

WR-84 politics

# Reviving the role of trade unions

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Prime Minister Fidel Castro

of workers movement was conceived and put into execution: that of the "Vanguard Workers." The "Vanguard Workers" were outstanding workers chosen by assemblies of their shopmates. The "Vanguard Workers Movement" worked on the periphery of the Communist Party, and each of its members became part of the reservoir from which Party members were chosen.

In theory and practice, in many work centers the "Vanguard Workers' Movement" began to replace the traditional trade union. A vanguard movement among the workers had thus begun to replace a movement that encompassed the totality of the workers. Under this conception, general worker participation in the daily affairs of the work center was small. The "Vanguard Workers" met to discuss problems and then brought the decisions to the other workers.

In this sense, the "Vanguard Workers Movement" was assuming a method similar to that assigned to the Communist Party itself. This was the trend that was taking place before Fidel Castro's call for a viable

trade union movement in 1970.

On August 23, 1970, Fidel Castro told a Cuban women's congress that "we still don't have all the formulas." But he stressed that it was clear that the general line must be "to replace the administrative procedures with democratic ones." In the same speech he declared that special emphasis had to be placed on the strengthening of the workers' movement in Cuba.

On September 2 of the same year, Castro told a Havana province meeting of the labour Confederation that "even the most efficient administration cannot generate the control, the vigilance, the efficiency, militancy and energy of the masses that are required for overcoming difficulties."

It was clear that the entire trade union movement would have to be restructured. Castro expressed once again the idea that he had put forth in 1959: democratic elections within the trade union movement. Now years later, he affirmed: "Let us have faith in our workers and The Cuban Revolutionary Government speedily carry out elections in all our

trade unions... in an absolutely free way in which the workers nominate anyone they want.. Let us begin to democratize the labour movement. If it isn't democratic, it isn't worth anything.

The trade union based on the totality of Cuban workers was thus reborn. One year later, in October 1971 it could boast that absolutely free elections had been held in all the work centers in Cuba.

Originally, the 23rd Congress of the Cuban Trade Union Movement (CTC) was to have been held at the end of 1972. When it was found that the preconditions for assuring a profound study of all the necessary questions were not yet ready, it was decided to postpone the Congress till this year.

At present, 15 pre-Congress subcommittees are hard at work drawing up reports. The reports will be discussed in all trade union locals. Out of these discussions that will involve the whole Cuban workforce new reports will be written which will, in turn, be discussed and approved by the National Trade Union Congress.

The Cuban revolutionary Government has already announced that the decisions taken at the Trade Union Congress will be used as its guide in determining national policy. Not only will the Congress help to define the role of the trade unions and their relationship to other institutions but also the general economic policy of the Cuban Government as regards wages, prices, employment and labour laws.

One of the most eagerly awaited reports is that related to wages. While moral incentive is still stressed in Cuban policy, certain changes have begun to take place in the wages policy which indicate that a new stress is now being put on a more direct tie between production and wages. In a number of spheres of the Cuban economy this policy is already in effect.

Another theme which has captured great interest is that of women in production. Although 600,000 women (30 per cent of the workforce) are now employed as compared

with 194,000 women in 1958 the problem of bringing more women, more quickly into the workforce and preventing desertion of those already in it has not been totally solved. In March, the Second National Congress of Working Women discussed these problems, their causes and solutions.

A third theme that will have far-reaching repercussions is that of workers participation in management. In 1970 Fidel Castro asked: "Why should the manager be the absolute master? Why not begin introducing workers' collectives into the administration of the factory?"

However, there is the other side of the coin: a call for administrators to assert their legitimate authority in making correct and equitable decisions. Is there then an insoluble contradiction between manager authority and worker participation in management?

Jorge Risquet, former Labour Minister and now a member of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, sized up the manager's authority and the possible contradictions in the following way:

"...We don't have to fear the dangers of possible excesses as long as there exists the countervailing strong local trade union that is capable of evaluating the actions of the manager and defending the interests of the workers in cases where they consider the measures unjust.

"The development of the constant contradictions that necessarily arise between the workers' organization and the management will strengthen the Revolution and form cadres who have gained in clarity and experience from every fraternal discussion. Contradiction, that is our best arm against the non-executive qualities, the inefficiency, bureaucracy and all the evils that beset us.

"Without labour democracy and without ideological struggle in the framework of proletarian democracy, the labour movement cannot develop itself; it will become weak and convert itself into a bureaucratic apparatus divorced from the masses..."