controlled by company administrations. There have been many cases of blunt violation of labor legislation, occupational safety, etc. Workers of various enterprises often seek consultative services and help in SPB primary organization of entrepreneurs. Usually, they ask for protection against administrative repression, i.e. illegal firing, lay-offs, delays in paying salaries, violations of

occupational health provisions and safety measure. The trade union has helped them to the maximum. It has been asking questions:

- How to counteract the myriad of government bureaucrats?
- How should an inspector behave in front of an entrepreneur?
- What rights towards an inspector does an entrepreneur have?
- How to protect an entrepreneur's assets, honor, and dignity?

Unfortunately, under present Belarusian realities people practice small business incidentally. Most of them don't have any special training. Therefore, they make economic and legal mistakes and put their business in danger. Unfortunately, many of them go bankrupt.

In order to give answers to these questions, a self-financing business incubator should be established in the SPB primary organization of entrepreneurs. Business incubation system dissemination in public organizations and free trade union will provide:

- a) establishment of self-financing system;
- b) raising of funds for public activities in the amount of 30% of the income of each activist, who has received profit through business incubation system;
- c) return of those public activities, who had had to stop active work because of no money for subsistence;
- d) attraction of politically pro-active and conscious Belarusian citizens to active work;
- e) training and provisioning of entrepreneurs with economic and legal knowledge in a clear form;
- f) increase in survival of SME structures under Rechytsa conditions;
- g) reduction of confiscated assets and penalties volume due to better knowledge;
- h) publishing of a monthly information newspaper;
- i) establishment of a "Legal Clinic", i.e. of a center providing free advice to the population.

The SPB primary organization of entrepreneurs would like to draw attention of international trade union organizations to the deplorable state of primary trade union organizations in Belarus. Top trade union management cannot be strong. If primary organizations are weak and vice versa, only strong primary organizations can set up a strong centralized trade union system. Therefore, the establishment of new Belarusian trade union committees should start from primary organizations, not the other way. Assistance and attention of international trade union organizations should be primarily focused on primary organizations.

Zurab Barbakadze

Mr. Zurab Trifonovich Barbakadze has been the Chairman of the primary organization of Rechytsa entrepreneurs of the Belarusian Free Trade Union since 2000. He was born on 21 March 1955 in Tbilisi, Georgia. Citizen of the Republic of Belarus. Member of the Belarusian Popular Front since 1994. Member of All-Belarusian “Club of Electors”. Member of Rechytsa department of “Civil Initiatives”. Member of Free Trade Union (SPB).

Education: Tbilisi State University, post graduate studentship at the Research Institute of Trade and Public Catering (Kiev, Ukraine, 1983–1985); National Research Methodological Training Center “ALGORITM”, received training in entrepreneurship management.

Conclusion

*E*vents taking place in Belarus' home policy actually confirm the authors' forecast about gradual subordination to the authorities of FPB member trade unions and delegating to them the functions of "transmission belts" for executing Presidential policy, like it was in the Soviet Union. There is no doubt that the authorities have been trying to transform trade unions into another controlled segment of social/political structure and preclude any potential opportunity of their independent participation in the country's political life, like it was before the 2001 Presidential Elections. Belarusian authorities have made no secret of that. A. Lukashenka openly stated, "together with strong Soviets and influential youth organization, resuscitated trade unions are the main pillars for building civil society in Belarus". Indeed, the Soviets have already been totally dependent on executive power and in September 2002 there was established the Belarusian Republican Youth Union, financed and controlled by the authorities. Trade unions have also undergone a centralized administrative "renaissance".

The fact of FPB incorporation into the government system was made clear in changing its name. "Belarusian Trade Union Federation" was renamed into "Trade Union Federation of Belarus." Belarusian Legislation precludes political and public organizations from using the word "Belarus" in their names, reserving this right for government institutions, only.

The forecast about the toughening of government and FPB attitude to independent trade unions, organizations and individuals, which disagree with the policy towards trade unionist movement, have also come true. A. Yarashuk, Chairman of the Belarusian Trade Union of Agribusiness Sector Workers was dismissed with violating the Law and M. Kovsh, Chairman of Brest Region Trade Union Committee of Education and Culture Sector was made to resign. The FPB has been actively working on liquidating Minsk Region organization of culture sector workers, which Chairman U. Mamonka made a complaint about the actions of the Government and FPB top officials to the ILO. Dismissal of all the employees of the "Belaruski Chas" trade union weekly newspaper, who had refused to execute orders by new FPB management, has been another link in the chain. All hopes about Belarusian trade unionist movement restructuring through the FPB have absolutely vanished.

No broad discussion on the trade unionist movement further development has taken place either in the country or inside the FPB. The public has not been involved. Neither active flight to independent trade unions, nor increase of FPB membership has happened. In a trice, the Belarusian trade unionist movement has rolled back by several decades. Like in the early nineties, it is now facing a difficult and challenging task of self-identification and becoming a genuine independent structure for protecting workers' rights.

Abbreviations in the Text

RB — Republic of Belarus

BSSR — Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic

USSR — Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

CIS — Commonwealth of Independent States

BUND — national social-democratic organization of Jewish workers in the Russian Empire and Poland (established in 1897)

RSDRP (b) — Russian Social-Democratic Workers' Party (the Bolsheviks)

RCP (b) — Russian Communist Party (the Bolsheviks)

CPSU — Communist Party of the Soviet Union

CPB — Communist Party of the Byelorussian SSR

LKSMB — Leninist Young Communist League of the Byelorussian SSR

CK — Central Committee (HQ)

VLKSM — All-Union Leninist Young Communist League

GULAG — Supreme Department of Detention/Labor Camps

USSR CM — USSR Council of Ministers

VCSPS — All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions

FPB — Belarusian Trade Union Federation

RS — Workers' Union

SPB — Belarusian Free Trade Union

BKDP — Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions

BNP — Belarusian Independent Trade Union

ASM — Trade Union of Automobile and Agricultural Machine-building Workers

APK & PP — Trade Union of Agribusiness and Catering Sector Workers

BRC — Belarusian National ('republican') Committee

ILO — International Labor Organization

AFL-CIO — American Federation of Labor/ Congress of Industrial Organizations, the biggest US trade union association with 13 million members

OMON — special police detachments (i.e. commandos)

MAZ — Minsk Truck Plant

MoAZ — Mahilew Automobile Plant

MZAL — Minsk Automatic Lines Manufacturing Plant

MTZ — Minsk Tractor Plant

TACIS — Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States, European Union Program of technical assistance to 12 ex-USSR countries (excluding the Baltic States) and Mongolia

Quoted Political Parties

BNF — Belarusian Popular Front — the oldest democratic party (initially a movement) in Belarus established in 1988. Most currently existing parties of different orientation (from liberal to social-democratic) originated from it. Presently, the BNF is regarded as a moderate right-wing party of Christian-Democratic orientation. Intellectuals and art elite representatives dominate among its members. Chairman of the party is Mr. Vintsuk Vyachorka.

OGP — United Civilian Party — a leading liberal party in Belarus established in 1995 through the merge of the united Democratic Party and the Civilian party. It is regarded as a moderate right-wing party, incorporating a lot of ex-top officials (*'apparatchiks'*), who fell into A. Lukashenka's disgrace. Chairman of the party is Mr. Anatoli Lyabedzka, Member of the Supreme Soviet of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Convocations.

BSDG — Belarusian Social Democratic Hramada — the oldest social-democratic party in Belarus, established in 1991. Its Chairman is Mr. Stanislaw Shushkievich, ex-Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Twelfth Convocation (1991–1994). Party Charter allows dual party membership and some BSDG members joined the United Social-Democratic Party of V. Palievikova in August 2002.

BSDG (NG) — Belarusian Social Democratic Party (People's Hramada) — one of several social democratic parties in Belarus, established in 1995 after the split in the Belarusian Social Democratic Hramada. In August 2002, its faction, headed by A.Karol, joined the United Social-Democratic Party of V.Palievikova. Chairman of the party is Mr. Mikalai Statkievich.

The Women's Party **Nadzeya** ('Hope') was established in the mid-nineties on the basis of trade union structures. It is a social-democratic orientation party, headed by Ms. Valyantsina Palievikova. In August 2002, it became a part of a newly established United Social-Democratic Party.

BPT — Belarusian Labor Party — a party of socialist orientation, established in 1993. Till 1999 it was headed A. Bukhvostaw, Chairman of the Trade Union of Automobile and Agricultural Machine-building Workers (ASM).

PKB — Belarusian Party of Communists was established in 1991 from the remnants of the Communist Party of the Byelorussian SSR as a prototype of a “democratic” Communist party. On some key issues pertaining to the restoration of the Constitutional Law after the coup d’etat in November 1996, has cooperated with democratic parties. Chairman of the party is Mr. Syarhey Kaliakin, Member of the Supreme Soviet of the Thirteenth Convocation.

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Belarusian Trade Unions: *Transformations and Prospects*

Seminar Materials

Compiling authors: **Valentin Golubev, Alexey Khadyka**

Printed by Xerox

