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Strikes in Russia:

The case of the coal-mining industry

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Volume One of Two Volumes

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Declaration

Parts of this thesis contain material which has been published in a different form. All of this material was written and based on research conducted during my period of registration. Some of the research was conducted in collaboration with colleagues.

The third chapter is based on Chapter Two of *The Workers' Movement in Russia* (Clarke, Fairbothor and Borisov, 1995), the original of which was written by Simon Clarke on the basis of our joint research. I accompanied Simon Clarke on his research visits to Kuzbass and interpreted his interviews, as well as conducting my own interviews, and I also researched newspaper and archival sources and prepared the material for inclusion in the chapter, the content of which we discussed together at every stage, although the final English text was written by Simon Clarke. Apart from the excision of some material, the main changes to the published text are the incorporation of additional material from Lopatin, 1998, and the concluding section of the chapter.

A previous account of the Donbass strike discussed in Chapter Four has been published as Clarke and Borisov, 1994, which was written jointly on the basis of my research. A fuller account has been published in Russian as Borisov, 1999. The version here has been written on the basis of Borisov, 1996b, which was translated from the Russian by Simon Clarke.

About one-third of the material in Chapter Five, relating to the 1996 strike, was originally published in Clarke and Borisov, 1996. This article was written jointly on the basis of my original research.

Most of Chapter Six (apart from the introduction and conclusion) was previously published as Borisov, Bizyukova and Burnyshev, 1996. The original paper was written by me on the basis of joint research, and translated by Simon Clarke.

Some parts of Chapter Seven were previously published as Borisov and Burnyshev, 1998 and Borisov and Kozina, 1998. These articles were written jointly on the basis of our original researches.

None of the material contained in this thesis has been submitted for another degree or for a degree at another university.

Annette Robertson translated parts of the thesis that were originally written in Russian and corrected my English for the final version of the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis presents an analysis of the character and significance of strikes in post-Soviet Russia on the basis of a series of case studies of strikes in the coal-mining industry. The central argument of the thesis is that the patterns of strike activity have been conditioned by the forms of management and financing of the coal-mining industry and by the strategy of the mining industry trade unions.

Following a review of the sociological and industrial relations literature on strikes, the thesis opens with a detailed study of the 1989 miners' strike in Kuzbass. Here it is shown that the original demands of the miners were taken up and generalised by the structures of branch and local administrative power, and the strike was thereby assimilated into the traditional structures of branch and regional lobbying for resources in Moscow. This set the pattern for the subsequent organisation of strikes in the state and state-subsidised sectors of the economy.

The coincidence of interests of miners with the branch and regional authorities in 1989 was determined by the centralised management and financing of the coal-mining industry. The system of subsidies to the industry reproduced this structure even after the 'transition to a market economy', although the financial and political weakening of the state amid intensified competition for resources made it increasingly difficult for the state to meet all the demands put on it. An analysis of the 1993 miners' strike in Ukrainian Donbass shows how these constraints meant that the miners were used by the directors to achieve their own ends. This is followed by an account of the relationship between the lobbying activity of the coal-mining industry, conflicts within the government apparatus, changing forms of financing of the industry and the organisation of nation-wide miners' actions, centred on the 1995 and 1996 miners' strikes.

The changes in the system of management and financing of the coal-mining industry meant that the trade unions sought to contain conflict within the enterprise in the attempt to concentrate their efforts on regional and national campaigns in collaboration with management. The final three substantive chapters of the thesis explore the implications of the increasing isolation and fragmentation of the miners through a series of case studies of strikes in Kuzbass and Rostov over the period 1997-9. The final chapter draws together the general themes addressed in the thesis.

List of Acronyms, organisations and key figures referred to in the thesis

FNPR	Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia
GOF	Coal Enrichment Plant
Gorispolkom	City Executive Committee
Gorkom	City Communist Party Committee
Goskomstat	State Statistics Committee
Kemerovougol'	Kemerovo Coal Association
Komsomol	Communist Youth League
KPRF	Communist Party of the Russian Federation
Kuzbassugol'	Kemerovo Regional Coal Association
LDPR	Liberal Democratic Party of Russia
Minfin	Ministry of Finance
MVK	Inter-Departmental Commission for Problems of the Coal Mining Industry
NPG	Independent Miners' Union
NPRUP	(former official union)
Obkom	Regional Party Committee
Oblispolkom	Regional Executive Committee
Oblsovprof	Regional Trade Union Council
OTS	Branch Tariff Agreement

OVU	Vorkuta Coal Association
Profkom	Trade Union Committee
Prokop'evskgidrougol'	Prokop'evsk Hydro Coal Association
Prokop'evskugol'	Prokop'evsk Coal Association
Reformugol'	Coal Reform Fund (World Bank financed)
Rostovugol'	Rostov Coal Association
Rosugleprof/Rosugleprofsoyuz	Russian Independent Trade Union of Workers of the Coal Mining Industry (former official union)
Rosugol'	Russian Coal Concern
SeveroKuzbassugol'	North Kuzbass Coal Association
STK	Council of the Labour Collective
Terkom	Territorial Committee of the Trade Union
Ugol' Rossii	Coal of Russia
Vorkutaugol'	Vorkuta Coal Association
Aslanidi, Aleksandr	Leader of the 1989 strike movement, later elected to the Federation Council from Kuzbass.
Avaliani, Teimuraz	Leader of the 1989 strike committee, later a leader of the Russian Communist Workers' Party
Bud'ko, Vitalii	President of Rosugleprof until May 1998
Chernomyrdin, Viktor	Russian Prime Minister, December 1992 to March 1998

Gaidar, Yegor	Deputy then Acting Russian Prime Minister, December 1991 to December 1992
Golikov, Vyacheslav	Leader of 1989 strike, president of Kuzbass Workers' Committee
Gorbachev, Mikhail	General Secretary, Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 1985-9
Kirienko, Sergei	Russian Prime Minister, March - August 1998
Kislyuk, Mikhail	Leader of 1989 miners' strike, later Governor of Kemerovo Region
Kozhukhovskii, Igor'	Activist in 1989 miners' strike in Kuzbass, later head of the Coal Department, Ministry of Economics and then Deputy Minister of Fuel and Energy responsible for mine closures
Lebed, Aleksandr	General, opponent of Yeltsin in 1996 Presidential election
Lyutenko, Anatolii	Chairman of Kemerovo Regional Executive Committee in 1989
Malykhin, Anatolii	Leader of 1989 miners' strike and Independent Miners' Union, later Yeltsin's representative in Kuzbass
Malyshev, Yurii	Director of Rosugol'
Mel'nikov, Aleksandr	First Secretary of Kemerovo Regional Party Committee in 1989
Naidov, Mikhail	General Director of Prokop'evskugol' in 1989
Nemtsov, Boris	Russian Deputy Prime Minister

Primakov, Evgenii	Russian Prime Minister, September 1998 - July 1999
Ryzhkov, Nikolai	Soviet Prime Minister in 1989
Sergeev, Aleksandr	President of the Independent Miners' Union
Shafranik, Yurii	Minister of Fuel and Energy, 1993-6
Sharipov, Vyacheslav	President of Kemerovo Independent Miners' Union, 1991-6
Shchadov, Mikhail	Soviet Coal Minister 1989-91
Shokhin, Aleksandr	Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Chairperson of MVK
Soskovets, Oleg	Russian Deputy Prime Minister, responsible for military-industrial complex and heavy industry,
Stakhanov, Aeksei	Ukrainian miner, founder of Stakhanovite movement
Tuleev, Aman G.	Communist Head of Kemerovo Regional Administration, 1990-1, elected Regional Governor in 1996
Yavlinskii, Grigorii	Leader of Yabloko, liberal democratic opposition to Yeltsin
Yeltsin, Boris	President of Russia 1991-1999
Zhirinovskii, Vladimir	Leader of Liberal Democratic Party of Russia
Zyuganov, Gennadii	Leader of Communist Party of the Russian Federation

Chronology of Significant Events

1989

- March Elections to Supreme Soviet of the USSR
- July First Miners' strike starts in Kuzbass, spreads to all soviet coalfields

1990

- March Elections to Republican Supreme Soviets and regional soviets

1991

- January Transfer of mining industry to regional self-financing
- March to May Second miners' strike settled with transfer of mines to jurisdiction of Russia
- June Yeltsin elected President of Russia
- August Failed putsch
- December Collapse of Soviet Union

1992

- January Liberalisation of prices (beginning of Gaidar's reforms), big increase in miners' wages, to be subsidised out of state budget
- May Council of Ministers resolves closure of unprofitable mines
- July Mining industry excluded from privatisation programme
- December Gaidar replaced by Chernomyrdin as Prime Minister

1993

- June Miners' picket of Government Building protesting delays in payment of subsidy to the industry
- June Council of Ministers reaffirms programme to close unprofitable mines
- June Government decree freeing price of coal, agreement with miners to continue subsidisation of the industry to cover indexation of wages
- September One day national miners' strike over non-payment of subsidy to the industry
- September Yeltsin dissolves Supreme Soviet
- November World Bank delivers draft report on restructuring the Russian coal-mining industry, proposing elimination of subsidy and imminent closure of 100 of Russia's 300 mines and loss of 320,000 jobs in three years
- November Miners paid off on eve of Duma election
- December State Duma elections

1994

- January Government signs tariff agreement including subsidy of \$3.6 billion for the coal industry
- March One-day miners' strike over non-payment of subsidy for wages
- July Russian government report on the coal-mining industry, approved by Inter-branch Commission in May, proposes new investment programme, closure of 42 mines and anticipates loss of 300,000 jobs
- August World Bank report on restructuring the coal-mining industry published, anticipating cut of 70-75% of jobs in Kuzbass industry and proposing withdrawal of subsidy for loss-making mines, decentralisation of wage-bargaining and employment reductions driven by sharp wage cuts.

November	First blocking of railway in Russia
December	Wage arrears in coal mining reach an average of three months' pay
December	Russian invasion of Chechen Republic

1995

February	All-Russian miners' strike and picketing in Moscow
December	State Duma elections

1996

January	Chubais sacked as Deputy Prime Minister
January	Picketing in Moscow
February	All-Russian miners' strike
July	Yeltsin elected for a second term

1997

November	In accordance with recommendations of the World Bank, Rosugol' liquidated
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1998

May-June	Rails War: Trans-Siberian Railway cut in Kuzbass, railways also blocked in Rostov
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1 Introduction

This thesis is about strikes in Russia. A strike is a particularly intense but relatively self-contained expression of social conflict between employers and employees. The study of strikes is of interest in itself, particularly in a country in which strikes were banned for more than sixty years, but it is also interesting for the light it throws on the more regular patterns of labour relations which erupt into strikes in exceptional circumstances. In fact the focus of the thesis is rather narrower than is indicated in the title, in that all of the strikes studied are in the Russian coal-mining industry. This is partly a result of the fact that I have had the opportunity to study such strikes in the course of my other research and trade union activities, but it is also because the coal-mining industry is the most fertile ground for the study of strikes: it was the birthplace of the modern strike movement in Russia and has seen the most extensive and varied development of strike activity. Thus, although the content of the thesis is drawn from the coal-mining industry, the thesis is about strikes, not about miners' strikes: I am not particularly concerned with the traditional questions of why miners are especially prone to strike, nor with comparing miners' strikes in Russia with miners' strikes in other parts of the world.

I started research on strikes in Russia in collaboration with Simon Clarke and Peter Fairbrother, with whom I researched the development of the new workers' movement and, in particular, the 1989 miners' strike in Kuzbass, which provides the focus for Chapter Three of this thesis. During this time I received a British Council scholarship to study for an MA by research at Warwick University. According to the terms of my scholarship I could not conduct my fieldwork in Russia, so I decided to study the workers' movement in the Ukrainian Donbass. I

happened to arrive in Donetsk at the precise moment at which the 1993 Donbass strike broke out, and was able to participate in the meetings of the strike committee and even participate in negotiations with the government as a fraternal Russian delegate. This research provides the basis for Chapter Four of this thesis (I upgraded my registration to a PhD, so did not submit an MA thesis, although I have published the results of this research in Russian in a book (Borisov, 1999)).

I continued my research on the trade union and workers' movement, and in particular on strikes, as I continued to work with Simon Clarke and Peter Fairbrother on their ESRC-funded projects on 'the restructuring of management and labour relations in Russia' and, with Huw Beynon as well, on 'the restructuring of the Russian coal-mining industry'. Soon after the beginning of the latter research I was invited to take up a position as consultant to the President of the Independent Trade Union of Russian Coal Mining Industry Employees (NPRUP, later known as Rosugleprof). This gave me access to regional and national leaders of the union and allowed me to participate in trade union meetings at all levels. It also enabled me to travel to the coalfields (on one occasion as a consultant to the World Bank), and provided a framework for collaborative research with my colleagues in the Institute for Comparative Labour Relations Research, particularly in Kuzbass and Vorkuta. This all gave me ample opportunity to observe strikes in the coal-mining industry (at one point it seemed that every time I visited a town, its coal-mine went on strike) and also to observe discussions in the trade union at the highest level. These studies provided the background for this thesis, and the substantive material of the remaining chapters, Chapter Five, which focuses on national negotiations and All-Russian strikes, and Chapters Six to Eight which provide case studies of five strikes in Kuzbass and two strikes in Russian Donbass.

The thesis has three principal objectives. First, to describe the specific characteristics of a series of strikes in post-Soviet Russia (and Ukraine) on the basis of ethnographic case study research. A strike represents a specific course of events undertaken by specific individuals and social groups, the understanding of which lies in the detail. Respondents will frequently describe a strike in the most general terms: the strike broke out spontaneously, the strikers put forward some demands, a meeting decided to do something, the strikers went somewhere, the strikers returned to work. But none of these events happen on their own: people have to be gathered, somebody has to make a proposal, the proposal has to be discussed, a decision has to be taken, people have to decide to act upon it, and it is in these detailed events that the real social processes unfold. In my ethnographic research I have always been concerned above all to investigate these details, either by participating in the events myself or by finding informants who can provide the detailed information required. This is a laborious and time-consuming process, and in most of the case studies I have been fortunate enough to have had colleagues from ISITO working alongside me, observing and interviewing and writing up their observations in their field notes. The accounts presented in what is still an excessively long thesis are necessarily much abbreviated and truncated reports of the events which they describe, but I hope that they provide food for thought and material which other researchers can use for comparative or theoretical purposes.

The second purpose of the thesis is to provide some explanation for the typical forms of strikes found in post-soviet Russia by relating the strikes reported in the case studies to the theoretical (sociological and industrial relations) literature on strikes which I review in Chapter Two. It is impossible to explore all of the issues that arise in this literature, but I try to use the theoretical literature as a point of

reference for my studies and at times use my studies to evaluate some propositions in the theoretical literature.

The third purpose of the thesis is to provide an account and explanation for the patterns of development of strike activity in Russia, which are shown in their most accentuated form by strikes in the coal-mining industry, but which have followed a very similar course in other branches, such as transport, health and education. The coal-miners' strike of 1989 contributed in no small part to the collapse of the soviet system, while the 1991 strikes provided the last nails in its coffin. From 1993 to 1996 the coal-miners proved the most powerful and effective opponents of the liberal reformist course of the Moscow government, the short strike of February 1995 extracting more than half a billion dollars from the government. However, the national miners' strikes of 1996 collapsed ignominiously, and the miners have been increasingly divided from the rest of the population, between the coal mining regions, between different coal-mining enterprises, within mines between underground and surface workers, and even between sections and brigades, so that the miners acclaimed solidarity has become an increasingly scarce commodity.

In the second chapter I review the sociological and industrial relations literature on strikes, in order to provide a theoretical framework and point of reference for the thesis as a whole.

In the third chapter I present a detailed account of the 1989 miners' strike in Kuzbass, the purpose of which is to show how the strike arose and spread spontaneously across the south of the region, but that the miners demands were soon harnessed by the leaders of the coal mining associations and by the local administration in the towns and cities across the region to press their own demands

on Moscow. The 1989 strike in Kuzbass therefore set the precedent of integrating strike action into the traditional system of lobbying the government in Moscow, a precedent which would be taken up by other branches and regions.

The fourth chapter analyses the 1993 miners' strike in Ukrainian Donbass. This strike is interesting in that it established a pattern which would only manifest itself later in Russia, in which the government was able effectively to isolate the striking miners by exacerbating political and sectional divisions, between Western and Eastern Ukraine, between coal miners and other sections of the population, between different towns and cities and, finally, between the workers and the management of the industry. In the dire economic circumstances of Ukraine the mine directors were able to get some useful concessions out of the government on the backs of the workers, but the workers got nothing, being driven back to work by threats and promises. No small part in this outcome was played by the commitment of the leaders of the miners' unions and workers' committees to pressing the workers' interests through collaboration with industrial management and local administration in the traditional structures for the lobbying of branch and regional interests.

The fifth chapter provides an overview of the development of the trade union movement from 1989 to 1996, focusing on the role of the dominant union, Rosugleprof, and the two largest All-Russian strikes, in 1995 and 1996. As in Donbass, and building on the achievements of 1989, both trade unions sought to achieve their ends by lobbying through political and bureaucratic structures, NPG exploiting its connections in the government, Rosugleprof collaborating closely with the management body of the industry, Rosugol', in pressing the government for the funds with which to pay the miners' wages. This collaboration was reinforced by the character of the subsidy to the coal-mining industry between 1992

and 1995, which took the form of a wage subsidy, originally introduced to provide the industry with the money to pay wages in a situation in which the price of coal was fixed. Once fuel prices were freed in 1993 the subsidy system was gradually changed, increasingly being oriented to promoting the restructuring of the industry by funding the closure of unprofitable mines and providing some investment funds for the most promising, with the determinant of the scale of subsidy being shifted from employment to production in 1995. The freeing of the price of coal and the change in the subsidy system had two effects. First, the subsidy became less relevant to the level of wages and the ability of the mine to pay wages, both of which came to depend primarily on the productivity and the commercial success of the mine. Second, it introduced sharp divisions between the interests of miners in different regions and in different types of coal-mine. This meant that the participation of the trade union in the system of 'social partnership', lobbying in collaboration with and on behalf of the management of the industry, had less and less relevance to the living standards of the mass of miners, while it became more and more difficult for the union to unify different mines and different coalfields around a common set of demands, except for the universally popular demand of the resignation of the government and the president.

The following chapters follow through the implications of the strategy conducted by the trade union at national level for the activity of workers in individual enterprises by looking at strikes, most of which emerge spontaneously, from below. Apart from their spontaneity, these strikes tend to have a number of other features in common. First, they tend to develop without the participation of the trade union and receive little or no support from regional or national trade union bodies. Trade unions have been primarily concerned with co-ordinating grass roots action with their lobbying

activities in Moscow, and so often try to persuade strikers to postpone their actions so that they will coincide with regional or national days of action or, when no such actions are impending, show no interest in or seek positively to dissuade a strike which may be damaging to the interests of management and so to the unions' collaborative relationship with management. Trade union leaders may become members of the strike committees, which are usually set up to co-ordinate strike action, in which case they may play an ambivalent role. Second, strikes are often precipitated by the frustration that results from participation in national days of action, in which workers' emotions are aroused but which produce no tangible results. However, strikes which take place before such days of action, against the advice of trade union leaders, tend to be more successful because the regional authorities and security services are more anxious in the run-up to mass actions. Third, the supposed inability of mine management to meet the workers' demands, because of financial constraints ultimately determined by government policy, means that the strikers' demands rapidly extend beyond the enterprise and take on a political complexion, from appeals to higher authorities to demands for the resignation of the government. This tendency is encouraged by mine management, which does not want to be the target of conflict, and by the trade unions' orientation to seeking to resolve the problems of the industry through lobbying. On the other hand, mine directors are vulnerable to dismissal if they allow the situation in their mine to get out of hand. Fourth, the ineffectiveness of strike action in loss-making mines in a situation of general overproduction and the lack of support from the trade union or from other authorities, means that the strikers are soon driven to take more militant action – blocking railroads, taking hostages, hunger strikes, underground strikes – and to look for support to regional and national political forces. Miners'

strikes, by contrast to those of teachers, have generally taken place outside the framework laid down by the law for the regulation of collective labour disputes. Fifth, attempts to extend the strike beyond the mine carry threats of provoking social disorder and so bring the intervention of the local security forces. However, such intervention is motivated by public order considerations, not by any industrial relations expertise. Sixth, the predominant reason for strikes since 1994 has been the non-payment of wages. However much the strikers might put forward broad political demands, managers soon found that strikers could be induced to return to work by the payment of at least some of the wage debt. The money to contain a strike might come from the federal government, from the coal industry, by borrowing from financial structures or from regional or local authorities (which may be at the expense of the payment of wages to municipal and public employees) or by diversion of funds at the expense of non-striking workers in the same enterprise. Such diversions of resources potentially exacerbate the isolation of the strikers from their fellow workers and undermine any solidarity that may be achieved by the workers' movement.

There is also some development over time. First, strikes have tended to take place on an increasingly narrow basis. The 1989 and 1991 strikes swept across all the coal-mining regions of the country and even attracted the support of workers from other branches. From 1992 it became increasingly rare for a strike to extend beyond a single mine, and even when a number of neighbouring mines were on strike there would be little or no co-ordination between them. Underground miners had always played a much more active role than surface workers, and had benefited much more from strike actions, but the divisions were further exacerbated by management strategies through the 1990s as managers learned to extinguish strikes by

assiduously handing out small sums of money to selected groups of workers. More and more strikes involved only one shop or section, or even just a handful of workers, and such strikes would be settled by paying off just those workers. The increasingly narrow basis of workers' solidarity is not a result of the deterioration in the organisation or morality of the workers, but of the fact that solidarity was established in the earlier periods on the basis of the subordination of the workers' actions to the common interests of management and local authorities, common interests which have been eroded by the move from state to market regulation of the economy, changes in the system of state support and political pressures imposed by central and regional government. Second, as a result of declining solidarity among the miners, management has been increasingly willing to resort to forceful means of defeating strikes, threatening workers with fines and dismissal and using physical force to intimidate strikers. This tendency has been reinforced as mine directors have come under increasing pressure from above (pressure on Rosugol' from the government, on associations from Rosugol' and on mines from the association and local and regional authorities) to contain conflict within the limits of the mine. Third, during the mid-1990s strikes came to be used as a pretext for closing mines and, as the more active miners left and prospects of getting another job for those who remained deteriorated, this proved a powerful factor inhibiting strikes in the less prosperous mines. However, the managers of the more prosperous mines had learned the lessons of their colleagues and have proved well able to fragment and isolate their workers so as to neutralise the strike threat.

Chapter Six is a case study of a militant strike at Sudzhenskaya mine in Kuzbass in the autumn of 1994. This was one of the first strikes to arise over the issue of the non-payment of wages, in which the miners' blocked the Trans-Siberian railway

and linked up with outside political forces, in this case Zhirinovskii's LDPR, for the first time. At the time there seemed a serious danger that economic crisis was leading to a lumpenisation of the miners and providing fertile ground for fascist demagogues.

Chapter Seven presents four case studies of strikes over the non-payment of wages which took place in four different towns in Kemerovo region during 1997, with the All-Russian day of action called by the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) for March 27 providing a point of reference for all four strikes. The first case again involved the blockade of the Trans-Siberian Railway and the intervention of the security forces. In the second case the workers took the general director of the coal association hostage and threatened to block the railway before achieving their demands, but at the expense of payments to the Pension Fund and the city budget. The third case is unique in that the strike was led by female auxiliary workers and came to focus on the resistance to mine closures, but was met with brutal repression as the strikers were isolated from their fellow workers in the mine. The fourth case is of a hunger strike in which social conflicts were intertwined with personal animosities, but in which the strikers were successfully isolated and defeated by management.

Chapter Eight presents case studies of strikes in two relatively prosperous mines in the Rostov coal basin in 1999, the context of which is provided by very active lobbying to represent the branch interests of the region in Moscow. One case is of a new mine, in which the labour force has not developed traditions of collectivism and solidarity and in which management was able to exploit this to turn the strike into a lock-out. The other is of a mine which has been acquired by a private owner, so has left the coal association and the system of state subsidies, but in which the

owner has sought systematically to reduce labour costs and has successfully divided and fragmented the labour force.

The concluding chapter draws together the findings of the thesis as a whole.

2 Theoretical approaches to strikes

2.1 *Strikes at industrial enterprises and their significance in Russian conditions*

Strikes have always had great significance in all countries in terms of changing existing industrial relations and the establishment of new forms of relations between employees and employers. The special feature of Russian strikes lies in the fact that the overwhelming majority of them have occurred at state enterprises and in the public sector and also in sectors of the economy, particularly coal-mining, which receive state subsidies. As the main employer at most such enterprises was and remains the state, almost any open conflict with economic demands is inevitably directed against the government, which acts not as an arbitrator but an active party in the industrial conflict. Moreover, in such circumstances, enterprise directors respond to all of the workers' demands with the traditional Soviet phrase, 'But what can I do about it?', convincing the workers that everything depends on higher bodies and not on the directors at all. They thus take immanent conflicts beyond the confines of their enterprises, involving opposing political forces in their resolution (or rekindling). This results in the politicisation of industrial conflicts. In the wider sense, strikes can create the threat of change not only to the system of industrial relations but also to society's political system. This was the case with the well-known miners' strike of 1989, which opened a new stage in Russian history.

During the Soviet period, strikes were nipped in the bud. In accordance with communist ideology, there was no place for social conflict in conditions of common property, meaning that there was no reason for such conflict. Although industrial

conflicts nevertheless did occur, they were not class conflicts. Any open display of dissatisfaction was perceived as an attack on the ideology of the ruling party, undermining the basis of the 'most just system', and was severely brought to an end with the use of the forces of initially the NKVD and later the KGB and army units.

Unlike most of the strikes that happen around the world, strikes in Soviet Russia could hardly count on the support of public opinion (except for that of the international community, whose opinions mattered little to the leaders of the Soviet regime). Information about strikes circulated only in secret KGB documents, which were intended for the eyes of only a narrow circle of party leaders. Strikes were ignored, while those who participated in them were subject to severe punishment. There were, nevertheless, many cases of conflict between workers and employers, including work stoppages, although none of the parties involved used the term 'strike' to describe what was happening. The workers nonetheless understood perfectly that not a single employer was interested in 'airing their grievances publicly' as this could provoke the wrath of the party and lead to managers being sacked. Conflicts were therefore largely personal in nature and did not threaten the existence of the Soviet regime.

Although it would appear that the Stalin regime ruled out any possibility of strikes, towards the end of the 1940s and early 1950s there was a wave of strikes in the enterprises that belonged to the various camps of the *Gulag*, in particular the coal-producing enterprises of the Vorkuta and Kara camps and the Kuzbass coal basin. All these strikes were suppressed by force with many of those who took part being shot or sent to other camps with longer prison sentences.

The most well-known strike of the 1960s was held by workers in Novocherkassk (1962).¹ Army units were used to quell this protest, resulting in dozens of people being shot on the spot, and hundreds of participants being sentenced to varying prison terms in the Soviet penitentiary system and forced to sign documents to the effect that they would never divulge information about what had occurred.

The Brezhnev years came to be known as the ‘years of stagnation’, during which the authorities did not take such overt punitive action against those who expressed their dissatisfaction. It was during this period, however, that the sending of so-called ‘troublemakers’ to psychiatric hospitals was widespread.

Despite such repression, worker dissatisfaction continued to grow. While it may have seemed unexpected at the time, the 1989 miners’ strike was the product of all that had happened before. Even before the miners’ strike, which assumed the character of a national protest, took place, the spring of 1989 had witnessed many local strikes throughout Russia, including the coal-producing enterprises of the Kuznetsk and Pechora coal basins.² The workers of one section at the Severnaya mine in Vorkuta had held a sit-in strike down the mine at the beginning of March in protest at arbitrary fluctuations in their wages, which had developed into a short underground hunger strike with demands for no Sunday working, a six-hour working day, cuts in the management apparatus, the sacking of the director, and enhanced pay for night work, announcing the formation of an independent trade union, ominously called *Solidarnost’*. Support meetings were held in the city, but the strike was resolved with

¹ Mandel, 1992 (Based on eye-witness accounts and an interview with P. Siuda).

² A detailed list of strikes that occurred from 1987 with the name of the enterprise, category of worker involved and the demands made is contained in Institute of Employment (RAN), 1992.

the usual influx of Party officials and rapid concession of the bulk of the workers' demands (Rutland, 1990, 353; *Trud*, 10 March 1989, and our interviews; Ilyin, 1998). Following this strike the Vorkuta miners met to establish a City Workers' Committee on 10 June.

In Kuzbass there had been a strike over wages in one section in the Lenin pit in Mezhdurechensk in February, and another in the neighbouring Usinskaya mine, in which one shift refused to start work over a demand for higher piece rates, as well as strikes over wages at the Severnaya mine in Kemerovo and Kapital'naya in Osinniki. The same month there was a sit-down strike in the small Kuznetskaya mine in Leninsk-Kuznetsk when the night shift refused to come to the surface in protest at the shortage of cigarettes. The Party secretary of the coal association arrived with two boxes of cigarettes in his car. These stoppages were all settled rapidly with the acceptance of all the workers' demands. There was nothing unusual in these strikes except for their frequency (interviews; Kostyukovskii, 1990; Lopatin, 1998).

The tempo of strikes increased through March and April, and they were not confined to the coal-mining industry. One brigade of workers in the Western Siberian Metallurgical Complex refused to work for three hours as a result of the failure of the director to meet their demands for increased pay, night-shift payments and various other matters. A similar strike by another brigade occurred at the end of the month.

On 24 March members of the Komsomol-youth construction detachment of Raspadskaya mine in Mezhdurechensk went on to the roof of the drying building and declared that they would not leave until their demand for the immediate construction of the building in which they had been promised separate apartments by the

management of the South Kuzbass Coal Production Association was met.³ It was only at 10 p.m. the following day, after the regional administration of the Coal Ministry, Kuzbassugol', and the Kuzbass Mine Construction Kombinat had passed a resolution to include the immediate construction of the building in the plan that the members of the detachment went home.

On 2 April there was a strike in the 60th Anniversary of the USSR mine in the small town of Malinovka when 33 workers from the eighth section (including three Communists) stopped work and refused to come up to the surface, demanding an increase in the piece-rates for cutting coal, full payment for evening and night work, increased bonuses and a 40 per cent cut in the size of the managerial staff, together with various claims concerning living conditions: complaints about the failure to supply water to a miners' settlement, about interruptions in the electricity supply, and inadequate maintenance of communal buildings and roads. The immediate cause of the strike was, according to the obkom (Regional Party Committee), 'the irresponsible attitude of the mine management to the elementary needs of the workers: they were not conveyed in good time to their work places, before their descent into the mine there turned out to be no respirators, drinking water or tea'. However, according to Aleksandr Aslanidi, a leader of the miners and later one of the leaders of the regional workers' committee, the immediate reason for the strike was the fact that the workers did not receive towels, and had no soap with which to wash after the shift. As a result of this stoppage the local administration organized a large meeting in the Malinovka Palace of culture, attended by Anatolii Lyutenko, the chairman of Kemerovo regional

³ This and the next two examples are taken from the Resolution of the Bureau of the Kemerovo obkom (Regional Party Committee) of the CPSU, 'On facts concerning the refusal of workers to work in

executive committee (oblispolkom). Grandiose promises were made to the workers at this meeting and they started to work again, but according to Aslanidi 'nobody was satisfied' (interview). After the strike the mine administration introduced a new set of rules to prevent a recurrence, according to which no more than two shifts were allowed to be in the shaft at once. Other strikes took place or were threatened in various transport enterprises and in Azot, a large chemical plant in Kemerovo.

On 3 April there was a second strike at the Lenin mine in Mezhdurechensk when one brigade of miners stopped work and refused to come to the surface, demanding increased bonuses and a reduction in the number of engineering-technical staff (ITR) in the mine. The same demand was made at a similar sit-down strike at the Volkov mine just outside Kemerovo, the regional capital, in which the workers of two sections refused to come to the surface. The mine director, B. Konyukhov, lost his temper and promised to get them up with the help of the mine safety service and the police, a threat which merely aggravated the situation. The precipitant of this strike was the poor organisation of work. The face-workers had been complaining that they were expected to carry logs hundreds of metres by themselves. They complained to the chief engineer, who told them to get on with it. The director was no better – 'a horseradish is no sweeter than a black radish'. They did not expect any help from the president of the Labour Collective Council, who was also head of the Department of Labour and Wages – in the words of the miners, quoted by Kostyukovskii, 'nobody knows who voted for him'. The workers demanded that all three should be sacked, that the size of the management apparatus should be reduced, that norms and wage-rates should be reviewed, and added as a footnote the demand that Party and trade union

various enterprises in the region', 5 April 1989 reproduced in Lopatin, 1993, 39.

organisations should be more active. They concluded their demands thus: 'Not one of the participants in this statement will come to the surface without having received a positive answer to all the points of our demands. There will be no negotiations with the administration of the mine' (Kostyukovskii, 1990, 8–9).

Neither these nor any other strikes were reported at the time, but they were the subject of a resolution of the bureau of the obkom on 5 April, which identified the causes of the strikes as 'violations of social justice, levelling, dependence, inadequacies in the organisation, norming and payment of labour, errors connected with the transfer of enterprises to new economic conditions, distortions in the development of the social sphere' (Lopatin, 1993, 39–40).

Enterprise management did not adequately judge the collective display of worker dissatisfaction, characterising the strikes as 'the forced stoppage of production'. The fact that the Central Committee of the Union of Coal Industry Workers of the USSR had prepared an official document in which were listed the demands that had to be met by a certain date in order to avoid a mass protest indicates that a social explosion was expected in the coal regions. This document was published by the national newspaper, *Izvestiya*, on the second day of the strike. The demands contained in the document coincided to a great extent with those made by the miners during their protest. The preparation of this document by the trade union leadership, which was fully under Party control, making overt demands to the Soviet government is proof of the extent to which trade union officials had weighed up the possibility of a protest by the miners.

1989 can be said to have marked the beginning of the strike movement in Russia. 1990 was a relatively quiet year, but there was a renewed outburst of strike action, again led by the miners, in 1991 which was exploited by Yeltsin in his struggle with Gorbachev

and so played a significant role in the collapse of the Soviet Union. The erosion of real wages in the face of the inflation unleashed by the freeing of prices in 1992 led to an even larger number of strikes in that year. Following a relative lull in 1993, strikes became a permanent backdrop to industrial relations in Russia during the 1990s (Table 2.1).

Most strikes have occurred in the coal sector, the other most strike-prone branches since 1992 being health and education. Moreover, public sector employees have been most active in the coal regions, doubtless influenced by the initial miners' protests. As the pioneers of the strike movement, the miners long maintained their vanguard position in the strike struggle, and this is one of the reasons why this thesis concentrates on the analysis of case studies of miners' strikes, the other main reason being that I have had more opportunities to research strikes in the coal-mining industry than in other branches. In this thesis I would like to look at two main questions. Firstly, how do strikes begin and proceed, to include an investigation of how the direction and form of strikes alters with time. Secondly, how do rank and file members of the trade unions interact with trade union leaders, and how do the latter interact with enterprise management and representatives of the authorities and branch structures during strikes? Russian reality during the 1990s provides a rich seam of material for an analysis of open forms of industrial conflict. The coal-mining industry in particular provides very rich material through which to research the relationship between spontaneous strikes which erupt on the basis of the conflicts of everyday working life, the organisation and institutionalisation of strikes by trade unions within the framework of industrial relations, and the incorporation of strike activity into the political system. In this chapter I will review the western literature on strikes to

provide a theoretical framework for the subsequent analysis of the case studies of Russian strikes.

2.2 Approaches to defining strikes

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* defines a strike as, ‘a form of industrial action involving the withdrawal of labour so as to constitute a temporary breach of the employment contract. Effective strike action means preventing the use of an alternative labour-force, usually through picketing the workplace, so causing the partial or total loss or cessation of production until the matter in dispute is favourably resolved. Strikes are the characteristic sanction of trade unions and in this form are often characterised as official. Local or wildcat strikes arise from spontaneous, even unorganised walkout or action, by unrecognised rank-and-file leaders’ (Marshall, 1994, 514). In spite of the length of this definition, it does not provide a clear and precise understanding of the phenomenon of a strike. In literature devoted to research on strikes, the authors often avoid defining strikes, preferring instead to list the main characteristics which determine a strike or to use the definitions previously offered by other academic researchers, most notably Knowles (1952: 1): ‘Strikes in the broad sense – collective stoppages of work undertaken in order to bring pressure to bear on those who depend on the sale or use of products of that work’. According to Hyman (1984: 17), ‘a strike has been defined as "a temporary stoppage of work by a group of employees in order to express a grievance or enforce a demand"’. This is one of the briefest but most successful definitions of a strike, every word of which notes a very significant aspect of the phenomenon of a strike.

Gouldner (1965) avoids giving a precise definition of a strike by saying that many definitions may be attached to the phenomenon, depending on the aims of the

researcher in question. In place of a definition, he offers a list of features which any strike should include:

‘the technological consequences are placed foremost. It is spoken of as a cessation of "work", that is, as a breakdown in the flow of materials within the factory and of the flow of commodities to the community’ (66);

‘strike as a refusal to obey’. That is ‘focus on matters of specific sociological interest, the **breakdown** in the flow of *consent*; we address ourselves to the **disruption of a social system**, particularly in its authority relations’ (66);

‘strike is... an open expression of aggression’ (66).

Citing aggression as an obligatory element of a strike is perhaps not entirely valid, as, in my opinion, this only applies to spontaneous strikes. In the case of organised strikes, on the other hand, it is possible for aggression to be replaced by a form of organisation of collective action. An example of this which is characteristic of Russia is the development of industrial conflict in one of the coal towns beyond the Arctic Circle. Having been on hunger strike for several days, the leaders of the miners’ unions explained their actions as not only expressing protest against many months of wage delays, but also as preventing the miners from beginning an imminent spontaneous strike.⁴ By beginning their hunger strike, the trade union leaders lowered the pressure that was ready to explode into a spontaneous stoppage of work and instead channelled events in a more organised manner. The hunger strike is an active

⁴ The hunger strike by the trade union committee members of the mines of Vorkuta (March 1995) forced the Russian government to hold a meeting of the Inter-departmental Commission (MVK) on the issues of the socio-economic development of the coal regions in Vorkuta earlier than the one planned for Moscow.

form of influencing the employers, in this case – the government. The important factor for the workers was that something was being done to try to resolve their problems, which meant they were ready to wait to see what the outcome would be.

In defining what constitutes a strike, Kornhauser (1954: 8) uses such characteristics as visibility and maturity: ‘Strikes are not the only expression of industrial dissatisfaction, and probably not the most dangerous, but they are the most spectacular. They are not the only form of economic conflict but merely the most conspicuous. They involved face-to-face primary relations between mutually identified antagonists, whereas some forms of conflict (e.g. competition in the market place) are so impersonal that the antagonists may not even be known to each other’. In other words, unlike many other forms of conflict, a strike is first of all an open; secondly, a personified; and thirdly, a mass form of conflict.

The perception of conflict as destructive in its very nature is rather widespread both at the level of common sense and in sociology. Hyman (1984: 77) identified several approaches to conflict that exist in sociological literature:

‘Sociological orthodoxy has something of a fixation about "order", and tends to treat any threat to the stability of the *status quo* as a "problem" to be deplored and if possible eliminated’.

‘Another sociological tradition, very much in a minority, has tended to define the *status quo* as the "problem" and to welcome conflict as a possible precursor of an alternative form of social order’.

‘There is... an increasingly influential approach which insists that, paradoxically, the expression of conflict can act as a means of *reinforcing the status quo*’.

Gouldner is one of the academic researchers who perceives strikes not as a continuation of industrial relations, but as a disruption, interruption, or violation of such relations, to the extent that this threatens the very social system with disintegration (the system of social relations which exists within a given enterprise or community). According to Gouldner (1965: 83), the result of all transformations has been pressure which has 'disrupted the worker-management relationship'. In my opinion, these relations have only changed to some extent: the emotional background being replaced and hierarchical relations being transformed into more reciprocal relations does not signify their repudiation.

Considering a strike as a change of organisation, Nicholson and Kelly (1980: 275-284) note the following:

the transformation of issues (during the strike relations between opposing sides continue to develop, which may also lead to a change of emphasis towards issues which were previously considered minor) (Marsh, 1967);

effect of consciousness (during the short period of a strike, old experiences may be reviewed and new values adopted (Brogden and Wright, 1979));

the effect of the strike on the climate, particularly its results and how it influences the quality of relations between opposing sides. The side which loses usually undertakes significant informal activity – compared with the normal state of affairs – in order to reassert themselves;

effect on the industrial relations system (new rules and procedures appear to regulate aspects which were previously ignored);

effect on external relations (strikes have varying effects on the reputations of the trade unions that organise them and on the enterprise, the management apparatus of which is unable to fulfil contracts with its customers as a result of the strike).

Using this approach, a strike is perceived as a process of modification of the traditional relations between workers and employers, which results in the establishment of new forms, and in some cases new systems of industrial relations, thereby changing the basis on which subsequent strikes may take place.

I think that the issue of defining and understanding strikes may be approached from the position of Clausewitz: in the same way that war is only the continuation of politics by other methods, strikes are only a particular form of industrial relations (primarily relations between the workers and the employers) concerning traditional issues such as wages, health and safety at work etc., which are used to restore a balance between the interests of labour and capital either by means of a return to the former system of mutual relations which were disrupted (which more than likely led to the strike) or to the creation of a new system. Although work is at a standstill, relations between the workers and the employers continue (in the form of opposition or negotiations). Relations are thus maintained and, despite the fact that production is at a standstill, these relations nevertheless concern production. A strike is thus a special form of industrial relations between workers and employers in conditions of a stoppage of production on the initiative of the employees, a view which is shared by Hiller (1969: 11) and Lane and Roberts (1971: 16). As a rule, workers usually put forward a number of demands during a strike aimed at changing certain aspects of labour relations (working conditions and wage levels, for example). Using the example of the case studies used here, we can follow the consequences of strikes for the form and character of industrial relations.

2.3 *Strike parameters and statistics*

As a rule, researchers who conduct comparative analyses of strike movements in various countries focus their attention on the parameters of strikes. Ingham (1974: 28) identifies the following measures of strike activity as the most wide-spread: the duration of strikes – i.e. days lost per strike; the size of strikes – i.e. strikers per strike; frequency of strikes – i.e. strikes per 100,000 workers; and total man days lost through strikes. Hyman (1984) notes that British statistics take into account three main measures: the number of stoppages of production, the number of participants, and the number of work days lost as a result of the strike, a view which is shared by Kornhauser (1954: 7) who developed a more precise definition of the factors measured: ‘There are three standard measurements of strike activity: the number of strikes (defined as stoppages involving at least six workers for a period of at least one working shift); the number of workers directly involved; and the number of man-days of idleness on the part of the workers directly involved’. Having undertaken many research projects comparing strike statistics in different countries, Kerr and Siegel (1954) concluded that the official statistical bodies of various countries measure different indices which are frequently incomparable.

British statistics also used to distinguish between strikes and lockouts, considering the latter as a work stoppage on the initiative of the employers. Since this is very difficult to do, official statistics no longer make this distinction. According to Ross (1948: 106-7), ‘the only essential difference between a strike and a lockout is that the union takes the first overt step in one case and the employer in the other’.

Comparative studies of the incidence of strikes on the basis of statistical records date back to the beginning of the study of industrial relations. British strike statistics are

provided by Knowles (1952), while Ross and Hartman (1960) and Kerr and Siegel (1954) conducted comparative analyses of strike statistics in various countries and various branches of industry. Ross and Hartman believed that strikes should be considered as a function of the various types of systems of industrial relations: 'In particular, the nature of industrial relations institutions could help to explain the variations in strike records of different countries' (Ross and Hartman, 1960: 205).

It is also interesting to consider what is taken into account when including a stoppage in production in strike statistics, since not all work stoppages are strikes. As noted by Turner et al. (1967: 53), a stoppage may be defined as 'a pause for discussion' rather than an actual stoppage.

Batstone et al. (1980: 20) note two main factors in defining work stoppages as a strike: 'The first is that strikes are defined as such primarily by the managerial act of taking men off the clock; this is virtually automatic if the men leave the plant'. The second is, 'Management often have the power to define a situation as a strike or not. We have seen that often a stoppage is not defined as a strike because management in the interests of co-operation, production, and their assessment by their superiors, choose not to define it as such'. This approach is shared by Eldridge and Ingham (1974: 27-28)

Stoppages on the initiative of workers happen much more often than is reflected in official statistics. The main reason for this is that strikes which are considered legal by management are often not such in reality. According to Batstone et al. (1980: 20), 'The process of defining an act as a strike is a social process. It involves, first, particular acts or statements of intent on the part of the workers, and it requires,

secondly, the managerial actions of taking men off the clock and defining the grievance of the workers as legitimate’.

The authors of ‘Social Organisation of Strikes’ focus on the existence of variations between the strike statistics of managers and of trade unions. It is not surprising to find differences in the strike records of unions and employers. For example, Kuhn (1961: 58) found that in one case management records over a seven-year period showed 75 per cent more strikes than union records. In the case of Russia, coal industry unions used data on the number of enterprises on strikes received from the dispatchers’ service of the Russian coal company, Rosugol’, which made a daily tally of such activity (except for cases of national strikes, when the union makes its own calculation of the number of enterprises and workers taking part in the protest). As noted by Ingham (1974), ‘The social nature of the process of defining and classifying strikes means that the statistics provided by those parties directly involved are linked in a systematic way to their goals, strategies and relative positions of power’. The statistics provided by the trade unions and employers differ fundamentally. For example: ‘According to the miners’ union, Rosugleprofsoyuz, 300,000 miners from 129 underground mines and 15 strip mines across the country were on strike as of 9 December. The coal company Rosugol said 113,000 miners were on strike at 98 mines and 10 open cast pits’ (*Monitor - A Daily Briefing on the Post-Soviet States*. 13 December 1996).

It is important to note that the officially reported level of strike activity will also be affected by the way in which official statistics are collected. On the one hand, under what conditions an action qualifies for statistical enumeration as a strike. In the Russian case, for example, strikes did not officially exist, and data was not collected, until a law on strikes was hurriedly introduced in 1989. Since then a work stoppage

only qualifies legally as a strike if it is in pursuance of a collective labour dispute and if a clearly defined and fairly complex procedure has been followed, otherwise it is simply considered to be an unauthorised absence from work. On the other hand, under what conditions the statistical authorities are notified of a strike. In Russia, for example, although notification of the local office of the Ministry of Labour is part of the procedure for the conduct of a legal strike, there is no systematic obligation on employers or on the Ministry of Labour to transmit information on strikes to the local statistical office, the accuracy of whose reporting therefore depends primarily on the interest and diligence of its staff. The official statistics, therefore, have to be interpreted with considerable caution and cannot be used as the basis either for cross-national comparisons nor even as the basis of an accurate picture of the development of strike activity over time. Nevertheless, the official data on Russian strikes since strikes were first officially recorded in 1990 is presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Official statistics of strikes in Russia

Year	Number of enterprises in which strikes occurred	Number of workers involved		Number of working days lost to strikes		Average number of working days lost per strike participant
		Thousand	Average per enterprise	Thousand	Average per enterprise	
1990	260	99.5	383	207.7	799	2.1
1991	1755	237.7	135	2314.2	1319	9.7
1992	6273	357.6	57	1893.3	302	5.3
1993	264	120.2	455	236.8	897	2.0
1994	514	155.3	302	755.1	1469	4.9
1995	8856	489.4	55	1367.0	154	2.8
1996	8278	663.9	80	4009.4	484	6.0
1997	17007	887.3	52	6000.5	353	6.8
1998	11162	530.8	48	2881	258	5.4

Source: Russian Statistical Yearbook, 1999.

Unlike international statistics, which show a tendency towards a decline in the number of strikes, in Russia there has been a marked increase in levels of strikes since 1989, although there was a lull in 1993–4. The concentration of strike activity in particular sectors of the economy in 1995 is shown in

Table 2.2: of the 220 strikes organised at industrial enterprises, 190 occurred at enterprises in the fuel and energy complex. It should be noted that, with the exception of several strikes held by electricity workers at electric power stations, most of these strikes were held by the miners: neither the gas nor the oil workers held any kind of organised collective action in the form of officially registered strikes. What is peculiar about data presented by Goskomstat is that official statistics take into account only those stoppages of production which are classified as being 'strikes', which to a great extent depends on whether it is beneficial to the employers or the local authorities to notify the Centre when making their statistical reports. More often than not, spontaneous stoppages are not reflected in any sense by official statistics in Russia if the conflict stays within the confines of an enterprise and workers return to work within 2 or 3 days. Moreover, official statistics only reflect strikes which involve the trade unions and are organised in accordance with all relevant legal procedures which means they go beyond the confines of an individual enterprise. As shown in

Table 2.2 the greatest number of institutions affected by strikes were in the education sphere, although the total number of working days lost as a result of strikes is only slightly higher in education than in the fuel and energy complex. Using the number of striking enterprises as a measure is hardly likely to help us draw a clear picture of the strike movement in Russia and more likely to add to the confusion, since the significance of one striking mine (where the average number of employees is around 2000) and one school (with an average of between 30 and 50 employees) differs not only quantitatively, but also in terms of their social and political influence.

Table 2.2. Industrial action by sectors, 1995

	Number of enterprises experiencing strike action	Number of workers taking part in strikes	Loss of working time (in days)
Total	8,856	489,400	1,367,000
All industry	220	144,000	631,000
of which fuel and energy	190	130,000	576,000
Education	8,555	320,000	612,000
Construction	11	5,000	35,200
Health	5	500	2,300

Source: Russian Economic Trends, 1996, Volume 4 (4): 96

The education workers show a high level of strike activity, while at the same time their union is very concerned with the legal consequences of their actions and therefore tries to follow the spirit and the letter of the law, going through all the prescribed stages of industrial conflict. Moreover, a high level of education determines a higher level of legal literacy amongst the teachers and their adherence to all legal requirements. As the teachers' union does not represent any political threat to the government, their collective actions are often ineffectual and union leaders have no other protection apart from the law, which in Russian conditions has little meaning for official structures.

Unlike the teachers' union, the Russian Union of Workers in the Coal Industry (Rosugleprof) is a political force, which many political parties court during election campaigns. Almost all strikes, irrespective of the level at which they are held (the mining enterprise, concern, branch level) make their demands directly to the

government of the Russian Federation or personally to the President.⁵ The level of relations between the government and Rosugleprof is determined by the strong pressure exerted by the miners and the lobbying of their interests at the various levels of all branches of authority. In addition to this, public opinion and the mass media traditionally support the miners. The experience of the miners' previous collective actions give them reason to hope for impunity and protection from the side of public opinion even when they break the laws regulating collective action. This is one of the reasons why the coal industry is most responsible for strikes that can be deemed unconstitutional, spontaneous, wildcat or unofficial. At the same time, however, not adhering to the procedures for the resolution of collective conflicts is one of the reasons why these strikes are not always included in official statistics. Proof of this is provided by the example of the national miners' strike held in February 1995. According to data from Rosugleprof, more than 500,000 coal industry workers took part in the strike. This figure is much higher than the one provided by Goskomstat and also by Rosugol' (around 300,000). Moreover, dozens of strikes were held throughout the year at the level of the Russian committee of the union as well as by its territorial and primary organisations, which for the above-mentioned reasons were not included

⁵ A very good example of the political orientation of even the most local strikes is the text of a telegram sent to the government of the USSR: 'A meeting was held in shop no. 5 of the Oktyabrskaya mine of the Vorkutaugol' association on 27 January 1990. It was decided at the meeting to send the following demands to the government:

To change the law on the taxation of enterprises' wage funds.

To increase the price of a ton of coal to consumers as a result of an increase in materials and other products...

Berestovii (chairman of the council of brigades), Shalashov (chairman of the Oktyabrskaya mine trade union committee) and Kopasov (co-chair of the VGPSK).' Cited in Il'yn, 1998: 152.

in statistical reports. It may therefore confidently be asserted that official statistics fundamentally underestimate and provide a very approximate picture of the strike activity of workers in the various sectors of the economy.

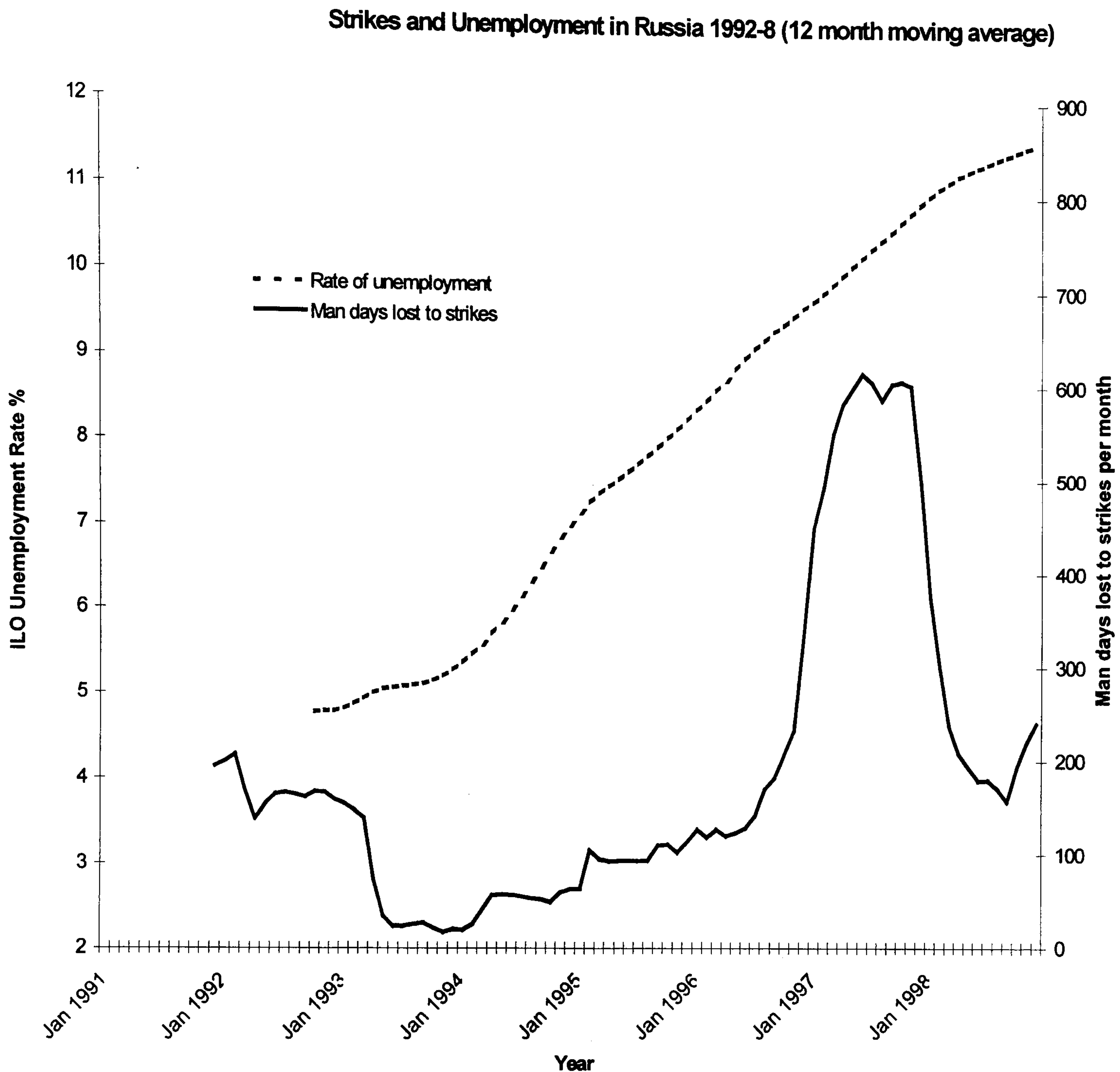
Data presented in official statistics should therefore be approached with great care. While they can reflect the general picture, in my opinion they can hardly claim to provide a precise picture of strikes both in terms of conducting an inter-regional or inter-temporal, as well as an international analysis.

2.4 *Trends in the strike movement*

The decline in interest in conducting research in the sphere of industrial conflicts and strikes which was observed during the 1980s and 1990s was directly related to a sharp reduction in the level of strike activity of workers and the unions representing their interests in the countries with developed capital. At the same time, as noted by Edwards (1992: 359), 'Conflict remained a central element of work organisations'. With regard to Russia, in spite of an expansion of the strike movement, research is usually limited by the financial resources of research institutes and the lack of researchers who are familiar with the experience of overseas research and free from the traditions of Soviet-era science.⁶

⁶ Probably the only exception is the Institute for Comparative Labour Relations Research (ISITO), whose researchers work closely with British colleagues at Warwick University and are capable of conducting research in Russian industrial enterprises using the experience of western qualitative sociology.

Figure 2.1: Strikes and Unemployment in Russia, 1992-8



Most economic theories link a decline in strike activity to a rise in unemployment, a correlation which is frequently made with reference to Kondratiev's waves which determine the cyclical nature of industrial slumps and booms. However, Edwards (1992: 369) suggests that the link between unemployment and strikes may be weaker than it appears if we look at available statistics: 'Rising unemployment tends to reduce the number of negotiations taking place, so that apparent reduction in strikes reflects fewer instances in which a strike may occur, and not necessarily any lower willingness of bargainers to use the strike weapon'. The fact that there is not necessarily a strong

link between unemployment and the incidence of strikes would seem to be confirmed by the Russian example, where the increasing number of strikes has been associated with increasing unemployment, although the fall in the number of strikes since 1998 may partly be a delayed effect of rising unemployment (Figure 2.1).

Approaching conflict from the point of view of political economy also identifies a fall in the number of strikes, explaining this as a compromise between the state, workers and employers. According to Edwards (1992: 366), 'The decline in industrial conflict in Sweden, for example, stemmed from the accession of the Social Democratic Party, which permitted the unions to secure their ends in the political and not the economic sphere'. In Russia this argument is confirmed in the contrary sense, where it was the failure of the government, particularly at Federal level, to enter into meaningful negotiations with the trade unions and to abide by agreements entered into that forced the trade unions to take strike action in the attempt to force the government to negotiate and to abide by the terms of its agreements. From this point of view the situation has improved since 1998, with the government being more ready to meet its obligations to pay wages to state employees and this is a principal reason for the decline in the number of strikes. Many researchers have written about the trend towards a decline in the number of strikes and link this to a change in the form of conflict. Ingham reviews this tendency towards a decline in the number of strikes between the end of the 19th century and the middle of the 20th century, on the basis of Ross and Hartman's argument that, 'there are three primary reasons why the strike has been going out of style. First employers have developed more sophisticated policies and more effective organisations. Second, the state has become more prominent as an employer of labour and economic planner', explaining this as the institutionalisation of industrial relations, i.e. 'the emergence of stable institutions for the regulation of

industrial relations' (Ingham, 1974: 15). As well as Ingham, Ross and Hartman agree that the centralisation of the negotiating process leads to the establishment of harmony in production and a decline in the number of strikes.

It has been suggested that anti-strike legislation in Britain led to a decline in the number of strikes and the transformation of workers' dissatisfaction into other forms of collective action (Hyman, 1984: 59).

Brown and Sisson (1983: 10-12) note the following changes which could have resulted in a decline in the level of strike activity:

a decline in, and curtailment of certain sectors of the economy which traditionally have a propensity to strike; 'Certain broad tendencies seem clear. Developed effort bargaining was concentrated in specific industries, and their decline will have reduced the prevalence of such bargaining in parallel to the reduction in strikes. There is also likely to have been change within establishments that remain. In the car industry, for example, massive changes in the system of labour regulation are likely to have reduced the use of informal bargaining' (Edwards, 1992).

the transfer of those branches with a propensity to strike to contract systems;

the appearance of legal restrictions in the form of new laws or government decrees (for example, the banning of strikes in some branches). Brown and Wadhwani (1990: 10-12) indicate that the introduction of new legislation which limits the freedom of trade unions forces them to behave more circumspectly when organising industrial action.

The decline in the level of strike activity is demonstrated not only by a reduction in the number of work stoppages, but also in the duration of strikes: 'strikes have become shorter: the proportion lasting less than three days rose from 42% in 1979 to 70% ten

years later' (Edwards, 1992: 377). The lack of strikes, however, in no way signifies a lack of conflict. A widely held view of strikes is that they are only the most explicit and overt expression of conflict, which in conditions where open forms of dissatisfaction are difficult or impossible are transformed and displayed in the form of high labour turnover, not turning up for work, low labour discipline etc. (See, for example, Birchall, 1975 and Hackman and Lawler, 1971).

According to Richard Hyman (1984: 58), if the reasons for dissatisfaction are not resolved by management, conflict will continue to develop and to appear in one form or another: 'attempts to suppress specific manifestations of conflict, *without removing the underlying causes of unrest*, may merely divert the conflict into other forms. There is the case of the major motor company which, two decades ago, dismissed a number of leading shop stewards as "trouble-makers". The resulting demonstration at shop-floor level led to a temporary fall in strike figures; but absenteeism, accidents, and turnover all rose sharply'.

In addition to the tendency towards a decline in the number of strikes as open displays of worker dissatisfaction against the administration, many researchers note the tendency towards the politicisation of industrial conflicts: 'the increasing intervention of the state on the side of the employers in industrial relations means that the traditional trade union segregation of "industrial" from "political" activities has become largely meaningless. Every important union struggle over wages or conditions has today a political dimension, since it impinges directly on government economic strategy' (Hyman, 1984: 58). Hyman also points out that 'in the Ford strike of 1978... the invisible opponent of the union negotiating committee was the Government's crumbling pay policy' (Hyman, 1984: 176-7). We have already seen that in Russia

strike action is heavily concentrated in the state sector and in the subsidised coal industry, where strikes are designed to put pressure on the government.

2.5 *Grand theories of industrial conflict*

The reasons for, and development of, industrial conflict was a very popular topic of literature on industrial relations between the 1950s and the 1970s. During the 1980s, however, in spite of the occurrence of many strikes, including the important miners' strike of 1984 in Britain, interest in research on industrial conflict fell notably. The overwhelming majority of publications which received general recognition were published during the period 1960–70. Many articles and books concerning the study of strikes which appeared between 1980 and 1990 are critical reviews and their authors make no claims to having developed their own concepts (Nicholson and Kelly, 1980: 275-284; Zetka, 1992: 214–26; Edwards, 1992: 359– 404).

The vast literature on industrial relations contains different approaches to the concept of industrial conflict. The different theories put forward are distinguished from each other by the principles that determine from which angle industrial conflicts are studied. The five most important grand theories are unitary, conflict, social action, systems and Marxist.

The *Unitary theory* is that which dominated official soviet thought. Within the framework of unitary theory, 'Work organisations... are viewed as unitary in their structure and unitary in their purposes, and as having a single source of authority and a set of participants motivated by common goals. Consequently industrial relations is assumed to be based on mutual co-operation and harmony of interest between management and managed within the enterprise' (Farnham and Pimlott, 1990: 4-5). This theory is classical in nature, denying not only the inevitability but also the

possibility and naturalness of conflict between employers and employees. 'The essence of the unitary theory of industrial relations...is that every work organisation is an integrated and harmonious whole existing for a common purpose... By this view, there is no conflict of interest between those supplying financial capital to the enterprise and their managerial representatives, and those contributing their labour and job skills... It follows that there cannot be "two sides" in industry. Indeed managers and managed alike are merely parts of the same "team"...This requires, on the part of management, at the minimum a paternalistic approach towards subordinate employees... Conversely, employees are expected to remain loyal to the organisation and to its management...' (Farnham and Pimlott, 1990: 4). By convention, unitary theory mainly focuses on the value to the management apparatus, which is interested in avoiding economic losses from production stoppages on the initiative of the employees.

Conflict Theory is based on two interrelated views of society and of industrial relations between employers and employees. The first is that 'although *Britain and western industrialised societies* are still class based, they are essentially "post-capitalist" in the sense that political and industrial conflict are institutionally separated within them and that industrial conflict has become less violent because its existence has been accepted and its manifestations have been socially regulated'. The second view is that work organisations are microcosms of society. 'Since society comprises a variety of individuals and of social groups, each having their own social values and each pursuing their own interests and objectives, it is argued, those controlling and managing work enterprises similarly have to accommodate the differing values and competing interests within them' (Farnham and Pimlott, 1990: 6).

According to this approach, industrial conflict is an expression of a wider conflict in society between social groups with different interests.

Social action theory emphasises the individual responses of social actors in a given situation and is associated with Max Weber. According to him, action is social 'by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual... it takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course' (Weber, 1896: 4). In his opinion, social action can be explained only through the subjective meaning attributed to it by a social actor and not on an objective basis alone. 'Social action... is behaviour having subjective meaning for individual actors, with social action theory focusing on understanding particular actions in industrial relations situations rather than on just observing explicit industrial relations behaviour' (Farnham and Pimlott, 1990: 9).

Systems theory is most popular in America in explaining industrial relations. The theory was developed by John Dunlop, who put forward the hypothesis that the system of industrial relations was not part of the economic system of a society but was an independent sub-system which partly coincided with the economic and political systems with which it interacts. According to Dunlop, the system of industrial relations presupposes the existence of actors, a specific context and an ideology which connects industrial relations to the system, and of rules created to manage them in the workplace and production as a whole. In describing the context which determined the form of rules of interaction in production, Dunlop included the following:

the technological characteristics of the work place and work community

the market or budgetary constraints which impinge on the actors, and

the locus and distribution of power in the larger society (Dunlop, 1958: 9).

In this respect, systems theory is an universal theory which goes beyond the framework of technological determinism and at the same time avoids the excessive subjectivity of social action theory.

From a *Marxist* point of view, political and class theory are synonymous with industrial conflict. The source of industrial conflict thus lies in the system of social relations which predetermines class divisions in society between capitalists, who own the means of production, and workers, who have nothing and are forced to sell their labour power. As a consequence, they feel alienated from the means of production, the labour process and its results. This alienation is a permanent source of conflict between labour and capital and at the level of the enterprise it occurs in the form of industrial conflict. Blauner (1964), Mills (1959) and Eldridge (1973) developed their concepts within the framework of the theory of alienation.

These are the main theoretical approaches to the issue of industrial relations. However, in spite of their apparently universal nature, researchers often use arguments borrowed from several theories in order to explain the processes or phenomena they are studying. A more general division reduces the theories to two main concepts: functionalism and structuralism.

The Human Relations School (functionalism) believes that poor communication is the sole reason for industrial conflict. In this respect, the Human Relations School seems to ignore the possibility that conflict may be inherent to the structure of industry. Mayo (1946), Scott and Homans (1947) and Whyte (1951) are members of this school of thought.

Proponents of technological determinism (see Kuhn, 1961; Sayles, 1958 and Woodward, 1970) explain the level of industrial conflict by the type of production, the

technical characteristics of the job and the technology used. Suggesting that technological components determine industrial conflict, the proponents nevertheless recognise that the influence of the technological variable on conflict is rather complex and not always direct.

Of all the research into the various forms of industrial conflict, the study of strikes as open conflicts has perhaps been the most successful and therefore the most accessible in terms of research. Three case studies of strikes which are considered to be the most well-known provide different approaches to the study of industrial conflict. Pope (1942) provides a description of the Loray Textile Mill Strike: 'From the point of view of the systems approach, a strike is viewed as the inevitable result of environmental and factory specific development. In detail the attitude and actions of individuals may be important but these largely will be seen as a function of the structural changes. Thus, when changes like those examined in this case study take place they will result in pressure being exerted on existing relationships and institutions, which in turn will inevitably result in some kind of industrial action' (Jackson, 1977, p. 210).

Gouldner (1965) also presents a very interesting description of a strike. Initially, it appears that the main reason for the strike and research into it lies in the installation of new equipment at the enterprise and that the explosion of worker dissatisfaction is therefore explained by technological determinism. However, a detailed description by Gouldner of the process of how the strike evolved and the behaviour of the participants in the conflict reveals the deeper mechanisms which led to the wildcat strike. Gouldner explains the strike on the basis of the existing formal and informal norms of production, and communications within the work place and in the settlement where the workers lived. According to Gouldner, the workers refused to accept the legal demands of management because these demands violated existing informal

norms, which were supported by attitudes in the workers' settlement. Gouldner therefore constructed his explanation within the realms of functionalism.

In their research into the strike at Pilkington's glass works near St. Helens, Lane and Roberts (1971) clearly emphasised that they were using a social action approach. They considered 'the strike from the point of view of each of its major groups of participants' and sought to explain the strike by understanding 'why each group embarked upon particular courses of actions' (Lane and Roberts, 1971: 16). They concluded: 'Translated into technical sociological language this means that we have formulated our research within the framework of social action theory' (Lane and Roberts, 1971: 18).

Research conducted by Huw Beynon (1975) at Ford's Liverpool plant eliminates the contradictions between the priority influence of the structure or the public consciousness and creates a basis for linking a structural and an ethnomethodological-phenomenological view of society.

Nicholson and Kelly (1980) generally believe that industrial conflict on the whole and strikes in particular are too complex and heterogeneous a phenomenon to be explained by any single existing grand theory. To understand strikes, they identify 'five processual aspects of strike dynamics'. They consider the following aspects: (1) the strike as protest, in which leaders race to keep pace with membership demands; (2) the strike as warfare, in which intergroup hostility sets the keynote for conflict; (3) the strike as stratagem, in which it is a counter in negotiation; (4) the strike as group process, where social structures and processes govern conflict susceptibility and control; (5) the strike as organisational change, through which the strike is a formative

influence on the industrial relations 'climate' of the participants' (Nicholson and Kelly, 1980: 275).

2.6 *Explaining the propensity to strike*

According to Richard Hyman (1984: 59-60) there are two main approaches to strikes. 'The first is to examine variations in strike-proneness: to consider why the incidence of industrial conflict differs between work groups, between firms, between industries, or between regions and even nations... The second approach involves a different level of analysis: examining the causes of strikes in general, and exploring the rationale behind them' (Hyman, 1984: 59-60). These are not completely different approaches, since exploration of the reasons for the differential incidence of strikes can help us to understand the causes of strikes in general.

It is well-known that strikes differ in number depending on different branches, the existence of a trade union, and its level of activity: within one sector strike propensity may to a great extent characterise several groups of workers. 'The 'strike-proneness' of an industrial or occupational group can be calculated by relating the number of stoppages or striker-days recorded to the size of its labour force' (Hyman, 1984: 30). There thus exist professional groups with a high or low propensity to strike. 'Coal mining ranks near the top of virtually every national table of strike-proneness... In the mid 1950s... coal-mining was responsible for three-quarters of recorded stoppages (Hyman, 1984: 30). According to British statistics, besides the coal industry, the largest number of strikes are recorded in transport, and the metal-producing and using industries. Kornhauser (1954: 10) also notes in his comparative analysis of strike statistics in various countries during the first half of the twentieth century that, 'Strike activity is concentrated in limited sectors of the economy. About 60 per cent of the

total man days of idleness during the past 25 years has been incurred in mining, textiles and apparel, iron and steel, automobiles and food manufacturing’.

The lowest incidence of strike activity is found in agriculture, financial, administrative and professional services and clothing, but the hierarchy is not a constant feature: thus in Britain, public sector workers were increasingly involved in strikes during the 1970s and 1980s.

There are many theories used to explain strike-proneness. Hickson et al. (1986) identified three types of strike: descriptive, which characterises the process or organisation of strikes; variance, which considers the differences between organisations and branches; and explanatory, which offers a wider scope of understanding.

More often than not, strike proneness is explained on the basis of the characteristics of the different technologies of production. As previously noted, the most well-known proponents of this approach are Kuhn, Sayles, and Woodward, and it is now being actively developed by Zetka (1992), who considers the different types of labour processes to be the source of spontaneous protests. Zetka identifies two types of theory to explain the propensity of workers to collective action.

‘The homogeneous thesis, which links worker militancy to labour-force homogeneity and to the centralisation of production operations, is one of the most popular variants of this theme. In workplaces characterised by worker homogeneity, common interests among workers exist and permit collective mobilisation. Centralisation of production increases these homogenised workers’ collective power by making a firm’s entire production system vulnerable to work stoppages.

This potential power sparks such workers to act collectively to realise their common interests' (Zetka, 1992: 214).

Another theory, developed by Perrone and extended by Wallace, Griffin, and Rubin, predicts a high level of militancy among workers holding strategic positions in the economy.

Analysing strikes in the American car industry, Zetka came to the conclusion that: 'the technological organisation used in building cushions and seat backs, operating stamping and welding presses, and installing interior trim generated workgroup solidarity. Such organisation demanded that workers co-ordinate their moment-by-moment activities to accomplish management's objectives, as well as values ends outside their official job description. I hypothesize that pre-existing patterns of intensive interaction and co-ordination among these workers enabled them to mobilize support for grievances and to act decisively as a collective unit' (Zetka, 1992: 218).

According to Zetka, the very process of work may be designated as 'solidarity-generating, because they encourage workers to form primary groups and to co-ordinate consciously their activity to accomplish work tasks' (Zetka, 1992: 216). Zetka identifies two types of work (meaning the industrial process, or operations): 1) common work, which presupposes joint efforts and 2) work which is implemented individually, with each person responsible for fulfilling their own tasks and therefore no joint effort is required. According to Zetka (1992: 218), 'Only solidarity-generating labor processes facilitated wildcat strikes'.

In spite of the relatively high popularity of technological determinism in explaining the reasons for strikes, a more in-depth study of the stoppages as processes often finds more weighty arguments which contradict the veracity of the technological approach.

An example of this is the aforementioned case study of a wildcat strike conducted by Gouldner. Not only qualitative research fails to substantiate the positive dependency of strike proneness on the technology of production: Eisele (1974) conducted quantitative research to test the hypothesis on the domination of technological reasons for strikes: 'with survey data describing the technology, size, and strike experience during the 1950-69 period of 282 manufacturing plants in fourteen states. This evidence shows very little relationship between type of technology and strike frequency and a stronger, but still mixed, relationship between plant size and frequency of strikes' (Eisele 1974: 560).

Kerr and Siegal also consider a purely technological approach limited. To explain the strike-proneness of workers they used a comparative analysis of strike statistics in various countries and different industrial sectors and came up with two theories. The first considers the position of workers in society to determine their propensity to strike, which is also influenced by working conditions. In accordance with this theory, branches of industry have a high level of propensity to strike when the workers find themselves in a homogenous group and are, as a rule, isolated from the general community and display a high level of solidarity. The position of miners, as representatives of the most militant profession, and the fact that they live in their own separate communities, leads to the formulation of their social standards, stereotypical behaviour, their authorities and heroes, and a common understanding of social justice for all members of the community. The miners' 'community integration' forms a single collective consciousness and collective grievances, the expression of which leads to overt forms of displays of dissatisfaction. However, Kerr and Siegal, the biggest proponents of using community integration theory to explain the propensity to strike, consider this theory insufficient. The second theory which they use defines the

nature of labour and the characteristics of the workers. So, if work is physically demanding and unpleasant, unskilled, temporary or promotes a spirit of independence, it will attract militant, temporary workers, prone to strikes. Kerr and Siegal suggest that the best explanation of strikes results from an amalgamation of these two theories.

It appears that Kelly and Nicholson were correct when they wrote that strikes involve processes that are too complicated, heterogeneous and often inconsistent. Any theory is a deliberate simplification of the processes being studied and too restricted in terms of explaining strikes. Moreover, it is hardly likely that any single theory could explain different types of strikes.

We shall eventually return to the question of why Russian miners strike, but first of all we shall look at classifications of conflicts and strikes.

2.7 *The classification of industrial conflicts*

The literature on industrial conflicts offers various classifications. For example, Kornhauser (1954) divides conflicts into two large groups: first, organised conflict, which presupposes group behaviour (strikes, lockouts, walk-outs, cuts in productivity rates, and conflicts during negotiations on contracts) and second, unorganised conflict (labour turnover, strict supervision, unofficial acceleration of production, job truancy).

Fox has a different way of dividing conflicts. The first group involves conflicts between individuals, while the second involves individuals who are not members of any collective on whose behalf they are acting, and management; the third group involves conflicts between a group or its representatives and management; and finally the fourth group involves conflict between collectives.

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* reduces the heterogeneity of industrial conflicts to two main groups: formal and informal. 'Informal industrial conflict is so labelled because it is not based on any systematic organisation, results directly from a sense of grievance, and supposedly is wholly expressive in nature. Many forms of industrial sabotage which appear irrational would constitute industrial conflict in this sense, as would purely individualised and even unconscious forms of protest, including absenteeism, frequent job-changing, negligence, and even accidents at work. Formal industrial conflict is reserved for organised expressions of conflict articulated through a trade union or other worker representative. Its supposed purpose is strategic or instrumental rather than (or as well as) expressive and may often involve workers who, by themselves, have no feeling or personal involvement regarding the issues at stake in the dispute' (Marshall, 1994: 240-1).

These groups contain various forms of industrial conflict. First, there is the strike as a form of conflict, descriptions and analyses of which most publications concerning industrial conflict are dedicated to. In his research on the problem of relations between labour and management, Kerr lists, besides strikes, a number of forms such as the 'form of peaceful bargaining and grievance handling, of boycotts, of political action, of restriction of output, of sabotage, of absenteeism, or of personnel turnover. Several of these forms, such as sabotage, restriction of output, absenteeism, and turnover, may take place on an individual as well as on an organized basis and constitute alternatives to collective action' (Kerr, 1964: 171). Great attention was paid to sabotage as a form of collective protest by Bensman and Gerver (1963), whose classic research was conducted at an aeroplane plant.

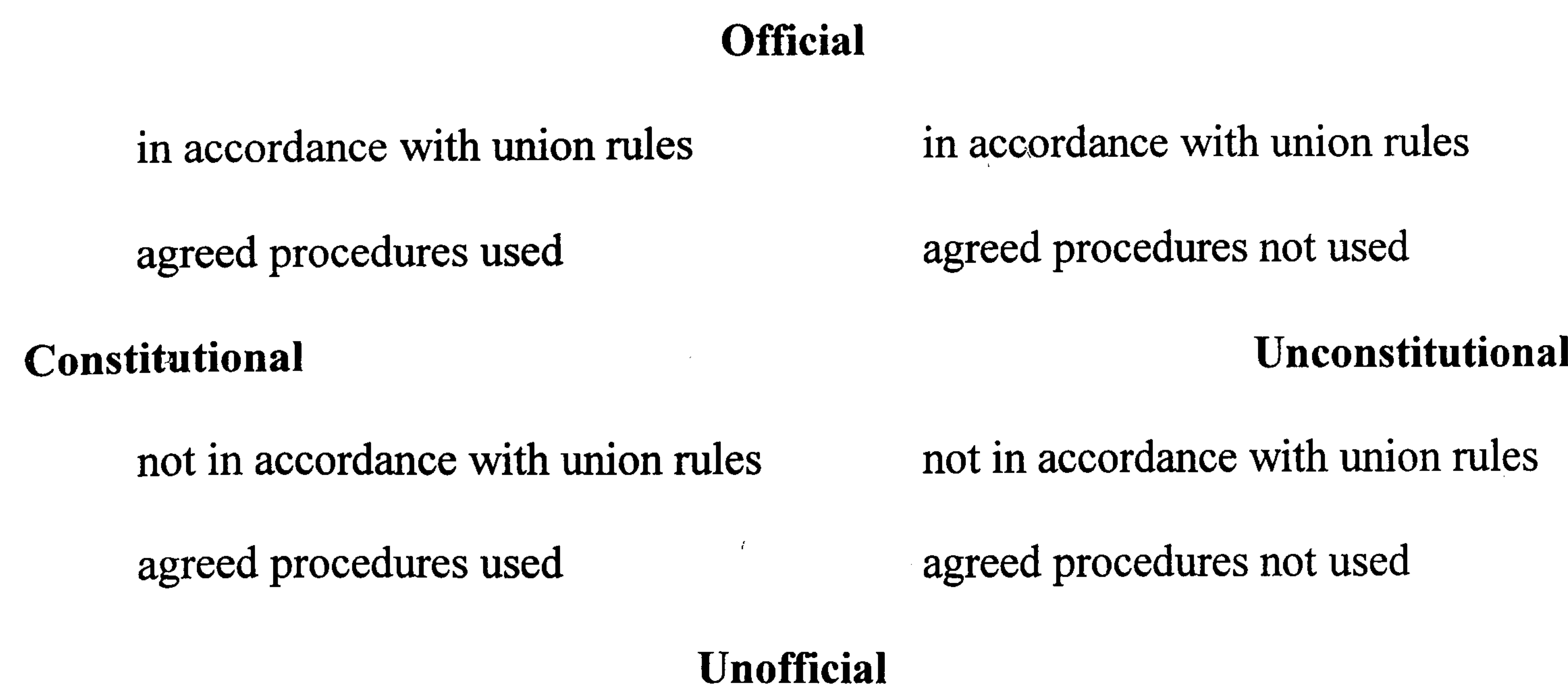
As noted above, strikes are the best researched form of industrial conflict. This is explained by the relative accessibility of this form of conflict using both qualitative

and quantitative research methods since strikes 1) are always overt conflicts, which presuppose the personification of opposing interests; 2) are a mass phenomenon, which reflect the opposition of different social groups; 3) unlike other forms of conflict, have a clearly defined beginning and end; 4) have inherent measurements which can be used in quantitative studies.

2.8 *Types of strike*

A typology of strikes is not one of the subjects hotly discussed in industrial relations literature. Most researchers draw the simple distinction between official / unofficial and legal / illegal (or constitutional / unconstitutional). Farham and Pimlott (1990) present their approach to categories of strike action in the form of a diagram (Figure 2.1): ‘Strikes can be official or unofficial and constitutional or unconstitutional. Official strikes are where the union "officially" supports its members in accordance with union rules during a dispute. A constitutional strike is one taking place after negotiations through the agreed procedure for avoiding disputes have been exhausted and a "failure to agree" recorded’ (Farnham and Pimlott, 1990: 171).

Figure 2.1. Categories of strike action



Whether a strike is deemed official or unofficial depends on who heads it: 'an unofficial strike is one which is not recognised by the Executive Committee of a Union' (Knowles, 1952: 30). It is true, however, that strikes which begin as spontaneous and unofficial often turn into official strikes, headed by trade union officials. Since trade union recognition of a strike can occur both prior to and after it has occurred, Eldridge proposes the concept of 'quasi-official' and 'completely informal'. He also makes a distinction between unofficial and spontaneous strikes.

Knowles takes a similar position, drawing a distinction between strikes which receive the complete and partial support of the Union Executive Committee: 'although unofficial strikes very often have the general support or connivance of branch officials, there still remains a distinction between a strike which has full recognition and financial support from the Executive and one which does not. An unofficial strike may involve the violation of the strikers' contracts only, but more often they violate both contract and agreement' (Knowles, 1952: 31).

It should be noted that both trade union officials and the heads of official structures are apt to consider the term 'unofficial strike' as incorrect and confusing to an understanding of conflicts which take place. A former Minister of Labour pointed out in the House of Commons on 21 May 1962 that: 'There are difficulties in defining and classifying strikes as official and unofficial... Some strikes start as unofficial and end as official. Some are official only when they are over. Some are official at district level and are repudiated at headquarters' (Hansard (May 1962), Vol. 660, col. 8, cited in Knowles, 1952). Moreover, he argued that negotiations with the leaders of informal strikes only provoke further unofficial strikes.

Participating in a dispute, William Gallacher (a Clydeside shop steward during the First World War and later a Communist MP for West Fife) had the following to say about the term 'unofficial strike': 'Such a term is entirely misleading. Branch officials, district officials, and in some cases, executive officials were involved. The more correct term for such strike is "spontaneous strike". Such strikes have played an important part in the development of the trade union movement and are often recognised and supported by the national officials' (Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, 1936: 42, cited in Knowles, 1952).

According to Batstone et al. (1980), there are two aspects which differentiate between a legal and illegal strike. The first is the observance of formal procedures concerning preparations for, and the holding of a strike. The second is whether the demands made by the strikers are legal or illegal (in other words, are they included in contracts, collective agreements, laws and legislative acts)?

Kerr (1964) distinguishes between strikes according to the socio-professional membership of their main participants. Even the strike is of many varieties. 'It may involve all the workers or only key men. It may take the form of refusal to work overtime or to perform a certain process. It may even involve such rigid adherence to the rules that output is stifled' (Kerr, 1964: 171).

Distinctions may also be made according to the level at which strikes take place: local level (the enterprise or a number of enterprises in a town or settlement), regional or national level: national strikes which are contained in one sector are called branch strikes rather than general strikes.

An important characteristic on the basis of which strikes may be divided into different types is duration. Comparative analyses of strikes in various countries shows that

while one-day strikes are the norm for some countries, it may be typical for others to stop production and hold talks for several days. Having conducted a similar comparison, Ross and Hartman (1960: 24) believe that using the same term to characterise phenomena which differ from each other to such an extent results in errors being made. The duration of strikes may be used as an indicator to distinguish between strikes the function of which is a real test of power and those which only represent a symbolic demonstration.

2.8.1 Wildcat strikes

Wildcat strikes stand somewhat apart from other unofficial strikes. Although the literature appears to find it difficult to define wildcat strikes in terms of their scientific characteristics, authors nevertheless have a special attitude to them which makes this type of strike something more than just unofficial.

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* provides the following definition: 'Wildcat strikes are short and begin without notice. Unofficial strikes are called without formal approval from the workers' trade union. Sit-down strikes or sit-ins differ in that strikes remain on the employer's premises. Other sanctions available to workers and their trade unions include the work-to-rule, in which an officious and punctilious observation of factory or office rules is made to inconvenience management; go-slows in which work is carried out more slowly than normal; overtime bans in which workers refuse to work more than their standard hours; and blacking in which workers refuse to work with particular products or services' (Marshall, 1994: 240). 'The term **unofficial** or "**wildcat**" **strike** is applied to strikes waged through unrecognised leaders such as shop-stewards, or by a non-recognised union, or in some other way which breaches established collective-bargaining laws

and procedures. Obviously, there is not a clear distinction in practice between wildcat strikes and some of the more collective forms of unofficial conflict' (ibid., 241).

Eldridge (1968: 79) notes that, 'It is not only the spontaneous element of the strike but the sense of alienation from the established union that characterises the wildcat strike'.

An interesting explanation of a wildcat strike is provided by Lane and Roberts (1971): 'there is a big difference between an organised strike and a wildcat. In the first there is a declaration of war in the form of strike notice. In the second there is a revolt in which all the normal constitutional channels are thrown to one side'.

Gouldner (1965: 95) offers the following summary of the main features that characterise spontaneous strikes: 'A wildcat strike has been seen to be one in which:

- 1) The formally dominant union officials have lost power consonant with their positions to other persons in their union...
- 2) The issues involved are ordinarily of "little interest" to formal labour leaders and business managers.

Workers' aggression is directed at the dilatory manner in which their grievances are dealt with'.

Unlike strikes organised by the trade union in which the workers often take part only as a result of their membership of the trade union, wildcat strikes are always more 'democratic' as all of their participants are more independent, directly involved in the conflict and personally interested in how it is resolved. 'In wildcat strikes, workers shut down production on their own initiative to force a resolution of their grievances directly on the shop floor without official union support or mediation. Workers thus asserted unilateral control over the timing of the action, robbing management and unions of ability to calculate strategic responses to strike threats' (Fantasia, 1988). It

should be noted that, unlike other unofficial protests, wildcat strikes undermine the foundations of existing trade unions and can lead to the creation of new organisations, which appear during joint worker protests.

In summing up analyses of strikes, the fact should not be ignored that, in spite of strict legislative restrictions, unofficial worker protests are a relatively wide-spread phenomenon. 'The existence in Britain of a high proportion of unofficial strikes indicates an important defect in formal union activity. It is an indictment of unions not of employees. The way to reduce unofficial strikes is to adopt union organisations so that they are involved in strike moves, thus making them official... Unofficial action is informal trade unionism, occurring because formal unions are incapable of fulfilling their functions satisfactorily and have, for this reason, lost some control over their members' (Allen, 1966: 115).

2.9 *Explaining strikes*

2.9.1 The breakdown in communications or informal relations

From reading work dedicated to the study of strikes, it is evident that, in many cases, one of the main reasons why workers are pushed into this open form of protest is the breakdown in communications between workers and management. In this respect, an important role is played by management's lack of knowledge about the mood in the workplace and the potential for strike or the workers' lack of information about the state of affairs within an organisation. A breakdown in communications means in practise, 'that the grievance machine did not work' (Gouldner, 1965: 97). In his work on the 1968 Ford strike, Huw Beynon (1975: 275) identifies the workers' lack of sufficient knowledge. On the other hand, the workers' low level of information at shop

floor level also makes the work of the trade union inefficient as insufficient information adversely affects the ability to organise united protest action. This is why one of the levers used to strengthen solidarity when strikes are beginning and tense negotiations are taking place with the administration is the daily informing of participants of what is happening: 'We had to ensure that the lads on all the sections knew what was going on. We had regular report-back meetings and produced a hell of a lot of leaflets' (Beynon, 1975: 275).

This same issue is described by Gouldner in his book on a wildcat strike, in which he raises the following questions:

'How well was management actually informed of the workers' real attitudes or "state of mind", regardless of the sources through which this information came? Did they perceive the situation as one in which open conflict might appear?

How did management feel about the precipitating grievances? Did they want to solve them?

Was there anything in management's situation which might have prevented them from acting effectively?... was there anything which constrained management to behave in ways which neglected the workers' grievances?' (Gouldner, 1965: 106-7).

Unlike researchers who highlight the prevalence of factors related to information in the strike, Gouldner explains spontaneous protests by workers as a result of the violation of the informal attitudes that traditionally exist within an enterprise. A classic example of this is provided by Gouldner's 'Wildcat Strike'. It was decided at the enterprise in which the research was conducted to install new equipment and to introduce a new work regime. To this end, it was necessary to strengthen control on the part of management, whose attitude to the workers had traditionally been relatively

indulgent; after a short time an illegal strike (the first in the firm's history) erupted and wage demands were made.

Gouldner explains the reasons for the strike as follows. The workers' expectations concerning management's behaviour were disregarded by the introduction of stricter control. However, the expectation that management should behave indulgently 'in conditions of production was hardly legal': it was difficult to refute the fact that management had the formal right to exert strict control if the company considered this fitting. The workers' dissatisfaction could not thus be expressed through formal negotiating procedures and therefore remained unauthorised and 'latent'. Subsequent negotiations between the unions and management on the issue of wages led this latent hostility to become active. In this case the workers did not see any obstacles to the aggressive pursuit of their demands: 'demands for wages are always legal'. The workers' attitude was largely ambivalent: their hostility towards management was partly displaced by the issue of wages as a response to, and a more sensitive attack on the company; besides this, higher wages were perceived as compensation for the deterioration which had resulted from the stricter management policy. The problem was not only the introduction of new equipment but also that this was preceded by a change in the social organisation of relations since foremen who had long worked in the labour collective and were well known to them were replaced. In other words, the system of informal relations which had somehow been able to mitigate the social consequences of technological changes had also been violated by management's actions, which had already placed the workers in conditions which were uncertain and new to them (disruption and violation of stability). During the initial stage of the strike, traditional moods were most evident, including the desire to restore the former style of relations between the workers and administration.

Gouldner draws the conclusion that it was not the technological innovations that caused the strike, but the social changes connected with them. In particular, the change in the social organisation that occurred with the replacement of the foremen and the installation of new equipment led to a sharp transformation in, and more specifically the undermining of the workers' status and role in the enterprise. The strike was therefore caused by the sharp decline in the workers' status, which was expressed by the violation of the former system of informal relations.

2.9.2 Organisation and institutionalisation factors

A number of authors emphasise the role of factors of organisation and institutionalisation in the development of strikes from different points of view. Wright Mills (1948), for example, notes that the degree of workers' political and social integration influences their level of strike activity. Other authors (see Lester, 1958; Kuhn, 1961, Sayles, 1958) indicate that the existence of institutions to conduct negotiations as well as of trade union organisations at the workplace affect strike models.

Gouldner, Paterson and Willet (1951) show the importance of who heads the strike in how it progresses and develops. The results of protests depend on the leaders' authority and their organisational skills.

Karsh explains the occurrence of strikes with a list which includes social, economic and historical reasons (Karsh, 1958, p. 2). On this basis, Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel (1980) note that strikes can also occur in unfavourable circumstances, giving the example of the wave of strikes in Europe in 1968, for which they use the term, 'explosion of consciousness'. 'There are a number of factors which have to be taken into account in any satisfactory and total explanation of strikes. First, it is essential to

recognise that strikes, as an expression of industrial conflict, reflect the subordination of workers within industry and, indeed, society more generally. Second, the institutions of collective bargaining, forms of social and political integration more generally, and management and trade union organisation all have some relevance to the probability of strike action' (Batstone et al., 1980: 4). I have argued elsewhere that the success of strikes at industrial enterprises (especially in the case of branch strikes) depends on concurrence during these protests, both in terms of timing and of the aims of at least some of the demands made, with the demands of the general democratic movement and the mood prevalent in society (Borisov, 1996a).

Most authors agree what is also asserted by statistics – that the presence of organisations representing workers in the form of trade unions, and also factors of institutionalisation like the recognition of unions by the other partners in relations with the employers, the adoption of laws to regulate relations between workers and employers etc., leads to a decline in the number of strikes on the whole and in wildcat strikes in particular, and to workers displaying their dissatisfaction in 'softer' ways.

2.9.3 Agitator theory

'Social scientists sometimes disregard the "agitator" theory of strikes' (Hyman, 1977), but 'there is a danger of depersonalising the causal analysis of conflict and overlooking the important fact that individuals who feel strongly about issues have more impact on people with whom they communicate than do more impersonal sources' (Nicholson and Kelly, 1980: 280).

Writing about the reasons for a strike, Cole rejects the theory of 'agitators' which was widespread towards the end of the 19th / beginning of the 20th century, explaining the occurrence of strikes with the activity of so-called 'agitators'. 'Why do strikes take

place, and why, in all industrialised countries, are they rapidly increasing in frequency and in dimension? The answer of upper and middle class prejudice is that strikes are caused by persons called "agitators" or nowadays "Bolsheviks", who possess a magical power of persuading the workers to respond to their destructive designs. This is equivalent to saying that there is no material cause at all; for, when it becomes necessary to explain why there are these "agitators" and "Bolsheviks", prejudice falls back either on the explanation of original sin, or else upon the infinitive regress in some such forms as this:

Bolshies here have Russian Bolshies striving to incite 'em,

Russian Bolshies German Bolshies - so ad infinitum,

which does not carry us far towards a solution' (Cole, 1920: 5).

In all probability, the theory of agitators cannot provide a sufficient explanation of the reason for strikes since it does not look at the social context of strikes, which immediately reveals its discrepancies. Categorising the existence of individuals capable of provoking conflict in an empty room as one of the reasons which explains the beginning of open worker protests, Hyman (1984) adds a further four to round off the picture, giving it a more systematic look: 1) the type of interpersonal relations; 2) community integration; 3) technology; 4) the industrial relations system.

2.10 The main reasons for strikes

In addition to the theoretical constructs that explain the predisposition to strike of one socio-professional group or branch or another, there are various classifications of specific reasons which lead to strikes: 'Until recently the Department of Employment listed nine 'causes of strikes': claims for wage increases; other wage disputes; hours of labour; demarcation disputes; employment and dismissal questions (including

redundancy); other personnel questions; other working arrangements, rules and discipline; trade union status; and sympathetic action. Only four of these categories of strike issues figure at all prominently: the two classes of wage disputes, employment and dismissal questions, and 'other working arrangements'. The remaining five categories have together accounted for only 10 to 15 per cent of stoppages... and often less than 10 per cent of striker-days' (Hyman, 1984: 120).

At the same time, the immediate reasons for the strike do not always appear to be conflict between the workers and the employers. There are well-known cases where opposition between various groups within one enterprise or branch has led to strikes: according to Dennis et al (1957: 63), 'Very many of the strikes officially classified as due to demands for wage-increases in fact spring from differences in rates of earnings between related jobs in the same plant or firm'. Confirmation of this is provided by the example of the Ford strike in Britain, during which the workers demanded parity with the highly-paid workers of the car industry in the Midlands, although such a demand is more likely to be a feature of their bargaining strategy than an expression of conflict between workers in the two plants.

Hyman also notes that: 'Men and women with such aspirations will feel aggrieved unless and until they succeed in improving their relative position; but this will necessarily involve a deterioration in the relative position of someone else. Thus the attempt to reduce differentials in favour of the lower-paid may well be interpreted by those with higher earnings as an assault on their established rights' (Hyman, 1984:

124). A Russian example of such a conflict is relations between pilots and air traffic controllers on the issue of wage levels.⁷

Knowles (1952: 7) defines three main reasons for strikes: the main causes (wages and hours), solidarity (union status and sympathetic action) and frictional causes (all the other categories).

There appear to be four main types of strikes: economic, ideological, political and psychological. The consequences of a strike can therefore only be partly assessed using economic parameters: 'Although strikes are often economic in origins, their effects reach far beyond the economic field; and the non-economic or indirectly-economic effects of strikes are even more difficult to forecast than their economic effects' (Knowles, 1952: 7).

In spite of the fact that all stoppages are usually perceived as having economic roots, this is in fact not always the case: 'In fact, the majority of wage claims are revolts against... oppression – revolts against the systematic mutilation of the worker's

⁷ The strike activity of the Federation of Unions of Air Traffic Controllers resulted in their inclusion on 'List No. 1' which provides a number of privileges, including higher wages as a result of dangerous work. Prior to this, the only representatives of the air sector on the list had been the pilots. This violation of the traditional hierarchy, which had primarily existed in terms of wages (with the pilots at the top of the pyramid), and which improved the position of the low-paid categories of workers, was perceived by the pilots as undermining their position. This led to representatives of the Union of Flight Crews forcing the government, under threat of a national strike, to come to the negotiating table and to adopt a new wage scale, which re-established the traditional relationship in wages for employees in this industry. The wage scale included 22 levels, and a special coefficient was included in the calculation of wages. It is interesting to note that the wage scales and the coefficients for the whole sector were

personality, against the stunting of his professional and human faculties, against the subordination of the nature and content of his working life to technological development which rob him of his power of initiative, control and even foresight. Wage claims are much more frequently motivated by rebellion against working conditions than by a revolt against the economic burden of exploitation born by labour. They express a demand for as much money as possible to pay for the life wasted, the time lost, the freedom alienated in working under these conditions' (Gorz, 1965: 319).

Non-economic sources of wage demands may be ideological, political, or psychological. A classic example of demands being changed is Gouldner's 'Wildcat Strike' research, where the tightening up of demands by the administration led to a strike. The indignation of the workers led to them making demands for an increase in wages, as this demand fulfilled a compensatory-replacement function for the moral losses sustained by the workers when changes were made to the previous system of mutual relations. The same thing occurred at Russian enterprises during 1992 and 1993, during the privatisation of enterprises, which led to a struggle for the distribution of shares. As demands concerned the distribution of shares which had already been redeemed, or certain privileges for the workers, they were perceived by everyone as illegal and the consequences were a rise in the workers' dissatisfaction in their material position, the clearest and most understandable expression of which was wage levels. Conflict therefore turned into a strike, with the demand that wages be increased. The demand to increase wages 'therefore carried an important symbolic

developed by representatives of the flight crews' union and that pilots' wages were given the coefficient

- 1. All others were allocated coefficients which depended on the pilots' wages (e.g. 0.6, 0.8 etc.).

character' (Hyman, 1984: 128) and played a compensatory role, replacing lost informal privileges with higher wages.

According to Lockwood (1955: 338), 'Demands framed in terms of hours and wages conveniently define what is at stake. Precise, quantitative demands give a concreteness and urgency to the opposition of groups that vaguely felt, but unfocussed, dissatisfactions about the quality of life would never do'. The workers' inability to formulate what they are unhappy or uncomfortable about, their irritation, and the difficulty for the workers and their unions to control new parameters leads to demands to increase wages as a simple and quantitatively expressed indicator. This view is shared by Hyman (1984: 128): 'Non-wage issues are often far less precisely formulable and may involve questions of principle on which compromise is difficult if not impossible'.

2.11 *Strikes in Russian literature*

Under the Soviet regime, there were no significant publications about strikes in Russia, which was related as much to the lack of strikes (or their covering up, if they did occur) as to the fact that, in accordance with Communist Party ideology, the very word 'strike' applied to class conflict between labour and capital and therefore could only be applied in capitalist societies. The term 'strike' was first used publicly during the miners' strike of 1989 and has since come to be widely used, particularly in the mass media, which often refers to the most heterogeneous forms of collective protest as 'strikes'.

Although the 1989 strike happened more than a decade ago, it cannot be said that the number of publications in Russia adequately reflects the prevalence of the strike phenomenon and its influence on the development of labour relations in Russia. Until

fairly recently, there had been no significant monographs dedicated to the study of strikes, with the exception of the journalist Kostyukovskii's *Kuzbass: Zharkoye leto 1989* (*Kuzbass: the hot summer of 1989*). Despite the lack of sociological concepts and a purely journalistic approach to describing events, this monograph contains a wealth of material, including long quotes from interviews and the minutes of meetings in various of Kuzbass's towns and between strike leaders and a government commission. This is probably the first publication in Russia of a book on strikes which includes certain aspects of case-study research. Other publications are either a response from the party-ideological apparatus to agitate the miners (Gavrilov and Lavrov, 1989), or articles and monographs which are rather one-sided and represent in a romantic light the development of the workers' movement as a whole, and the 1989 strike in particular, on the strength of the authors' involvement in the processes described (see Gordon, Gruzdeva, Komarovskii, 1993 and Shablinskii, 1995). Many articles were also written which show a research interest (see Maksimova, 1989). A significant contribution to the study of strikes was made by the ISITO publications that resulted from a joint Russian / British research project – 'The Restructuring of the Russian Coal Mining Industry' (see Bizyukov, 1996; Borisov, 1996b; Borisov et al., 1996), and also by strike monographs published in recent years both in and outside Russia (see Milovidov and Krestyaninov, 1998; Ilyin, 1998; Borisov, 1999). The works of Kemerovo historical researcher, Lopatin, are of historical and archival value: they collate documents adopted during the strikes of 1989 and 1991, as well as protocols of meetings and decisions taken by Kuzbass workers' committees, programmes prepared, and declarations signed by workers' committees, and government protocols and agreements etc. (Lopatin, 1993) in addition to interviews with leaders and participants in the strikes conducted and published at a later date (Lopatin, 1998).

2.12 *The application of existing theories to Russian strikes*

The authors of many publications on trends in strike activity note a decline in the number of strikes. Russia is different in the sense that, although by international standards the number of strikes held there may be low, the level of protest activity until recently was not abating, although the form of protest has been subject to change over time. This does not mean that it would be correct to suggest that Russia goes against a global trend: all that can be said is that reforms have brought in their wake social instability and a rise in strike activity aimed at the restoration of social guarantees.

On the subject of a decline in the number of strikes, Ingham (1974) and Ross and Hartman (1960) suggest that this is caused by more 'sophisticated' management policies and also infer that the centralisation of negotiations leads to the establishment of harmony in production and a decline in the strike movement. In no way does this correspond to the processes that are occurring in Russian enterprises. Firstly, the employers' 'more sophisticated policies' mean that, as noted previously, they are interested in strikes at enterprises as this secures state subsidies for them. As for the centralisation of the negotiating process, the opposite tendency is true of the coal industry: the government has made renewed efforts to transfer negotiations from federal to regional and enterprise level. Within the branch union, the processes of regionalisation and opposition has also been stepped up as a result of the lack of sufficient amounts of state subsidies for all those in need. As we will see, this has contributed to the fragmentation of the miners' movement and a decline in large-scale strike action.

As we also saw previously, economic theories link a decline in strike activity to a rise in unemployment. However, the closure of many coal industry enterprises and the loss of more than half the jobs in the coal industry did not lead, at least immediately, to a fall in the number of strikes, which are often provoked by the employers, although, following defeat in various protests (in numerous cases, strikes have ended with a decision from the employers to close the enterprise) their numbers began to decline. The number of protests would then begin to fall for a time in every town because of the workers' fear of provoking the swift closure of their enterprise. However, some time later, a new outburst of protest action would erupt. It is impossible to investigate such events using statistics since the closure of enterprises occurred at different times in different regions and towns. What thus appears as a rule for any specific town is not caught by statistics reflecting the average level of strike activity. The case studies that follow include strikes in dying mines as well as strikes in more prosperous mines.

According to Hyman (1984), the adoption in Britain of anti-strike regulation led to the transformation of worker dissatisfaction into other forms of protest. In Russia the allocation of responsibility to the organisers of strikes did not lead to a reduction in their numbers, but to trade unions no longer organising them or, in cases where the employers took the matter to court, to an avoidance of the word 'strike', transforming this for the purposes of judicial consideration to 'an individual conflict between worker and employer'.

It is noteworthy that for the purposes of our research, the application of such widespread theories as technological determinism and community integration theory is clearly inadequate. All industrial relations researchers agree that the miners of most countries display a high level of strike activity. However, it would be a simplification to perceive the coal sector as homogenous, comprising identical enterprises. Russian

mines use different technology, from manual labour with the use of hammers, to coal combines which correspond to international standards. It would therefore be incorrect to explain the propensity to strike in relation to any average type of technology. It cannot be denied, however, that the highest level of strike activity characterises those categories of workers who occupy key positions in the technological chain at mining enterprises and that the special features of coal extraction promote the joint labour of underground miners in conditions of increased danger, which creates feelings of responsibility, collectivism and solidarity amongst the workers.

Community integration theory also leaves many questions unanswered. Most Russian industrial enterprises (irrespective of the industrial sector to which they belong) were involved in the construction of housing for their workers, who subsequently settled into the flats and whole settlements belonging to their enterprises. Nevertheless, of all occupational groups, the miners have displayed the highest level of strike activity. An answer to this question goes beyond the framework of community integration theory, which cannot provide a rational explanation.

Grand theories have also demonstrated their lack of suitability in explaining the occurrence of strikes. Unitary theory rejects the naturalness of conflict between employers and employees. Oriented around the values of management, who want to avoid economic losses as a result of strikes, this theory cannot explain the occurrence of strikes at enterprises which are earmarked for closure or at mines which remain open but where production cuts are planned. The explanations offered by unitary theory are very similar to the approaches that prevailed in Soviet literature, which rejected the naturalness of conflict. Since industrial conflicts nevertheless exist, the application of unitary theory would be relatively illogical.

Conflict theory may be applied in explaining strikes insofar as conflict within the enterprise is an expression of a wider conflict in society. As for the hypothesis that political and industrial conflicts are institutionally divided in post-capitalist society, the Russian experience shows us the complete opposite, with the politicisation of most labour conflicts at coal industry enterprises as well as in the budget sector.

Marxist theory, which identifies industrial conflict with class and political conflict, cannot explain different levels of strike activity in different industrial sectors under the same conditions. It is also hardly capable of explaining the stronger alienation of the miners from the means of production and the labour process in comparison with other groups of workers. Moreover, during the Soviet period, worker alienation from the means of production was not less: then as now, nothing belonged to or depended on the labour collective. In this respect, the only difference now is the absence of any mass repression of participants in protests by the authorities.

Social action theory and system theory provide the most suitable explanation of strikes. Firstly, thanks to the fact that it allows for an explanation of the social action of every actor on the basis of the social context. Such an approach provides an explanation for the behaviour of subjects and reveals the internal logic of their actions as a reaction to contextual changes which are occurring or have already occurred. The case study method used here works best within the framework of social action theory.

As for system theory, a consideration of the system of industrial relations as a subsystem, which interacts with economic and political systems, also proves useful in explaining strikes, the occurrence of which is often connected to processes that occur at macro-level, as well as more specific subjects such as the financial limitations of the state budget and the struggle for influence and power in higher state bodies. At the same time, almost all coal enterprises experience these financial limitations and to one

extent or another are involved in 'political games' at various levels, including lobbying their interests. But not all enterprises strike: why is this the case? We cannot find an answer to this question within the framework of system theory and must therefore turn to social action theory, which attaches subjective meaning to all the actions of an individual, and also to case studies, as the most fitting research method.

2.13 *The special feature of Russian strikes at coal enterprises*

The main reason for labour conflict in Russian enterprises, and indeed around the world, is disputes between workers and employers. However, worker dissatisfaction and complaints are traditionally expressed and resolved within a particular social context. The only employer during the Soviet period was the state, which was headed by the Communist Party. Trade unions formally defended the workers' interests, fulfilling the role 'of the transmission belt of the Party' and were responsible for the organisation of socialist competition and the distribution of holiday vouchers and goods, etc. The directors' position was ambiguous as, on the one hand, they fulfilled management functions, including the hiring and firing of workers, while on the other hand, they were also hired workers and union members. The lack of economic independence at the enterprise and permanent shortages of the raw materials required to fill state plans forced directors to concentrate their efforts on winning resources and finance from higher branch structures, which were part of the huge state apparatus. The directors identified their own position with that of the labour collective, acting on behalf of the enterprise and seeing no basis for class conflict within the enterprise.

Under capitalism, trade unions and the system of industrial relations are guaranteed institutionally for the peaceful resolution of industrial conflicts. Strikes are one of the aspects of the institutionalised system of conducting negotiations. In the Soviet Union

trade unions were the normal channel for representing the interests of the working class, but did not guarantee a genuine expression of worker complaints and dissatisfaction if conflicts arose in production. As a result, almost all labour conflicts were transformed into personal conflicts and generated personal hostility between those involved. More often than not, when labour conflicts arose between workers and the enterprise administration, the worker was forced to leave. In rare cases where a shop or brigade was involved in a conflict, one of the shop, section or enterprise chiefs may have been punished and transferred to another job for 'not coping with their official duties'. However, in both cases, the end of the conflict resulted in the removal of one of the parties to the conflict, but not of the reasons for conflict. The Soviet production system did not create institutional channels for the expression of workers' collective complaints against employers. Disputes and dissatisfaction could only legitimately be expressed on an individual basis, by leaving the job, writing to the press or to party bodies, or by registering an 'individual labour dispute'.

The Soviet institutional structure only provided for the possibility of conducting negotiations with the Centre regarding the receipt of the resources it distributed. Trade unions could participate in negotiations, expressing the interests of the workers in support of the directors of their enterprises or the local authorities.

This was the context in which the strike of 1989 occurred. The strike, which began in a section of one Kuzbass mine quickly spread to the whole town, then to the whole region, then to all coal regions and found a response throughout the country, expressing the contradictory demands to give the regions their freedom and resources.

In spite of *perestroika* and the radical transformations in the country, leading to the restructuring of the coal industry and the privatisation of coal enterprises, the coal

industry continues to receive state subsidies. This governs the directors' interest in trade union involvement in the negotiating process and exerting pressure on the Centre to obtain a larger share of state finance. Enterprise management and the local authorities learned in 1989 to channel and direct the accumulated dissatisfaction of the workers towards the government, thus taking no real responsibility for the economic position of their enterprises but seeking to extract resources from the Centre.

The interest of enterprise directors determined the direction and form of expression of worker dissatisfaction in the first half of the 1990s. Usually beginning as a spontaneous strike, workers' protests come to be headed by a strike committee or by one of the unions that exist at the enterprise (Rosugleprof or the NPG). Following brief negotiations with the director, a conference of the labour collective is convened at which the director declares that the fulfilment of the workers' demands lies beyond his competence and that they should be addressed to the government. The directors promote the extension of conflicts beyond the enterprise, after which political demands are added to the economic demands already made. The conflict becomes politicised with the involvement of various political forces, the regional authorities and branch management and the Russian Committees of the Trade Unions. Each participant acts as a lift, raising the conflict to the level of the government, transforming a labour conflict into a political conflict. As the government is, in turn, not politically homogeneous, various forces use the resonance obtained from the conflict for their own purposes, trying to change the balance of power and influence within the government to their own advantage. When tension in society begins to create the threat of a change to the balance of power in the country, government leaders make financial compromises, paying (or promising to pay) the amounts demanded by the miners and the strike quickly comes to an end. However, this process

of transformation of miners' grievances into political demands directed at the government through institutional channels does not proceed automatically. The process may break down at any of the links in the chain as pressure to resist the workers' demands is imposed from above. The branch body, Rosugol', may fail to support the demands of the trade union and coal association; the association may fail to support the mine director, the mine trade union, under pressure from the enterprise director, may fail to support the workers. In such a case we may find the spontaneous strikers immediately making demands to the government, without the dispute being generalised, and other forces may intervene, offering to represent and support the workers so that the strike is generalised on a more immediately symbolic and political basis without being institutionalised through bureaucratic mediation. This latter course of development became more likely after 1995, with changes to the system of subsidies to the coal-mining industry and growing pressure from the Centre to maintain management solidarity in opposing the workers' demands.

From 1995 the trade union was increasingly caught between the spontaneous expression of the workers' grievances, which brought them into conflict with management, and their collaboration with the management bodies of the industry in their attempt to extract resources from the government. This led the union to oppose isolated strike action by particular mines and to try to persuade the workers to postpone their action until they could participate in co-ordinated action across the whole coal field, or across the country as a whole. However, the failure of such actions to bring any significant consequences for the increasingly desperate miners meant that spontaneous actions became increasingly militant, but also increasingly isolated, while the union was drawn into increasingly bureaucratic negotiating structures, their position no longer depending on their ability to mobilise almost a million workers in

opposition to the government as in their ability to contain the threat of any widespread action by the half million workers who remained in the industry.

The social context may thus facilitate the transformation of a strike from a phenomenon in the sphere of labour relations to a mechanism for the lobbying of branch and regional or faction or political interest and results in the involvement of opposing political forces in labour conflicts. The end of the strike does not lead to changes in the system of labour relations and after a short period of time worker dissatisfaction again accumulates and explodes in the form of spontaneous protests. This is the model that miners' strikes have followed in Russia. It is envisaged that special attention in this thesis will be paid to relations between the trade unions and the employers during strikes, since they, to a great extent, determine how worker dissatisfaction is expressed. Subsequent chapters will consider cases of miners' strikes over the ten-year period between 1989 and 1999 in order to identify the specific and changing characteristics of miners' strikes in Russia. The first chapters will look at the relation between miners' strikes and the system of lobbying that was established in 1989 and continued until 1994–5, including a study of the strike in Donbass in independent Ukraine, which anticipates the Russian example in that the government was able to exploit divisions between industries and regions so as to isolate the miners and leave their demands unfulfilled. As the government's programme of mine closures proceeded it was at first the dying mines which were most active in the strike movement, and the following case studies are of strikes in such mines. However, by the end of the decade those in the dying mines had been taught the lesson of their defeats, that their only hope was to find a job elsewhere, and it was miners in the more prosperous mines who took up the struggle, but in increasingly unfavourable circumstances, as is shown by the final case study of the Rostov miners.

2.14 *Strikes as an object of case studies*

Strikes are ideal for case-study research. Unlike other industrial conflicts, a strike develops overtly, as a result of which the researcher need not spend much time investigating the main objectives of the protest and the chief forces behind it as would be the case in a latent form of conflict. A strike puts all the opposing forces in their places, making them clearly visible and easy to study. Moreover, with strikes it is possible to describe the whole case in full, from beginning to end. The perimeters of a strike are clearly delineated by the framework of the voluntary stoppage of work and the subsequent return to work, which perhaps explains why the most well-known research texts on industrial conflicts are detailed descriptions of strikes, the reasons behind them and the mechanisms by which they develop. The short time frame of strikes (usually no more than one or two weeks) and their clearly defined borders allows for the most complete characteristics of this research phenomenon to be provided within a certain social context.

Case studies provide a wealth of material as they reveal the interaction and reactions of social actors within a given social and cultural framework, and provide an explanation of the subjective sense of the behaviour of the strike participants using their own concepts and evaluations. Research on strikes allows for an explanation to be given not only on the basis of objective data, but also taking into consideration observations (including participant observation), interviews with the participants in the conflict, group discussions etc. In this regard, it is possible to say that case studies of strikes allow not only for a description of how conflicts develop and the interaction between social actors, but also an explanation of industrial conflicts on the basis of the interests and values of the parties to the conflict.

The choice of case studies as the main research strategy was determined by the fact that not only in Russia, but also in Britain, case studies of strikes remain an exception rather than a rule. Moreover, a detailed description of the very process of a strike and the behaviour of its participants allows for an analysis to be conducted on the basis of 'live' material, rather than previously developed theoretical constructs. In this sense, an ethnographic approach, where sociologists put together mosaics from seemingly isolated pieces, would seem more productive than applying one of the universal theories, which are all too general and abstract to provide a full explanation of specific events. It should be noted, however, that although social action theory appears to be most pertinent in analysing specific strikes, since knowledge of the subjective values of the participants who belong to different groups helps us to understand better what guided them to act in one way or another, this theory cannot be universally applied and should be supplemented by a detailed description of the social context in which conflict unfolds. In analysing the miners' protests, I shall try, where possible, to follow the whole process of how the strikes developed from beginning to end and to describe the specific situation and elucidate the specific reasons which led the workers to take this course of action.

In this thesis, I would like to focus on a detailed description of miners' strikes in post-Soviet territories between 1989 and 1999. The workers' movement is characterised here by the domination of the miners' protests and in this respect, is not outside the realms of the international context: miners' strikes, along with teachers' strikes, occupy a high position in Russian statistics. Over the period of many years, Rosugleprof, one of the largest branch unions in Russia (with 860,000 members as of 01/01/96 and 495,000 as of 01/12/99) organised only one or two national branch strikes.

One of the main tasks that I therefore set myself is a detailed description of the social context of industrial conflicts, the importance of which in understanding processes is recognised by sociologists from the most varied schools and backgrounds. As noted by Gouldner (1965: 12), 'human action can be rendered meaningful only by relating it to the contexts in which it takes place. The meaning and consequences of a behaviour pattern will vary with the contexts in which it occurs'. One of the results of the analysis during the strike should be an understanding of whether the strike was a completely unique occurrence, determined by the activity of the mysterious 'Russian soul' or inscribed in the international context, presenting itself as an organic part of the workers' movement, which subordinates Russia to the same laws as other countries. Alongside a description of conflicts, I will try to provide my view of the development of the miners' protests and my model of miners' strikes in Russia.

I would also like to develop the understanding of industrial conflicts and to provide an answer to the question of how strikes develop in Russian coal industry enterprises. Although every strike is unique in its own way, it is nevertheless possible to conduct a comparative analysis and to uncover the features which are 'typical' of various strikes. In order to do this, in analysing each strike, I will try to find answers to a series of standard questions:

how long did the strike last?

what type of demands were put forward?

to whom were demands made?

were demands formulated before or during the strike?

were appeals made to workers in other enterprises, including those of other branches?

what was the attitude of the mass media and public opinion to the strike?

were attempts made by the strikers to stop work at other coal enterprises or enterprises in other branches?

was information on the strike provided (was there an information vacuum or was the strike widely publicised in the mass media)? How did the participants in the conflict use channels of information (for announcements, to fight misinformation and rumours etc.)?

what were the results of the strike? (where possible, provide participants' evaluations)

was the enterprise at which the strike took place the town or settlement's main enterprise or one of many?

was the strike official or unofficial?

was the strike constitutional or unconstitutional (in two senses: legal or illegal in terms of a) procedures; b) the demands put forward)?

who led the strike (did the leadership emerge during the strike or before it began?)

which channels were used by the workers before the strike began and during the strike to resolve the conflict (in other words what was done so that their complaints were heard and taken into consideration by official structures)?

what were relations like between the workers and the unions that represent their interests and the employers and representatives of the local authorities (or in the case of a national strike, with the government and branch management) before and during the strike?

There is a lack of publications in Russian on the issues of industrial sociology, detailed anatomies of strikes, and also comparative analyses of various strikes, despite the fact

that this is an oversight for a country where revolutionary shocks have become a way of life and strikes are already perceived by no-one as an extreme method of influencing employers. This thesis will contribute to a better understanding of strikes as a form of the institutionalisation of conflicts, revealing how the system of industrial relations in Russia functions.

The following materials were used in the analysis:

printed materials and documents adopted during the first miners strike in 1989 in Kuzbass and also recordings made by Kemerovo sociologists during meetings on the squares of various Kuzbass towns;

participant observation of the Donbass strike (June 1993) and publications from the local press (*Novosty i sobytiya, Zhizn', Donbass*)

materials on the strike at Yuzhnaya mine of the Vorkutaugol association (April 1994)

material from research conducted of the industrial conflict at Sudzhenskaya mine (Anzhero-Sudzhensk, Kuzbass, July - November 1994)

material from research on the underground strike at Kiselevskaya mine (Kiselevsk, Kuzbass, January 1995)

field recordings on the national miners' strike (February 1995)

research material from Severnaya mine (Kemerovo), Tsentral'naya mine (Prokop'evsk) and Fizkul'turnik mine (Anzhero-Sudzhensk), April 1997

research material from Biryulinskaya mine (Berezovskii, Kemerovo region, July 1997)

research material from the 'rail wars' (Inta mine, Anzhero-Sudzhensk, May 1998)

research material from mines in Rostov region; Obukhovskaya mine (Zverev) and Oktyabr'skaya-Yuzhnaya mine (February 1999)

Information from the newspapers *Na-gora*, *Nasha gazeta*, *Kuznetskiy krai*, *Zapolyar'ye*, *Vorkuta - chas pik*, between 1991 and 1999; and about miners strikes in the national press

research materials collected by colleagues of the Institute for Comparative Research in Labour Relations (ISITO), including research students, within the framework of the projects, 'The Restructuring of Management and Industrial Relations in Russia' and 'The Restructuring of the Russian Coal Mining Industry' (with the financial support of the ESRC), and the monitoring of conflicts at coal industry enterprises in the Kuznetsk, Pechora and Donetsk coal basins.

Between 1994 and 1997, I also worked as assistant to the president of the Russian Union of Mineworkers and was able to observe many processes from within. The thesis therefore contains remarks from workers, trade union leaders, government representatives and representatives of management which were made during both official and unofficial meetings.

3 The 1989 Miners' Strike in Kuzbass.

The miners' strikes of July 1989 marked a qualitatively new stage in industrial conflict in Russia, not only because of the scale and location of the strikes, but also because the strikers' demands extended beyond the jurisdiction of the enterprise.⁸ In this respect they were anticipated by the wave of mass strikes launched by the

⁸ On the 1989 miners' strikes see Mandel, 1991, Chapter Three; Rutland, 1990; Friedgut and Siegelbaum, 1990. Marples, 1989 and Marples, 1990 provide detailed accounts of the Donbass strike.

Most of our information on the workers' movement in Kuzbass derives from interviews conducted by myself and in conjunction with Simon Clarke and Peter Fairbrother on regular visits to Kuzbass and Moscow during 1992–94, supplemented by a series of interviews on the 1989 strike with the leaders of the movement conducted by my colleague Petr Bizyukov from Kemerovo State University, who has also provided me with the benefit of his own very extensive knowledge and research in regular discussions and reports since 1991 (quotations are from these interviews unless otherwise stated). I have also made extensive use of reports in *Nasha gazeta*, which was founded as the newspaper of the workers' committee in December 1989. On the 1989 strike I have drawn on an eye-witness account of the strike by Viktor Kostyukovskii, 1990: 1990 (at the time of the strike, Kostyukovskii was the correspondent for *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, later for *Izvestiya*); extracts from a book by the editor of the TV programme Pulse '*Professiya – Kolpakov*' published in *Nasha gazeta*, 23 July 1991; an eye-witness account of the strike in Prokop'evsk, Maksimova, 1989, and a transcript of a tape-recording of the radio relay of the negotiations in Prokop'evsk which concluded the 1989 strike and of meetings in the city square in Kemerovo at the same time. Collection of documents have been published in Lopatin, 1993 and Institute of Employment, RAN, 1992, and a series of interviews in Lopatin, 1998. I have also been able to see video-recordings of a seminar discussion involving the miners' leaders in early 1990, of the July 1990 strike in Kemerovo, and of the Confederation of Labour Congress in Novokuznetsk in April 1990.

nationalist movements in the Caucasus and the Baltics in 1988, but in the case of the miners' strikes the disputes were over fundamental economic issues, and soon centred on the operation of the administrative-command economy, ultimately raising the questions of the form of property and of political power. While some have seen the first wave of miners' strikes as supporting *perestroika*,⁹ and many of the leaders were still Communist Party members, the political demands of the miners' movement soon became radicalised, and the miners' leaders aligned themselves with the demands for democratisation and a rapid transition to a market economy.

Soviet miners had always suffered from unhealthy and dangerous working conditions, and the Russian coalfields were located in inhospitable regions with appalling living conditions. This had created problems of labour recruitment, which had been solved by the widespread use of slave and prison labour,¹⁰ and more recently by the payment of relatively high wages and a lower retirement age, with a 25 per cent regional pay premium for Kuzbass, although declining relative wages were creating labour supply problems by the mid-1980s. Although the use of forced labour declined from the 1950s, the mines retained the authoritarian forms of management and summary forms of labour discipline characteristic of the penal

⁹ Leonid Gordon was probably the leading advocate of this view, 'The democratic workers' movement in Kuzbass ... objectively assists the leader of *perestroika*' (*Izvestiya*, 12 January 1990). See also Friedgut and Siegelbaum, 1990. This is also the tone of all the published contemporary accounts: Maksimova, 1989; Kostyukovskii, 1990 and the reports in *Trud* and in the local press.

¹⁰ One of the demands of the Kuzbass miners was that labour shortages should no longer be met by the settlement of released prisoners in Kuzbass, a demand that was ignored (Lopatin, 1993: 107).

system, and the culture of the miners retained many features of the macho culture of the prison.

The drive to expand coal production since the late 1960s had been at the expense of the working and living conditions of the workers, as rest days and maintenance were sacrificed, and social investment lagged behind social need, with around a quarter of all miners living in barracks and hostels, while productivity had been falling for a decade before the strike as a result of lagging investment. Although miners received relatively high pay for their dangerous working conditions, it could not compensate for the appalling health and safety record of the pits, while the regional premia did not even compensate for the increased cost of living, and money was no use if the supply of basic foodstuffs was deteriorating.

In all regions there was plenty of evidence of deteriorating labour relations within the coal fields, but issues came to a head with the decline of the economy, as bonuses were cut back, deliveries of food and essential supplies fell, and 'uneconomic' enterprises were threatened with closure. In January 1989 the mines, which had consistently run at a loss, were supposed to start to shift to full self-financing, which seriously compounded the pressure.

There were at least a dozen short strikes in mines in various coalfields in the first half of 1989 (*Trud*, 5 May 1989), some of which were referred to in the previous chapter, but all still followed the traditional pattern in being short stoppages confined to a single mine. Production stoppages and 'local revolts' did not only

occur in the mines, but also in enterprises of other branches.¹¹ For example, all three of the giant metallurgical plants in Novokuznetsk saw strikes in the spring of 1989, rather undermining Crowley's contrast between the passivity of steelworkers and the activism of miners (Crowley, 1997). In 1989-90 the shortage of cigarettes led to a wave of 'tobacco rebellions' across the country. Quite often discontent erupted by empty counters in shops, but much more often it was poured out in spontaneous production stoppages and the presentation of demands to which the directors and secretaries of the Party Committees at the enterprises reacted. To calm the striking workers down they distributed cigarettes received from special distribution funds free-of-charge.¹² All these strikes were pretty quickly quelled by enterprise directors and party bodies.

The bureau of the Kemerovo Regional Party Committee (obkom) passed a resolution which denounced strikes, declared the participation of Communists in strikes incompatible with Party membership and imposed on Party members an obligation to prevent strikes, but also instructed Party committees at all levels to work urgently with managers to resolve problems related to the satisfaction of the

11 'There had been local rebellions in our town before. Including in our transport depot.. But then the bosses quickly curtailed our grievances: they called a meeting, promised, handed things out, gave assurances, threatened and so on' (interview with Aleksandr Veterennikov, driver at 'Belaz', Lopatin, 1998: 192).

12 'One April day in 1989 as part of the work of our laboratory I found myself in the office of the party organiser of the Leninskugol' coal association. ... In his office there were three enormous cases of Astra cigarettes. At that time you were rationed to two or three packets of cigarettes a month. 'Well well – I said to him, – you live pretty well to be able to hold onto crates of cigarettes'. He didn't manage to answer me before the telephone rang. It was loud enough to hear, 'At Kuznetskaya – a strike!' 'Over what', he asked. 'Tobacco', they replied. The party organiser grabbed one of the crates and raced to Kuznetskaya. For three hours he travelled, calmed them down, gave out tobacco.' (Interview with Petr Bizyukov, Director of Kemerovo branch of ISITO, Lopatin, 1998: 532)

everyday needs of workers, pointed out to the first secretaries of the Novokuznetsk, Mezhdurechensk and Osinniki city Party Committees the low level of political-educational work in labour collectives, and demanded that the Osinniki city Party committee prepare a report on the events at the 60th Anniversary of the USSR mine and resolved to bring the mine management, the secretary of its Party committee and the trade union President to account before the Party, while requiring the South Kuzbass Production Association to establish a commission to resolve the workers' problems (Lopatin, 1993: 40).

On the basis of this resolution the bureau also issued a statement warning against disorder: 'As recent events show, the slogans of democratisation, glasnost, broadening the rights and freedom of the individual are all often used by those who would like to turn democracy into indiscipline, lawlessness and general licence. In particular, this is shown by the refusal of workers to work, taking place in enterprises in Kemerovo, Novokuznetsk, Mezhdurechensk, Osinniki, Kiselevsk' (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 8–9), and issued a strident warning to Communists that they would be expelled from the Party if they participated in strikes, a statement that led to widespread discussion in Kuzbass.

3.1 *The Strike Movement and the Contradictions of Perestroika*

Government, Party and industry authorities were well aware of the seriousness of the situation that was developing in Kuzbass.¹³ The bureau of the Kemerovo

¹³ The Sociology Department of the South Kuzbass Coal Association had conducted a survey in three mines in January 1989 which revealed very high levels of dissatisfaction among the workers with virtually every aspect of their lives, and a marked lack of confidence in their Party and trade union organisation (Mal'tseva and Pulyaeva, 1990).

Regional Party Committee had addressed a statement on the situation in Kuzbass personally to Gorbachev in October 1988, which was ignored (Lopatin, 1993: 101). The most dramatic sign of impending crisis was the fate of the Party's nominees in the elections for People's Deputy of the USSR in March, many of whom were swept aside. But at the same time rising social tension, expressed in wildcat strikes and the election results, could be harnessed by the local and regional authorities the more forcefully to press their claims in Moscow.¹ Occasional strikes were not altogether inimical to the interests of the local authorities – provided that they could be kept firmly under control.

Immediately after the catastrophic election results, Prime Minister Ryzhkov paid a notorious visit to Kuzbass, reportedly shedding tears over the living conditions of the miners in Prokop'evsk and Kiselevsk, and promised to take immediate action to relieve the situation. Nothing happened. At the end of April Aleksandr Mel'nikov, secretary of the Regional Party Committee, warned the plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU of the critical situation in Kuzbass (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 23).

These local developments took place against the background of momentous political events at the national level. The First Congress of People's Deputies assembled in Moscow on 26 May to elect the new Supreme Soviet and, although it turned out to be dominated by the old apparatus, its proceedings were broadcast on television, giving a national platform to 'reformers' and critics which attracted record viewing figures. The Supreme Soviet itself convened on 7 June and was in session throughout the miners' strike, providing a platform for the handful of representatives who supported the strikers, and an opportunity for regional representatives to assimilate the miners' demands to the usual battle for resources

from Moscow. The miners' leaders themselves felt that the fact that the Supreme Soviet was in session was decisive in forcing the government to negotiate with them, and to exclude the use of force to suppress the strike.¹⁴

Only four days before the strike began, a joint session of the Supreme Soviet and the Soviet of Nationalities held its confirmation hearing of the renewal of the appointment of Mikhail Shchadov as Coal Minister. In his confirmation speech Shchadov stressed the problems of the industry, 'the most important of which is the question of the social conditions of the miners' (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 14), with particular emphasis on the problems of Kuzbass. Shchadov quoted the figures for the USSR as a whole: 365,000 miners waiting for flats, 67,000 children without nursery school places, shortages of medical facilities, quality of drinking water, ecological problems, levels of injury, reclamation, food supplies, the need for more

¹⁴ Workers were very anxious about military intervention, and afraid of reprisals after the strike, which is one reason why the miners were wary of outside political contacts (cf., Friedgut and Siegelbaum, 1990, n. 119, p. 30). Rutland, 1990 says that few fears of reprisals were voiced outside Vorkuta (where a poll showed that 38 per cent feared reprisals), but according to our informants such fears were acute, general and constant, in both 1989 and 1991. Aslanidi: 'Everybody felt an instinctive fear that the strike might be suppressed by military force'. Golikov: 'We were frightened at the possibility of repression so when we drove to Mezhdurechensk we kept our eyes open all the time for military forces. People were prepared to protect themselves, and the miners formed platoons and had sentry posts at the railway station and on the roads so they were ready. They could protect themselves because miners had a lot of dynamite and were very experienced people'. Lyakin: 'People thought that the system could use military force against them and they knew that in a lot of yards police and people in civilian clothes were standing by and a lot of cars were in a state of readiness'. Mikhailets, on the other hand, said that he was not afraid of the use of military force, at least once the strike had spread.

independence for the mines. The latter call, which was to become the central demand of the Kuzbass Regional Workers' Committee, was taken up in their nomination speeches by the deputies from Donbass and Kuzbass. Shchadov's appointment was confirmed with one vote against and six abstentions. The fact that the necessity of granting greater independence to the mines was expressed by the branch chief is clear evidence that such a point of view had wide support among the directorate.

However, Shchadov's rhetoric about independence for the mines and concerns did not mean that he intended to give up any of his powers. Kostyukovskii reports a meeting in Prokop'evsk between Shchadov and the leading figures in the Kuzbass coal industry at which each in turn spoke about the catastrophic situation in the social and welfare sphere. The head of Kuzbassugol', the ministerial apparatus in Kuzbass, Vladlen Yalenskii, proposed that they temporarily stop all kinds of industrial construction and use all the resources for social welfare. The minister scowled at him and broke in: 'I would have understood if a simple miner, an ordinary worker, spoke like this. But someone like you, a big leader, how can you not understand!' (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 12–13).

The strike beginning meant that not only the workers were reaching the end of their patience, but also the regional authorities, both in the coal industry and beyond, who were confronting increasing difficulties in maintaining the economic and social stability of the industry and the region. Moreover, the bungled process of *perestroika* had opened up growing tensions both within the industry and within the local and regional administration.

The coal-mining industry was administered along traditional Soviet lines, with the control of resources and planning centralised in the ministry in Moscow. The

mines were grouped into coal associations, and so did not have the status of independent enterprises but only of component units of the association. In the other Russian mining regions one association covered the whole region, but Kuzbass had associations in Novokuznetsk (Yuzhkuzbassugol', the South Kuzbass Association, later Kuznetskugol'), Prokop'evsk, Kiselevsk, Belovo, Berezovskii, Leninsk-Kuznetsk and Kemerovo (Severokuzbassugol', the North Kuzbass Coal Association), and also a separate association for the open-cast mines based in Kemerovo. In addition to the All-Union Ministry there were until 1989 separate republican ministries, and a regional office of the ministry in Kemerovo, Kuzbassugol', which was supposed to monitor the associations, and which was liquidated after the 1989 strike.

The coal associations negotiated their plans and financing with the ministry on an annual basis, within the framework of the Five-Year Plan, but with frequent *ad hoc* revisions. The coal price was heavily subsidised as a part of the Soviet policy of cheap energy, which meant that the associations were kept on a tight financial leash. The financing from Moscow comprised three basic elements: the production subsidies, based on the relation between costs and the heavily subsidised coal price; finance for investment and the development of new mines, which was determined through negotiations in which personal contacts in the ministry played a decisive role; and finance for social development.

The situation had become more complicated as a result of the reforms of *perestroika*, which had opened up divisions in the formerly monolithic hierarchy of the industry. Gorbachev had abolished the republican coal ministries at the beginning of 1989 as part of his streamlining drive. In theory this was a decentralising reform, with the mines being given regional autonomy under a

system of 'regional cost accounting', but in practice the system had not been introduced, so that the measure simply increased the power of the All-Union Ministry while enabling it to evade responsibility, which had nominally been devolved to the mines and associations.

The mines themselves had been given greater responsibility without acquiring any powers of autonomous decision-making because they were not independent enterprises. In particular, this meant that the mines themselves did not fall under the 1987 Law on the State Enterprise (Association) which was the cornerstone of *perestroika* and which, nominally at least, gave the enterprise wide-ranging powers over the disposal of its own resources, switching from a system of compulsory plan targets to contracted state orders, and allowing enterprises the freedom to sell additional output for their own benefit. In the coal-mining industry it was the association, not the individual mine, that was covered by the law so that all the rights of proprietorship defined by the law were enjoyed exclusively by the association.

The majority of mine directors were not aggrieved at this situation. They had grown up within the rigidly hierarchical and disciplinarian framework of the coal industry, and almost all of them had a background in mine engineering not in economics, and so were not unhappy to leave economic questions to the associations while they got on with their job of lobbying the association and ministry for resources, producing coal, and hoping for a career advance into the structures of the association or the ministry. Meanwhile, their main concerns were more with the decline of discipline in the industry and the erosion of managerial authority as a result of the process of *perestroika*. However some directors, particularly of the more productive mines which had most to gain, and a significant

number of more junior managers,¹⁵ had a much more positive attitude to the promise (although not the achievement) of *perestroika*, seeing the independence of the mines as a way of escaping from the shackles of heavy subsidies and centralised control.

The coal associations, unlike the mines, had acquired the formal rights of state enterprises, but the system of subsidies and state orders made it impossible for them to realise significant benefits from these rights. In particular, in order to benefit from their independence they had to be able to produce coal above the levels which they were (compulsorily) contracted to supply to the state, and to be able to sell this coal at prices which would realise a profit. This meant, first, a reduction in state orders in favour of directly contracted deliveries to customers; second, an increase in the domestic price of coal (and corresponding phasing out of subsidies) and/or third, independent access to export markets and the right to retain at least a proportion of the foreign currency income derived from exports. These became the central demands of the Kuzbass workers' movement.

Greater autonomy for the mines and associations was also of concern to the local and regional authorities, who hoped that it would provide the basis for an increase in the resources available to the social sphere in the region. Responsibility for the

¹⁵ There was quite a high degree of mobility within the mines between skilled underground work and middle managerial posts, many of those with advanced technical qualifications choosing to take jobs as skilled workers both because of the higher pay and because of the frustrations of managing. Most of the 'workers' on the workers' committees had relatively high levels of qualification, and many had previously held managerial posts up to section head, the top level of middle management and effectively third in the line of command of the mine from director through chief engineer.

provision of social and welfare facilities was split between the mines and the local authorities. In practice, particularly in the mining towns, there was no clear division of financial or administrative responsibility, planning being on an *ad hoc* basis, co-ordinated by the city Party committee (gorkom) in collaboration with the local mine directors and the city executive committee (gorispolkom). The gorispolkom was 'elected' from the local soviet, whose members were traditionally nominated by the city Party committee from 'socially active' members of the local community, who were not necessarily Party members. Local social and welfare facilities were therefore financed out of the revenues of the mines, allocated by the association out of a budget ultimately decided in Moscow, and the revenues of the municipality, which were similarly allocated by the regional executive committee (oblispolkom), under the leadership of the Regional Party Committee (obkom) from a regional budget determined in Moscow. Although in principle the allocation and use of funds was determined in Moscow, in practice the mines and local authorities had quite a lot of leeway, and could reallocate funds to purposes other than those intended. Thus it was normal for mines to use production funds to subsidise social and welfare facilities, for example by including employees in the social sphere in its production budget.

Perestroika had disrupted the smooth running of the local and regional administration as much as it had that of the mining industry. In particular, in the past the co-ordination and allocation of resources had been managed primarily through the Party structures of gorkom and obkom, while the role of the members of local and regional soviets was primarily to monitor the administration of social and welfare policy at the micro level, people's deputies acting as a mixture of Citizens' Advice Bureau and social workers. However, *perestroika* was now supposed to

involve a separation of the Party from direct control of the administration and a strengthening of the powers of elected bodies, albeit still under the leadership of the Party. In principle this gave local and regional Soviets greater autonomy, so that people's deputies could become local politicians performing a decision-making role, although in practice it meant in the first instance an increase in responsibility, so that soviets could increasingly be blamed for shortcomings by the Party committee, without any corresponding increase in power, since the soviet had no independent source of revenue nor any effective control over the executive.¹⁶

Although the majority of people's deputies were content with their traditionally passive political role, some were more ambitious, while local executive committees saw in the independence of the mines and associations the basis for increasing local revenues, improved local conditions, and a reduction in social tension in their districts, while they saw the miners' strikes as a source of pressure on Kemerovo and Moscow to increase their share of centrally distributed resources, rushing to attach their long-standing local demands to those which were spontaneously thrown up by the miners. Thus the strike committees tended to work quite closely with the local executive committees in drawing up and implementing their demands, while one of their central demands became the call for new local elections, realised on a national scale in March 1990.

¹⁶ After the Mezhdurechensk strike the Regional Party Committee issued a strong reprimand both to the Secretary of the gorkom and to the president of the gorispolkom, but recommended the sacking only of the latter. (This could not be done directly, since he had been elected by the people, so the obkom could only 'recommend to the gorkom that it raise the question of the expediency of using him in his present post' (Lopatin, 1993: 106).)

Although the July strike was unexpected in its scale and its militancy, there were plenty of groups ready and willing to attach their demands to the miners' cause. The most conspicuous feature of the July strike is the speed with which the local powers and enterprise directors responded to the challenge, and the effectiveness with which they harnessed the miners' strike to their own more modest ambitions. The 1989 miners' strike may have become a part of the process of '*perestroika* from below' for which Gorbachev had called in 1987, but it began as a spontaneous explosion of anger with every aspect of the system and a rejection by the workers of all their self-appointed leaders. Just how the movement in Kuzbass was tamed in 1989 is crucial to the understanding of the subsequent development of the workers' movement in Russia as a whole.

3.2 *The Strike in Mezhdurechensk*

The July strike wave followed the well-established pattern of Soviet strikes, but on a vastly greater scale. The decisive difference in July was that the workers did not stay below ground but launched the strike on the surface, extended it to the scale of the whole mine, and then called on other miners for support.

It is difficult to overestimate the courage that this apparently simple step took. People knew something of the events at Novocherkassk in June 1962 when strikers were dispersed by armed militia, leaving dozens of dead. The miners were certainly aware that force could be used against them at any time, and we now know that military intervention was proposed, but immediately rejected, probably by Gorbachev himself. The hill opposite the Shevyakova mine, in which the strike began, is very picturesque in summer, dotted with fruit trees between the miners' cottages painted in pastel shades. But beneath the cottages and orchards are the

graves of those killed in a previous large strike in Mezhdurechensk, when the prison labourers rose up in the late 1940s. Everyone knew that a strike in Mezhdurechensk and another in the nearby city of Novokuznetsk had similarly, although less brutally, been put down by the use of military force in the 1970s (Aslanidi Interview).

The strike wave began on 10 July at the Shevyakova mine in Mezhdurechensk, from where it spread like wildfire. Despite the growing tension in the Kuzbass mines and the increasingly frequent spontaneous strikes, there were few if any direct contacts between worker activists in the various pits, and little contact even between different shifts or sections within the same mine. Apart from the press and TV, which rarely reported strikes, the only sources of information were the official channels of meetings of the regional committee of the trade union, attended by mine trade union presidents, and the daily meetings of section chiefs within each mine.¹⁷ Nevertheless, small groups of workers in mines across the Kuzbass were discussing their grievances and beginning to formulate their demands.¹⁸

¹⁷ According to Rutland, 1990, the decision to strike at Shevyakova was inspired by a report in the trade union newspaper *Trud*, 14 June 1989, of a stoppage at the Krasnii Lug pit in the Ukraine in June (Rutland, 1990, 353), although we have found no evidence to confirm this.

¹⁸ In the specific conditions of Soviet society, a key responsibility of Party primary groups was to recruit 'active' people and channel them into appropriate forms of activity to absorb their energies, whether it be through Party membership or through 'social service'. It took a particularly strong-willed, and often bloody-minded, individualism to stand out against the blandishments of the Party committee. Independent activists, while tolerated within limits, would often be subjected to ostracism and isolation if they approached those limits, such psychological pressure being more insidiously effective than direct repression. The result was that their oppositional activism often tended to be directed into strongly individualistic and politically harmless channels, for example the persistent writing of letters of complaint to state and Party bodies, persistent litigation through

Although it was in one sense mere chance that the spark that ignited the strike wave was struck in Mezhdurechensk, the city does have specific characteristics which perhaps explain why it was in Mezhdurechensk that the strike rapidly extended to the city level. Mezhdurechensk is a fairly large town, with a population of 45,000, which is almost entirely dependent on coal-mining, located in the extreme south-east of Kuzbass, with no alternative employment nearby. Moreover Mezhdurechensk is a very important base of the coal industry, producing high quality coking coal which amounts to 20 per cent of the output of Kuzbass. However, the municipal facilities in Mezhdurechensk are poor even by the standards of the region. The citizens of Mezhdurechensk blamed this largely on the fact that the city did not have its own coal association, the deep mines being part of the South Kuzbass Coal Association based in Novokuznetsk, around fifty miles away, and the large open-cast mines coming under the open-cast association based in the regional capital, Kemerovo, two hundred miles away in the north of Kuzbass. There was, therefore, a strong feeling in Mezhdurechensk that the city had no control over its own resources, which were siphoned off to the two main cities, Kemerovo and Novokuznetsk, on their way to Moscow.

disputes procedures and courts over the calculation of pay, and in the most unfortunate cases into chronic alcoholism and/or mental breakdown (cf. Ikhlov, 1994, 56–9). There was certainly greater scope for the activity of informal workers' leaders under *perestroika*, and the impression is that there is a marked difference between the kind of people who emerged as workers' leaders after 1989 and those individualists with a longer history of dissidence who pioneered the development of the independent workers' movement from 1987.

The strike at Shevyakova began in section 5 and was led by Aleksandr Petrovich Kovalev, then a mine foreman in the section.¹⁹ Kovalev was not untypical of the new generation of activists. He had originally been a senior research worker in the Kuznetsk Mining Research Institute, but he was a man of determined independence with a very strong streak of individualism who was frustrated by the bureaucracy, which led him to choose a downwardly mobile path. He came to the mine as a head of section, then became deputy head of section, and finally in 1983 moved to the lowest rung of the management hierarchy as mine foreman.²⁰

The strike broke out as the culmination of a long-drawn-out process of submission of grievances and formulation of demands by the workers of the section, in which the leading role was played by another mine foreman in the section, Valerii Kokorin.²¹ On 28 December 1988 the labour collective of the fifth section of

¹⁹ The mine foreman is responsible for mine safety, not for the organisation of work, so it is a post with responsibility but not power. The job is usually the first step on the managerial ladder for those graduating from mining institute.

²⁰ Kovalev joined the mine strike committee, but he was asleep at home when the town committee was elected. He lost patience with the workers' committees after the first year, because he felt that they lacked direction and achieved nothing, and became active in the official trade union, although he saw the official union structures as a barrier to effective trade unionism and remained in opposition to the union president in the mine, Aleksandr Andreevich Shchepan, who managed to escape the censure of both the Party and the workers in the wake of the strike, and who has been re-elected to his post annually since October 1988.

²¹ Kokorin, a Communist Party member, became the chair of the mine strike committee and then the first chair of the city strike committee until he was removed from the chairmanship, although not the committee, amidst charges of corruption. In the official account of the Mezhdurechensk strike prepared by the obkom on 20 July, Kokorin plays the leading role in the strike (Lopatin, 1993: 76–7) and, as we shall see, conducted the initial negotiations with Coal

Shevyakova had sent a letter to 'Prozhektor Perestroiki', a current affairs programme on central TV, over Kokorin's name. The letter complained about a whole series of defects in production and the social sphere, including falling pay, inadequate equipment, the inflated managerial apparatus, bad food, shortages of soap, the poor operation of the transport system, problems with supplies, the demand for additional pay for evening and night shifts, and the demand for the status of a state enterprise (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 10 and Lopatin, 1993: 76). The TV programme sent this letter to the central committee of the branch trade union at the beginning of February, which sent it to the territorial committee of the union and the regional office of the Coal Ministry, which in turn sent it to the South Kuzbass Coal Association, to which Shevyakova belongs. A commission of four persons was established, headed by the deputy director of the association, which 'closed the complaint', having resolved nothing (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 10; Avaliani Interview, *Moscow News*, 32, 6 August 1989; Lopatin, 1993: 76), while the trade union gave a purely formal response.

According to Kovalev, the underlying issue was not wages, but the poor organisation of work, which had meant that the workers in this section had had no real work for a year so that they were regularly assigned to other jobs.²² Kovalev

Minister Shchadov on his own. However, according to Kovalev and members of the city workers' committee, Kokorin's role was from the beginning to contain the workers' anger and direct it into official channels. After his removal from the chair of the committee, Kokorin was elected to the bureau of the city Party committee, and tried unsuccessfully to become both mayor of the city and president of the regional committee of the trade union (*Nasha gazeta*, 27 November 1990).

²² The bad organisation of work was a repeated complaint of workers. The bonus system in the mines meant that shortfalls in production, whether or not the fault of the worker, had a

and one or two others formulated their grievances as a set of demands at the beginning of June, apparently independently of Kokorin's initiatives, and discussed them over the next two weeks, at first in the section at meetings when workers gathered an hour before the start of the shift, before discussing them with neighbouring sections. The first demands were that the workers should only work at their own speciality, and that the administration should organise the maintenance of equipment more efficiently, to avoid stoppages. They submitted these demands to the administration, but got no response. During their discussions they added more demands, mostly connected with wages and labour conditions, including a demand that the regional wage premium should be increased to 60 per cent, and adding the demand that Party meetings should be banned during working hours.²³ The list of demands eventually attracted the signatures of five hundred workers.²⁴ The workers in the neighbouring Raspadskaya mine had developed a similar set of demands at

disproportionate impact on the workers' pay packet if they fell below plan targets. After the 1989 strike the miners moved on to a progressive piece-rate system in which the impact of production losses on wages, while still significant, was less dramatic. Subsequently the miners began to demand a guaranteed basic minimum.

²³ According to all the official propaganda, the first miners' strike raised only social and economic questions and did not challenge the existing political system. However, there is no doubt that radical political demands were frequently raised by the miners, only to be filtered out in the process of selection. There seem to have been two main reasons for this. Firstly, the fear on the part of the leaders of the movement that to politicise the strike would be to invite repression. Secondly, the concern on the part of the Party authorities to confine the strike within established political channels.

²⁴ This set of demands, elaborated collectively by the workers, is quite distinct from the set of demands laid out in Kokorin's letter of the previous December.

about the same time, although there does not seem to have been any co-ordination or even communication between the two.

On 28 June, Kokorin sent a list of 21 demands by recorded delivery to the central committee of the trade union, which merely passed the letter on to the ministry. Meanwhile the workers had sent their demands to the mine director, V.L. Soroka, and the city Party committee, with a deadline of 10 July for them to be met.

On 4 July an expanded meeting of the Labour Collective Council (STK), including participation of management, Party, trade union and about fifty workers, was held. The general director accepted most of the demands, but claimed that seven points, which the workers regarded as being the most important, were beyond his ability to resolve, primarily because of the financial position of the mine in the new conditions of self-financing. For example, according to a ministerial order of 1987 the mine administration was supposed to pay a premium for evening and night work which miners at Shevyakova did not receive, although the mine was on a permanent four-shift system, because the order included the sentence 'all money has to be paid from its own funds'. According to the director, backed by the union president, the mine did not have the money to pay, although the workers responded that other mines paid the premium, and the director of the Usinskaya mine had met all the similar demands of his workers. The director of the mine dismissed the workers' demands as 'utopian', and the workers walked out of the meeting, which continued without them. After this the administration organised shift meetings of the workers to attempt to explain the situation to them, but to no effect. Two days later, on 6 July, the trade union committee of the mine discussed the remaining demands and sent them to the Coal Minister to resolve.

On 7 July the Secretary of the coal miners' union from Moscow, V. G. Lunev, arrived in Mezhdurechensk and had a meeting with the trade unions of practically all of the pits, who brought along the demands that they had taken from their workers. They all warned of the high level of social tension, but he simply brushed aside the workers' demands, insisting that they were not Moscow's responsibility since the mines were now self-financing, so that they could solve their problems for themselves. He simply laid down on his table the demands from four pits and told the trade union leaders that it was their problem to resolve the demands because they had signed the documents. On 8 July tension was further raised by an incident in the canteen at Shevyakova in which miners complained that their food was off because it had been made with sour milk.²⁵

On 10 July the deadline for the workers' demands expired. At 9 o'clock in the morning 80 miners coming off the night shift refused to hand in their lamps and were joined by the 200 miners arriving for the first shift, and they stood around and talked. There was no formal meeting, nor any vote or resolution, but the common mood was to stop work. In the words of Kovalev, who was on the night shift, 'it was just the collective mind'.²⁶ The miners stayed at the mine, gathered around the administration building, organized food supplies, for which the union immediately offered to pay, and organized a maintenance rota without any reference to the

²⁵ The quality of the food in the canteen was, even by the standards of Soviet mines, apparently appalling. A friend of the trade union president, who had been a miner at the nearby Lenin pit, was eventually brought in by the union to improve the canteen. He told us proudly that he had done so by sacking 70 per cent of the 'stupid women'.

²⁶ The first *Pravda* report of the strike named Kokorin and Kovalev as joint leaders (*Pravda*, 13 July 1989).

administration.²⁷ A strike committee was elected from the meeting, headed by Kokorin.

The second secretary of the city Party committee, Shcherbakov, arrived at the mine at 11 a.m., followed shortly after by the General Director of the South Kuzbass Coal Association, G.M. Filat'ev. However, the miners refused to negotiate with them, demanding to talk to Coal Minister Shchadov, who alone had the power to resolve their problems.

At first, the mine administration did not take the workers seriously, but very soon the union, STK, and the mine administration realised the way things were going, and rushed to align themselves with the workers, at least to the minimal degree necessary to maintain the fiction of a common interest, in the hope of deflecting the workers' demands away from the administration and towards the ministry. It was in this context that the trade union took responsibility for providing food and drink for the strikers.

During the rest of the day the miners sent delegates to the neighbouring pits (Lenin, Tomskaya, Usinskaya and Raspadskaya) to explain their demands, and some also went to the local railway station where they blocked the railway for about ten minutes while they discussed their demands with miners in the train taking them to other pits, while others went around the other pits on the buses.

Three miners from Shevyakova arrived at Raspadskaya while the miners were changing their clothes at the change of shift that evening. They read out the list of

²⁷ The union claimed that it organised the provision of food and drink for the workers, but the latter say that it was they who took the initiative, the union only coming along later. However, the provision of food and drink became the basic activity of the official trade union for the duration of the strike.

their demands, and asked if the Raspadskaya workers agreed and supported them. The workers backed the demands, but the third shift decided to go to work after the pit director, together with the chair and deputy chair of the STK, persuaded them to put off any action until the next morning and proposed the establishment of a negotiating commission. However, when the fourth shift arrived by electric train they had more information, and at the change of shift those in pit clothes and those in clean clothes met together in the square in front of the pit. The unofficial workers' leaders in Raspadskaya, who had hitherto been organising secretly, declared to the meeting that they had got no results, and should take things into their own hands, immediately issuing their own list of demands. Volunteers (including the secretary of the mine Party committee) were immediately signed up for a strike committee which was appointed on the basis of self-nomination. The workers decided to strike on the spot, although, as at Shevyakova, they decided to continue maintenance. The Raspadskaya workers then sent delegates to Shevyakova. The Lenin and Tomskaya pits stopped soon after, on the morning of 11 July. Altogether ten city enterprises stopped work on the first day, with 15,900 people on strike and the city at a standstill.

In the morning of 11 July, the miners at Shevyakova arranged for mine buses and electric trains (the latter are also run by the mines) to take the workers to the city square in a move which proved the decisive escalation of the strike. Even city buses came to help, brought by volunteers from the city bus drivers. The workers gathered in the city square to confront the symbols of Soviet power: by Lenin's statue, in front of the offices of the local Party and the local executive, where they were joined by workers from other mines as they too came on strike, and by delegates from neighbouring towns who came to find out what was happening. Delegates

from Anzhero-Sudzhensk arrived drunk, and by unanimous decision of the mass meeting they were put into the drying-out prison (*Trud*, 13 July 1989).

When they first arrived in the square the workers found the secretary of the city Party committee, Yurii P. Cherepov, already there. The president of the city executive committee, N.Ya. Zav'yalov, immediately provided the strikers with a loudspeaker system, and for the next two days the workers held a continuous meeting, discussing their situation, and developing their demands. The discussions were relayed night and day not only over loudspeakers but also over the city radio. A city strike committee was elected in the square on the basis of self-nomination, again headed by Kokorin. Although the miners' central demands were clearly political, they rejected all offers of support and participation from representatives of outside political organisations (who were already arriving by the second day of the strike), for fear of provoking a reaction. This was the basis of their constant insistence that their strike was not political but only economic.

At first nobody knew what to do next. Many of the miners expected Gorbachev to arrive to sort out all their problems, 'because they believed in Gorbachev at that time'. The Strike Committee was given a set of rooms in the Komsomol building for their offices. The main activity of the strike committee was maintaining order in the city, in which they co-operated closely with the local chief of the criminal police, who gave regular reports to the town meeting. Together the strike committee and the police chief set up road blocks to control access to Mezhdurechensk, and enforced a ban on alcohol to avoid problems caused by drunkenness among

strikers.²⁸ The workers are proud that there was not a single crime in Mezhdurechensk during the course of the strike, but the reason for this preoccupation was not moral fervour, but an acute awareness that the authorities would seize on any provocation to justify the use of force against the strikers. There were rumours that troops were being sent in to suppress the strike, and two large lorry loads of vodka arrived mysteriously on the first day, but were turned away.

The strategy of the authorities was the traditional one, of trying to suppress information about the strikes, while looking for a quick settlement. Roadblocks were set up on the roads from Novokuznetsk, telephone communications were disrupted. Mel'nikov called all the media chiefs together on the first day of the strike and told them to report it only as a meeting (*Nasha gazeta*, 23 July 1991), and, indeed, no reports were published locally on the first two days of the strike. However, once it became clear that the strike could not be hushed up, but was rapidly spreading to other towns, the Party reversed its policy. On 12 July the obkom established a press-centre to handle information, and city Party committees were encouraged to make every effort to inform the local population of the costs of the strike and of the need to maintain order. On 16 July the obkom instructed all city Party committees to issue bulletins on TV, radio and in the press at least three times a day. Nevertheless, the Party did not have complete control of media coverage, and on the third day a popular TV programme from Kemerovo provided a long and accurate account of the strike.

²⁸ According to the official Party report on the events these activities were organised by the city Party committee, selflessly working round the clock to maintain vital services (Lopatin, 1993: 77).

The city administration sat back and waited, providing the strikers with facilities, adding their own demands to those of the miners, and trying to direct the miners' demands away from themselves and towards Moscow, keeping out of the negotiations until they saw which way the wind was blowing. It was only when Shchadov, the Coal Minister, agreed to meet the workers' demands that the city administration joined the commission which was set up to prepare the full programme of demands.

Shchadov, who was already in Kuzbass, arrived in Mezhdurechensk on 11 July with his Deputy Zaidenvarg, president of the miners' union Srebnyi, first secretary of the obkom, Mel'nikov, and chairman of the oblispolkom, Lyutenko. Shchadov spoke to the crowd in the square for three hours, explaining that many of their demands could be settled locally, and others he could deal with, but some he could not meet because they were outside his jurisdiction. He was clearly shaken by the hostile reception, and by the refusal of the crowd to allow him time to resolve their demands. He proposed going to Moscow to sort it out, but a member of the strike committee intervened: 'Lads! Nobody is going off anywhere, we all need to sit and calm down. We did not put forward our demands just to listen to this.... Of course the minister cannot give us an answer right away. We can't let him go. He must stay here and think about it.' A striker: 'So he says that he cannot simply raise the price of coal ... but prices of food stuffs or consumer goods can be raised without ceremony, without consulting anybody. Understand – they wanted them raised and they were raised. But the minister says that he cannot raise pay. If he cannot do anything, let him leave. Then Ryzhkov can come and we will decide it with him'. 'We have got plenty of time, we will wait here', so Shchadov went off to telephone the government in Moscow (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 18–20).

Shchadov then negotiated 'man to man' with Valerii Kokorin, the president of the city strike committee, while he spent an hour and a half on the telephone to Moscow. Moscow allowed him to offer to raise the regional pay supplement, but Moscow would not allow him to meet any of the other major demands. Meanwhile, Srebnyi had mounted the rostrum in the square to explain that the union supported the demands of the toilers of Mezhdurechensk, as proved by the fact that four of their five demands matched those of the strike committee (*Trud*, 13 July 1989). Mel'nikov, the regional Party boss, similarly identified himself with all the workers' demands, but not their methods.

Shchadov went back to the square to explain that he could not meet all the workers' demands, and in particular the demand for independence of the mines, which Shchadov insisted was a complicated matter and would take time to prepare, but the miners in the square angrily rejected his offer of a pay rise and decided to continue the strike. Shchadov called Moscow again, and was told to go back to the square and tell the miners that Moscow was not willing to offer any more, but Shchadov angrily told Moscow to come and try it themselves. In response, the Council of Ministers was gathered in Moscow, and each minister was asked how much he could give from his budget to satisfy the miners (Interviews with Mezhdurechensk City Workers' Committee). By now it was early in the morning of 12 July, negotiations having continued all night. Moscow promised to meet the miners' demands, including the immediate provision of supplies of food and medical equipment. Moscow's willingness to concede was no doubt influenced by reports that were already coming in through the night that mines in Osinniki and Novokuznetsk were also preparing to strike, reports which were confirmed during 12 July as the strike did indeed spread to individual mines in Osinniki,

Novokuznetsk and Prokop'evsk. Moscow's urgent priority was to do a deal with Mezhdurechensk, where the entire town was at a standstill, before the strike escalated in the neighbouring towns.

Moscow had agreed to meet the miners' demands, but these demands were themselves still not clearly formulated. In particular, the demand for the independence of the mines, which had moved to the centre of the stage, remained ambiguous, and Shchadov continued to resist immediate concession on this issue. Negotiations continued through 12 July and deep into the following night as the strike committee formulated its final list of demands and Shchadov continued to negotiate with Moscow, and to consult with the local and regional leaders of the Party and administration. The central sticking point continued to be the demand for independence of the mines.

The initial demand of the city strike committee, one which had long been in the air, and was no doubt sponsored by the local administration, was for Mezhdurechensk to have its own association. At dawn on 13 July, Shchadov came to the microphone and announced that Mezhdurechensk could have its association, but without the open-cast mines which would have to remain with Kemerovougol'. However in the meantime the issue had been the subject of further heated discussion. Vyacheslav Golikov, later to emerge as president of the regional workers' committee, had arrived early that morning with three others from Berezovskii, delegated to go to Mezhdurechensk to find out what was happening. When they arrived they met the leaders of the city strike committee, including Kokorin and Sergeev, an electrical fitter from the Tomskaya mine in Mezhdurechensk, who later became President of the Independent Miners' Union.

Golikov asked to see the miners' demands just as Shchadov started to speak from the rostrum. Golikov told those around him that he knew something about the rights of the enterprise, and in his view the important thing was not to create a new association, but to establish the financial independence of the mines. He tried to convince people that they had the chance of freedom but instead they were planning to give it to another association. According to Golikov, those around him asked why he just talked in this narrow circle, and suggested he take the microphone and explain it to everybody. He took the microphone and there were cries from the crowd, 'listen to him: he is talking sense'. And after that, he claims, everyone began to talk about independence for the enterprise instead of an association.²⁹ It was at precisely that point that Shchadov suddenly agreed to create an association, despite the fact that he had been adamantly opposed up until then.

Shchadov's offer of an association was rejected by the crowd. Moreover, the strike committee put a new demand, which can only have been an ominous sign for the government of the way the situation could develop if they did not settle fast. This was the demand that a new constitution be submitted for immediate discussion and adopted by 7 November 1990, and that the leaders of the Party and government should come to Kuzbass to negotiate on this issue, the committee calling for an All-Kuzbass strike to back the demand (*Trud*, 14 July 1989).³⁰ As more reports came in of the strike spreading, Shchadov backed down once more and conceded full

²⁹ Sergeev took up Golikov's call in his speech to the meeting: 'We don't need sausage and soap. We eat meat and sugar, and soap is finished too. We need freedom – economic independence for the mine so that we can control the results of our own labour! That is what we need' (*Nasha gazeta*, 23 July 1991).

³⁰ They were also demanding the resignation of the city soviet.

independence, promising all the mines in Mezhdurechensk the status of state enterprises, and signing an agreement with the strike committee on the morning of 13 July.

The deal provoked a split in the strike committee, with a minority resisting the settlement on the grounds that many of the original demands had not been satisfied and that there were insufficient guarantees that Shchadov's promises would be fulfilled. The strike committee issued a statement at 3 p.m. calling on the workers of Mezhdurechensk to return to work at 8 a.m. the following day, and also appealing to all the workers of Kuzbass to support their decision, adding that 'any further prolongation of the strike might lead to an uncontrolled situation and unpredictable consequences'. This decision was opposed by an initiative group, led by Valentin Sorokopudov, a mine engineer from the Lenin pit, which proclaimed itself a regional strike committee and demanded the continuation of the strike, but the leaders of the city strike committee simply shouted into the microphone 'the strike is over, that's all' and local officials went around the square persuading people to go back to their mines to make their decisions. Within an hour of the strike committee issuing its statement the town square was empty. The strike was over. At least in Mezhdurechensk.³¹

³¹ The miners of Mezhdurechensk have had to bear the brand of 'strike-breakers' for making a separate settlement just as the rest of Kuzbass came out. 'Was not that the moment at which they broke the back of the workers' committee? Was not that the point at which those we had elevated became strike-breakers, when they said that politics and miners are incompatible? It was only then that we painfully understood that it was not those people who had come forward to lead the workers' movement. The apparatus had done everything to draw the strike committees into a luxury mystery tour. The best hotels, free trips – with a workers' committee identity card – to the holy of holies.

3.3 *Who won the first round?*

The strike in Mezhdurechensk turned out to be only the first round in a fight which would eventually end in the collapse of the administrative-command system, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the dissolution of the Communist Party, and the collapse of the economy, all of which have been laid at the door of the Kuzbass miners.³² But who won the first round?

In addition to immediate economic concessions of higher wages and improved supplies, the main gain made by the workers was the concession of independence for their mines. But where did the demand for the independence of the mines come from? Kostyukovskii says that the demand that the mines be given the status of a state enterprise was included in the letter sent to central TV by Kokorin in December 1988, but none of the members of the strike committee we spoke to in Mezhdurechensk could remember it being on the list of original demands coming from the mines. Independence was certainly an issue that was firmly on the agenda, not of the workers but of the Association, mines and local administration. The issue for the local administration was primarily a result of the fact that the mines of Mezhdurechensk were paying their dues to two associations, in Novokuznetsk and in Kemerovo. There was a strong feeling locally not only that the miners were supporting an inflated bureaucracy but also that funds were being diverted to

Informal meetings with government leaders ... on one big condition – not a word about politics' (A. Kunts, President of the workers' committee of Raspadskaya mine, Mezhdurechensk, *Nasha gazeta*, 27 November 1990).

³² At first the miners' leaders were anxious to claim credit for all these achievements, except the last. However, more recently they have begun to disclaim responsibility, particularly for the disintegration of the Soviet Union which almost all of them see as a disaster.

subsidize less efficient mines elsewhere. If Mezhdurechensk had its own association then the city would be able to increase its social and welfare expenditure, for example to build a long-planned youth centre.

On the other hand, the issue for the mines was one of having control of their own resources. At one level this was a trivial demand, simply involving the mines acquiring the same status as other industrial enterprises, which would bring them into the framework of the 1987 Law on State Enterprises. However, this was not simply a bureaucratic matter, since independence would make no sense if it was not associated with an increase in the price of coal to free the mines from dependence on subsidies and to allow them to sell above-plan output at a profit, and almost certainly a relaxation of state orders as well, a demand which was of interest to the associations as much as to the individual mines. Interestingly, Aleksandr Mel'nikov, first secretary of the obkom, made this issue his first point in an interview with Kostyukovskii on the night of 11 to 12 July, when he noted that about a third of the miners' demands could be met by the mines themselves once the basis for their self-financing could be put in place (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 23).

Shchadov's initial obstinate resistance to the demand for an association seems not to have been a matter of principle, but of bureaucratic obstruction, stressing the administrative complexity and the time needed to carry out such a change. The demand for independence was another matter altogether, since this threatened the power of the whole ministerial system. The issue of mine independence was relevant to the workers' demands, since it would provide mines with the resources to meet those demands, but it was primarily an issue that involved a complex struggle for power between the ministry in Moscow, the local associations, the individual mines and the city administration, and was certainly not one which

excited the workers gathered in the square, who wanted to get rid of their bosses, not give them more power.³³

The formulation of the miners' demands was a complex process. The strike originated with long lists of demands drawn up by activists in Shevyakova and Raspadskaya, many of which concerned matters internal to the mine. However, as soon as the strike moved beyond the level of the individual mine these issues were lost, on the grounds that they were parochial, and broader issues, of concern to the city as a whole, replaced them. With the arrival of Shchadov, the scope of the demands was further broadened to emphasise those demands which could only be met by Moscow. The final list comprised forty-two points, including demands for higher pay and improved supplies, improved social and welfare provision (including the recruitment of 3,000 female and young workers for Mezhdurechensk), demands concerning the management of the coal industry (including the universally popular demand among the workers for cuts in management staff) and ecological questions. However, this list was clearly a patchwork which was dominated not by the concerns of the workers which had given rise to the strike, but primarily by the concerns of the city and regional authorities, which seized the opportunity to press their long-standing grievances on

³³ In the end Mezhdurechensk never got its association. After the strike Raspadskaya, the largest mine in the Soviet Union in terms of output, was transformed into a leasehold enterprise, one no doubt conscious by-product of which was to undermine the solidarity of the mines in Mezhdurechensk. During the 1991 strike Raspadskaya was again bought off by being offered the opportunity to become a closed joint-stock company. (This was not the first time that Shchadov had used this tactic. He had previously removed the Kirovskaya mine from the jurisdiction of the Leninsk-Kuznetsk Association and placed it directly under the ministry for similar reasons.)

Moscow. Moreover, it was a list which had reformulated the diffuse grievances of the workers to confine them within the limits of the system as a part of the process of *perestroika*. The constant refrain of the authorities at all levels was that the miners' demands were entirely justified, and *perestroika* was precisely about providing the means to meet such demands. All that was required was patience on the part of the workers, and a return to work before order broke down.

The transformation of the workers' demands was at one level a natural consequence of the way in which the issues were rapidly generalised with the arrival of Shchadov and the focusing of the negotiations on Moscow. However, this process of absorbing the workers into a negotiating framework in which their demands were effectively neutralised was by no means automatic. The primary aim of the authorities at all levels was to direct the movement into channels within which they could bring it under control. The first task was to encourage the emergence of a strike leadership, which would take responsibility for the conduct of the strike, and with which the authorities could negotiate a speedy end to the dispute. We have already seen this process in the run-up to the strike, when Kokorin took it upon himself to represent the workers through official channels, and then proposed himself as head of the mine and then city strike committees.³⁴ This could be seen from the very first hours of the strike, when the trade union sought to

³⁴ This does not imply a conspiracy, although it is extremely unlikely that Kokorin would or could have played such a leading role in the events over such a long period without at least guidance from higher Party bodies, particularly in the light of the declaration of the obkom that Communists should not participate in strikes, and its very strong reaction to the participation of Communists (including Aleksandr Aslanidi) in the strike in Osinniki in April. As we will see, once the strike spread the Party was very active in putting 'its' people in place in other cities.

establish its position as representative of the workers by providing food free of charge, and by espousing the demands (if not the methods) of the miners at their meetings, but it was immediately obvious that the official union would not be able to provide the leadership required.

As soon as the workers moved out of the mines, the question of the workers' representation became an urgent one. The workers' demands were diffuse and undirected, while their leadership was ill-defined. Who was going to negotiate what with whom? The immediate aim of the local authorities was to maintain order in the strike movement, which required the establishment of relations of hierarchy and responsibility. They encouraged this by providing loudspeaker systems and a platform for the town meeting, by permitting police co-operation with the strikers to maintain order, and by providing offices for the strike committee. All these measures encouraged the replacement of the spontaneous democracy of the first hours of the strike by an institutionalised hierarchical relationship between an active leadership and a passive mass.

The diffuse character of the miners' demands provided the authorities with considerable scope to channel them in favourable directions. However, the authorities at different levels were by no means united, as each sought to deflect the miners' anger against others. The majority of the initial demands of the miners were internal to the mine, concerning such things as working conditions, changing facilities or the quality of food in the canteen, and were submitted first to the mine administration. However, the mine administration directed the miners' main demands beyond the enterprise, on the grounds that they had neither the authority nor the resources to meet them on their own. This enabled them to assimilate the miners' demands to their own attempts to extract resources from Moscow. From this

point of view the strike served the interests of the mine directors and local administration, as long as they were not taken to task for allowing it to happen.³⁵

As soon as the strikes moved outside the individual mines, the local authorities very quickly hitched their interests to the strike movement, cautiously aiding, if not supporting, the miners and adding their own demands to those of the miners for presentation to Moscow. The result was that the diverse grievances of the miners were swiftly swept aside, to be subsumed under the one central demand that the mines should be switched to full financial independence, on the basis of an increase in the price of coal, although this had not figured in the original demands of the workers.³⁶

In the first hours of the strike, the mine managers and local administration successfully deflected worker criticism towards the ministerial system, which they claimed prevented them from meeting the workers' demands, and began to impose a hierarchical structure on the workers' movement. By the time Shchadov arrived in Mezhdurechensk on the first full day of the strike there was already a president of a city strike committee with whom he could negotiate a deal 'man to man', although they had to keep referring back to the distrustful workers in the square, and there

³⁵ Mine directors would not be expected to intervene openly, although in Donetsk two mine directors actively supported the miners once the latter had decided to strike, and in Kuzbass the director of the Baidakovskaya mine was a member of his mine's strike committee. It is important to remember that there was no clear dividing line in mining towns between mine directors and the leaders of the Party, trade union and local administration, who still constituted a relatively cohesive local elite tied together by the Party apparatus. There is no doubt that close co-ordination was maintained between these different groups throughout the strike.

³⁶ This point was made forcefully by David Mandel, 1991, Chapter 3.

was already a set of demands around which he could negotiate, although these remained fluid throughout the strike.

The actions of the local authorities had focused the miners' demands on the Coal Ministry, and when Shchadov arrived in Mezhdurechensk he was at first authorised by Moscow to resolve the dispute only within the limits of his own powers as Coal Minister. Clearly unable to do so, he angrily passed responsibility for resolving the dispute in Mezhdurechensk to the government as a whole. The Ministry was not going to get off the hook so easily: the government did not take collective responsibility for Mezhdurechensk, but each minister was asked what contribution he could make to help the Coal Ministry, and Mezhdurechensk was soon flooded with supplies.

The institutionalisation of the strike also changed the character of the strike committee. The initial demands may have been mundane and parochial, but they were central to the lives of ordinary workers. Once the demands moved beyond the level of the individual mine the issues became much more complex, their resolution demanding some knowledge of the way in which the system worked, and in particular of 'economics'. The strike committee therefore had to rely increasingly on the advice of 'experts' within and beyond its ranks.³⁷

37 'The development of a uniform platform has revealed serious problems, to resolve which the workers seem unable to do without advice from experts. And nevertheless. The boldness of the recognition of their lack of competence in the subtleties of economics and law and the decision to bring expert advisers in to the work of the committee have in the end only raised the authority of the meeting' (From the notes of the correspondent of the newspaper Kuzbass, E. Bagaev, on the course of the regional conference of strike committees, 16 July 1989).

Kovalev, who had formulated the original demands in Shevyakova, himself had higher education, but did not join the city strike committee. Kokorin, who emerged as president of the committee, was an active member of the Communist Party. Although only four of the seventeen members of the committee were well known as Communists, the first committee was soon working closely with the local Party apparatus, which had privileged access to resources and expertise, and the strike committee even defended the city Party boss when the Regional Party Committee tried to reprimand him in the wake of the strike. The workers did not rely only on their own resources, but needed outside experts to help them formulate their demands, of whom there were plenty willing to offer their services. The workers themselves demanded that Mikhail Naidov, a local hero and former director of Lenin mine, be brought to Mezhdurechensk to give them leadership, precisely in relation to the issue of mine independence, and Shchadov promised to send for him.³⁸

³⁸ Mikhail Naidov had had a switchback career – from First secretary of the Kiselevsk city Party committee, to director of a mine in Kemerovo, then head of the Kuzbass Mine Construction Kombinat, where he fell out with the deputy minister in Moscow and asked to be transferred back to a mine, being sent to Mezhdurechensk as director of the Lenin mine which, according to local legend, he transformed from a clapped-out pit on the brink of closure to one of the most prosperous in the branch, with a large social and welfare apparatus developed by Naidov, the pit being rewarded with the Order of Lenin, while Naidov was transferred to the most difficult job in the industry, as General Director of Prokop'evskugol', which he, with Shchadov's support, transformed into the Scientific Production Association Prokop'evskgidrougol'. Naidov had a reputation as a man who always worked in the interests of the workers, and this had brought him trouble with superiors, but also enabled him to bounce back. Naidov was the man to bridge the gap between Shchadov and the workers, and although he did not in fact come to Mezhdurechensk, which would have been very

If things had stopped there the strike would not have had a great deal of significance. Workers in a remote town in Western Siberia had been on strike for four days, but the authorities had successfully headed off their protest, making a wide range of concessions without conceding any fundamental changes and without giving up any of their powers, with the mine managers winning the promise of independence from Shchadov on the backs of their workers. However, the mines could not achieve their independence at the stroke of a pen. The government was very happy to grant independence in principle, since it immediately passed the buck back to the mine management, but independence in practice was a very different matter, requiring a sufficiently high price of coal to guarantee the pits' profitability or the abolition of the system of state orders (or both), neither of which were achieved even by Yeltsin's radical 1992 programme, or by the stalled privatisation and restructuring plans of 1993.

The strike committee had been separated from the workers it represented, many of whom felt that they had been betrayed by the deal, while miners in other cities felt that they had been sold out by the workers of Mezhdurechensk who had made a separate deal instead of standing together with those who had originally come out in their support. Moreover, the committee did not sustain its independence for long, as responsibility for ensuring the fulfilment of the agreement made with Shchadov fell not so much to the strike committee, now renamed the workers' committee, as to the city Party committee. The day after the agreement was signed, 14 July, the city

provocative in the eyes of Yuzhkuzbassugol', he was to play a crucial role in the resolution of the strike across Kuzbass (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 38–40). Naidov became chairman of the oblast executive committee after the March 1990 elections, resigning in January 1991 to become General Director of Kuzbassimpex, a privatized export–import concern (*Nasha gazeta*, 4 January 1991).

Party committee discussed the question, and drew up an additional list of demands to put to the representatives of the Party–Government Commission which visited Mezhdurechensk to discuss local demands on 20 July (Lopatin, 1993: 79). On 18 July there was a meeting of the Mezhdurechensk Party economic *activs* which set up a working group to consider the issue of the transfer of the coal mines to self-financing and creation of an association in the town. Order and control, the bedrock of Soviet Communism, had apparently been restored.

However, things did not stop there. Mezhdurechensk provided the spark, the inspiration and the precedent for other workers in the Kuzbass coalfield, and soon for miners throughout the Soviet Union. Despite the speed with which Moscow had acted, it was already too late to stop the spread of the strike. However, the authorities had already gained valuable experience, and they learned fast.

3.4 *The Strike Spreads*

In general the strike was more tightly controlled by the local authorities the further one moved away from its epicentre in Mezhdurechensk, with Novokuznetsk and Berezovskii as exceptions, for different reasons. The strike spread immediately to the nearby centres of Osinniki and Malinovka before the authorities could react, while in Prokop'evsk and Kiselevsk the authorities launched their own initiatives to head off the strike wave, but they were too late. Elsewhere, by contrast, the authorities managed to get in first, and on the whole the strike was controlled from the start by the mine and local administration and city Party committees.

Shchadov, having completed his negotiations in Mezhdurechensk, raced from one town to another like a man trying to put out a bush fire with a bucket. Once it became clear that the strike was spreading throughout the region, it became equally

clear that only a regional settlement could end it. The problem was on what basis was such a settlement to be achieved. Somebody had to bring the various city strike committees together to draw up and negotiate a common set of demands on the basis of which to secure a rapid return to work. The key question was who could do this? Before seeing how this question was answered, it will be helpful to chronicle the spread of the strike and the way in which the workers' demands arose in each city.

3.4.1 Osinniki

Osinniki is a mining town in the hills to the south of Novokuznetsk which already had a history of militancy to match that of Mezhdurechensk, as did Malinovka, a small mining settlement just up the valley. Kapital'naya in Osinniki and the 60th Anniversary of the CPSU mine in Malinovka had already struck earlier in the year, and they were quick to follow the lead of Mezhdurechensk. Like Mezhdurechensk, Osinniki and Malinovka were miners' towns which did not have their own association, but came under the jurisdiction of the South Kuzbass Association in Novokuznetsk.

At about 10 or 11 in the evening of 11 July someone arrived at the 60th Anniversary of the CPSU mine from Mezhdurechensk to ask them to come out in solidarity. That was enough for the whole pit to stop spontaneously and to gather in the square in front of the mine. Aleksandr Aslanidi, who was a senior mechanic in the mine and at that time a Party member, reached the mine at about 4 a.m. July 12 where elections to the strike committee were taking place, with one person being elected from each shift in each section or service, although initially the election was only from the night shift. Many people were afraid to come forward for various

reasons, the Party secretary refusing to join the committee because Party members had been strictly forbidden to strike, so the committee was dominated by young people. Aslanidi was well known as an informal leader, regularly being nominated to all kinds of local committees, and was elected president – ‘San’ka won’t keep quiet, let’s elect him’, people said. According to Aslanidi, everyone was afraid that force would be used against them, and this was a crucial factor in maintaining the solidarity and discipline that was missing in later strikes. Anyone who did not do his job on the committee was immediately replaced.

The miners of the nearby Kapital’naya mine in Osinniki, the largest mine in the Soviet Union in terms of employment with some 6,500 workers, who had already struck earlier in the year, came out in the morning of 12 July. The miners of Kapital’naya called on the other mines in Osinniki to strike and were immediately joined by the coal construction administration and several other enterprises, including all the deep and open-cast mines and the sewing factory, which employed almost entirely women. In the view of the first secretary of the city Party committee D.F. Nikitin the emergency had reached an all-city scale (*Trud*, 14 July 1989). As in Mezhdurechensk, the miners filled the square in front of the gorispolkom building and elected a strike committee with the familiar demands relayed from Mezhdurechensk: independence for the collective, an end to orders from above, a resolution of problems with the pay system. As in Mezhdurechensk, the sale of alcohol was banned and a lot of vodka was confiscated at the city limits, with a receipt provided so that the owner could reclaim it after the strike.

The strike committee realised that they were unlikely to make progress on their own and, as in Mezhdurechensk, immediately sought to link up with miners in other cities. The first demand of the strike committee was for a car to enable them to tour

the coalfield and gather information, since they did not believe what they read in the press or heard on radio or TV. Every day for the duration of the strike a carload would set off at five or six in the morning, returning at midnight or one the next morning to report to the workers gathered in the square.³⁹

Shchadov and his retinue went directly from Mezhdurechensk to Osinniki, where they met with the city strike committee on 14 July. However, the negotiations did not go easily, and the Strike Committee rejected Shchadov's official response to their demands. Shchadov and Mel'nikov went on to Novokuznetsk, where the strike had also broken out, but the meeting in the square continued from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. and the city strike committee was re-elected.

3.4.2 Novokuznetsk

Novokuznetsk is the historic capital and largest city in Kuzbass (formerly Stalinsk, and before that Kuznetsk, Dostoyevsky's place of exile), which is the basis of some rivalry and even enmity directed at the upstart administrative capital, Kemerovo. Novokuznetsk is dominated by two enormous and antiquated metallurgical complexes, KMK and Zapsib, with its mines based on smaller settlements around

³⁹ Aslanidi did not think much of the meetings held in the city squares, because they tended to be dominated by emotion instead of common sense, with those who shouted loudest being elected to the city strike committee, but turning out to be no good at the day-to-day work, so that after the strike many just drifted away. Most strike committees were made up of younger workers, with an average age across Kuzbass of 37, because older workers were more afraid of reprisals, and were elected from sections. There were eventually eleven city committees formed across Kuzbass with an average of thirty members each, 82 per cent of whom were workers and 38 per cent Communist Party members (varying between 25 per cent and 40 per cent), including 4 secretaries of primary groups, 3 chairmen of trade union committees and 8 chairmen of STK (*Pravda*, 21 August 1989).

the outskirts of the city. The city Party organisation was strong and conservative, based in the metallurgical enterprises rather than the mines, and showed little subtlety in dealing with the strike, but some success in keeping it under control.

Novokuznetsk is the nearest mining city to Mezhdurechensk, and the first to which the strike spread, although it took off fairly slowly compared to Osinniki.⁴⁰ The first pit to join the strike seems to have been the Novokuznetskaya pit on the road from Mezhdurechensk. Delegates from Shevyakova arrived at the mine in the evening of 10 July at the end of the shift. The workers coming off shift agreed to strike in solidarity, although they had never had a strike before and had no prepared demands, despite the difficult conditions in the mine. There was some discussion between the outgoing and incoming shifts as to who would start the strike. The new shift was nervous about joining the strike, because they would be identified as its initiators since the previous shift had finished their work, but eventually agreed to join. The workers all gathered by the administration building and some people went off to the other five nearest pits to tell them that they had stopped work in solidarity, adding their own demands to those of Mezhdurechensk, including the demand that all the workers on the 'third floor' of the administration building should be sacked. The director and the chief engineer spent the whole night in the square and the director promised that he would throw out all the staff from the third floor, although in practice he did not do it.

⁴⁰ Apart from the small settlement Myski on the road between Mezhdurechensk and Novokuznetsk, which has an open-cast mine and an enrichment plant. The open-cast Sibirginskii at Myski established a strike committee headed by its Party secretary, Yurii Yefimenko, on 14 July and joined the negotiations with Shchadov in Novokuznetsk, but did not actually stop working until 15 July.

By 13 July all the deep mines around Novokuznetsk were on strike, electing strike committees to draw up their demands. However, beyond Novokuznetskaya mine it seems that the Party initially had much better control over the process than elsewhere in South Kuzbass. Kostyukovskii quotes a conversation at the end of the strike with Vladimir D'yachenko, a combine machinist at Abashevskaya mine outside Novokuznetsk and a Party member. When the strike began, D'yachenko went to the Party secretary of the mine, Shutov, and said to him 'There is going to be an explosion, we must control it ... we must control it so that there is no disorder, so that nobody suffers'. The Komsomol organizer, who was sitting in the office, just laughed: 'So where do you expect it to come from, eh?', but the Party secretary agreed with D'yachenko, who established an initiative group.

It seems that this Party-led initiative was generalised to other mines. D'yachenko continued, 'When our people came back from Mezhdurechensk we set up strike committees in the mines, districts and town'. D'yachenko became president of his mine strike committee and a member of the Novokuznetsk city committee.⁴¹ He also implies that it was at the instigation of the Party that the decision was taken that in Novokuznetsk the miners should remain at their pits, outside the city, and not gather in the central square: 'We thought our town is large, not only miners, and we do not want to stir the water at meetings so we decided that we would have a sedentary strike, not leaving the enterprise' (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 111–16). The decision to remain at their pits was supported by the miners around Novokuznetsk because they were afraid that they would be vulnerable if they gathered in the centre

⁴¹ There is some confusion about the name and status of this person. The original list of members of the regional committee identifies Viktor Sergeevich D'yachkov, an underground miner from Abashevskaya, as the first president of the Novokuznetsk committee (Lopatin, 1993: 65).

of the city, particularly as the local authorities were already trying to stir up the workers of the giant Novokuznetsk metallurgical complexes against the miners.⁴² Meanwhile a strike committee established itself in the Mayakovski culture palace where it negotiated with leaders of the South Kuzbass Coal Association until the arrival of Shchadov on 14 July.⁴³

Although the authorities in Novokuznetsk showed no sympathy to the strikers, late in the evening of 13 July the first secretary of the Novokuznetsk City Party Committee, A. Lenskii, told Kostyukovskii that the Party committee 'supports and shares all the basic demands of the strikers, and considers them just'. While disagreeing with the form in which they were being expressed, Lenskii declared that 'Nevertheless, once it has happened I consider that Communists must at this time be alongside the workers. In the mines strike committees have been elected which, one

⁴² In Novokuznetsk there was an 'unauthorised' meeting in the Central Square but the miners stayed away (Lopatin, 1993: 78 – the term 'unauthorised' would imply that the strike committees were authorised). The meeting was small and apparently dominated by informal political organisations, which called for an All-Union general political strike – representatives of informal groups poured into Kuzbass in the first days of the strike.

Once the miners had achieved their settlement, the Novokuznetsk Party leapt on the bandwagon, calling a meeting on 18 July in the central Teatral'naya Square attended by representatives of STKs of enterprises of the city. A further meeting was called for the following day to consider the demands put forward by KMK and Zapsib for the Government Party Commission, which visited the city on 22 July. These demands were similar to those of the miners, including an increase in the regional pay coefficient, payment for long service, a change in the normative relation between the productivity of labour and pay increases, a concrete timetable for the reconstruction of KMK and permission to export unused materials (*Kuzbass*, 19 July 1989).

⁴³ The committee was initially constituted not as a city committee, but as the Ordzh-onikidzii District Strike Committee.

must admit, have been joined by very authoritative people, including many Party members, and even presidents of trade union committees and members of Party committees. For example the director of the Baidaevskaya mine is a member of his strike committee' (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 44). Lenskii went on to stress the importance of going beyond the demands of the Mezhdurechensk strikers to raise wider issues and to attract more state investment to meet the needs of Kuzbass. Lenskii himself established a committee to maintain essential services in the city. A similar line was taken by the Regional Party Committee . According to regional Party secretary Vladimir Lebedev, 'Having visited Mezhdurechensk and Prokop'evsk, Mel'nikov had felt the hot atmosphere. Then he understood a lot. Including how it is possible to use the miners to beat something out of Moscow for Kuzbass.' (Lopatin, 1998: 428).

3.4.3 Prokop'evsk

Prokop'evsk is a mining town, virtually joined to Kiselevsk, just to the north of Novokuznetsk and in the heart of the coal-mining region, with generally the oldest pits and the worst working conditions, surrounded by slag heaps and old open-cast workings. It was the sight of Prokop'evsk that had supposedly reduced Prime Minister Ryzhkov to tears in March.

Tension had been running high in Prokop'evsk where, according to Maksimova, 1989: there were already plans for an unofficial strike to take place in the autumn. As soon as the strike broke out in Mezhdurechensk, Naidov, General Director of Prokop'evskgidrougol', organised meetings in every mine to inform the workers about the strikes and to promise to improve conditions without the workers having to resort to such measures in Prokop'evsk. Each mine was ordered to send a

representative to a meeting at the association where they were presented with a programme of demands to Moscow produced by the management, which the meeting unanimously decided to send to the Coal Ministry in the name of the Prokop'evsk miners (Maksimova, 1989: 67). However, even before they could inform the workers of what they had done, the strike had broken out in Prokop'evsk.

The strike in Prokop'evsk broke out on the evening of 12 July, when, in solidarity with the Mezhdurechensk miners, the third shift of the Kalinin mine refused to go down the mine, to be joined later by the fourth shift when they arrived for work.⁴⁴ During the morning of 13 July, bus and truck drivers arriving at the mine joined the strike and transported the strikers to other pits to spread the word. As in Mezhdurechensk, the strikers boarded buses and trams to tell workers what they had done, so that by the morning of 13 July every pit in Prokop'evsk was on strike.

By mid-day the Kalinin mine had elected a strike committee, and miners from the Tsentral'naya and Kalinin mines had marched to the central Victory Square in their work clothes, where, as in Mezhdurechensk, a permanent meeting got under way, workers airing their grievances as the microphone was passed from hand to hand. The miners were soon joined by workers from other enterprises, some of which joined the strike, others sending delegations and material support, so that the meeting was attended by about eight thousand workers, crammed into the small square. In the square they passed resolutions, made their demands, and elected a city strike committee from representatives of the mine committees, a majority of

⁴⁴ In almost every case it was the night shift that initiated the strike, one reason being the fact that they were not being paid their bonuses for night work.

whom were workers, which prepared a strike programme. But who had written the demands?

Kostyukovskii arrived in Prokop'evsk late in the evening of 13 July, and immediately bumped into Naidov, whom he told about developments in Mezhdurechensk, including the workers' demand that Naidov be called to Mezhdurechensk at once. Naidov knew about the demand, but told Kostyukovskii that the workers of Prokop'evsk did not want him to leave, and had written to the workers of Mezhdurechensk to that effect. Kostyukovskii asked Naidov, "have you read the demands? Yours, the Prokop'evsk demands?" Naidov smiled and, having lowered his voice, said: "I have not read them, I wrote them. Well, not on my own of course, I simply took part in this process." Naidov did not dissociate himself from the strike – 'a good shaking up was what was needed to change this system' – he was only concerned that coal deliveries from the bulging stockyards to the metallurgical complex should be maintained, as in Prokop'evsk initially they were at the request of management, ostensibly to prevent the problem of fires in coal heaps, although the strike committee resolved to stop deliveries on 14 July. Naidov summed up the demands of Mezhdurechensk and Prokop'evsk, with which he was in complete agreement, as the demand for independence of the mines: 'the essence of the demands is "give us the ability to work effectively, so that we can live well"' (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 45).⁴⁵ Vladimir Strokanev, President of the Prokop'evsk city workers' committee confirmed that the position of mine directors coincided with that of Naidov: 'When we were preparing our very first demands, our advisers were

⁴⁵ According to Rutland, the collaboration of management in drawing up the demands in Prokop'evsk was exceptional (Rutland, 1990, 354). However, management and the local administration were more or less active in drawing up the demands in every city.

the enterprise directors. They tried though us to resolve their production and supply problems' (Lopatin, 1998: 65).

The miners in Victory Square sat in their work clothes, and each section and mine had its own part of the square where workmates sat together, facilitating consultation.⁴⁶ The miners reported to the square in shifts where their attendance was recorded, those who did not report being marked down as absentees. As elsewhere, the workers were distrustful of all sources of information, and at first did not believe it when they heard that Mezhdurechensk had ended its strike.

Following the example of Mezhdurechensk, the strikers imposed a ban on alcohol, worked closely with the police to maintain order, asked enterprises providing for the needs of the city to keep working, rejected collaboration with other political organisations and informal intellectuals (but not with independent trade unionists from Leningrad, who were invited to join in the workers' discussions in Victory Square),⁴⁷ and provided maintenance for the pits. As in Mezhdurechensk, no sooner was the strike committee established than its members were bombarded with long-standing grievances which people had previously submitted to the local administration in vain.

⁴⁶ They sat in their work clothes partly for symbolic reasons, despite the stifling heat. But there was another reason – if miners wore their everyday clothes they could easily slip away from the square without anyone noticing, while an absentee in work clothes stood out like a sore thumb.

⁴⁷ According to the official Party report on the strike V.R. Sokolov, an activist of the Leningrad Popular Front, turned up on the 18 July and circulated the programme and leaflets of the trade union *Nezavisimost'*, but met with opposition from the strikers and had to leave the square (Lopatin, 1993: 82), but according to Maksimova the crowd welcomed him (Maksimova, 1989: 69–70).

The authorities in Prokop'evsk were caught on the hop by the strike, which broke out before they were able to impose their own demands on the movement. Nevertheless, as in Mezhdurechensk, they gave the strikers a loudspeaker system, installed a telephone and illuminated Victory Square. One trade union president who provided food for the strikers immediately was sacked, and joined the miners' Strike Committee (Maksimova, 1989: 70), but then orders came from above and all the trade union committees provided free food and polythene shelters from the rain. Local Party and trade union leaders declared their full support for the demands of the strikers, while expressing reservations about the means and warning against any disorder.

Talk in the square was of pay, living conditions, the shortage of housing, and the money that was taken away from Prokop'evsk to support the bureaucrats (Kostyukovskii, 1990: Maksimova, 1989: *passim*).⁴⁸ The workers in the square showed no confidence in any of their 'leaders', apart from the local chief of police who, for admittedly tactical reasons, treated them with respect, declaring his support, calling the miners 'lads' not 'comrades' and beginning each speech 'As you entrusted me to report'. It was not the workers in the square who resisted the Mezhdurechensk request to send Naidov, for one of their first demands was for his resignation, and they treated the head of the local administration, trade union bosses and Shchadov with an equally dismissive contempt when they came on to the square (Maksimova, 1989: 70; Kostyukovskii, 1990: 70).

⁴⁸ According to Maksimova the miners showed a high degree of distrust and contempt for all 'intelligentsia'. One mine director threatened ITR (engineering and technical workers) with the sack if they went to the square, even in their free time. Others sent them to work on the harvest for the duration of the strike (Maksimova, 1989: 70).

The first set of demands put forward on the square was hardly non-political, starting by expressing lack of confidence in the city Party committee, and demanding the sacking and censure of various Party officials for inactivity in the creation of a construction–repair base, with a list of demands concerning the control of prices, night operation of trams, supply of buses, installation of telephones for presidents of street committees in settlements, building a children’s playground, the supply of disposable syringes, reduced kindergarten charges, turning the Party education building and the association’s hotel into a children’s home and children’s polyclinic, setting up local anti-crime detachments, and strengthening the struggle against parasites, with no mention of mine independence or the price of coal (Lopatin, 1993: 42). However, Makhanov, deputy president of the city strike committee, had more ambitious objectives, ‘this is a strike, not a holiday ... whose aim is to secure the reform of the present economic system’ (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 55).⁴⁹

The strikers demanded that Prime Minister Ryzhkov come to Prokop’evsk because Shchadov did not have the authority to resolve the most important questions (Lopatin, 1993: 43), but in the evening of 15 July Shchadov returned to Prokop’evsk from Novokuznetsk. Naidov proposed that he have a rest then study the demands and reply to the people in the square early next morning, but Shchadov asked to meet with the strike committee at once, before speaking in the square, where he was not well received by the strikers: ‘We know that not every question

⁴⁹ Vladimir Makhanov was an underground miner from Tsentral’naya mine. He later became president of the city workers’ committee and in March 1990 was elected a People’s Deputy of Russia, but a year later the Regional Council was demanding his resignation for failing to support the ‘democratic forces’ in the Congress of People’s Deputies.

can be settled at once. But why were the things we are being promised now not settled decades ago? The basic demand of the workers is to increase our standard of living. If the people of Prokop'evsk work for their money, why do they have to hand it out to every Tom, Dick and Harry? Every worker feeds six or seven people in the managerial apparatus. All the profits must stay here ... I can only see one way out – we need full financial independence, but together with increased pay and health care and welfare and social services' (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 63).

3.4.4 Kiselevsk

On 13 July members of the city Party committee toured all the town's enterprises, and persuaded them to stay at work. However, during the afternoon strikers arrived from adjoining Prokop'evsk, and the fourth shift of Karagailinskaya mine did not go to work. The next morning Vyacheslav Sharipov was in the trade union offices when a message came that the strike was spreading in Kiselevsk. Sharipov went to the office of Aleksandr Volkotrub, the head of the association, and they discussed what to do. Volkotrub gave Sharipov a car, and he took his group of development workers to the Central Square, where a microphone was installed. By afternoon six of the ten mines had stopped, together with various local factories and the open-cast Kiselevskii, and by 15 July the town was at a standstill, with about 20,000 strikers gathered in the city square, where a strike committee was elected with three delegates from each enterprise, amounting to about seventy people, of whom about one-third were active, with a core of about seven. The committee moved to the building of the association where they had been allocated an office, and elected Mauletdin Barievich Minyazov, later to become head of the city administration, as its chair. However, despite the militancy and solidarity of the

workers in Kiselevsk, the strike committee more or less disintegrated as many of those elected on the first day disappeared, so that it had to be reconstituted in order to call off the strike on 19 July (*Kuzbass*, 20 July 1989).⁵⁰ According to Minyazov: ‘We did not meet with a negative relation with management either during or after the strike. All our demands were agreed, or more accurately, worked out together with the engineering-technical personnel. We simply did not have the right not to take account of the opinions of the specialists’ (Lopatin, 1998: 137).

3.4.5 Belovo

Belovo is a mining city, with some additional industry, on the road north from Kiselevsk. In Belovo, the city Party committee discussed the situation on 14 July, worked out proposals to Shchadov, and gave advice to labour collectives (Lopatin, 1993: 79). At 10.30 in the evening, Novaya mine came out on strike and by the next day all six mines had stopped. In Pionerka mine the director, N.A. Vlasov, met the strikers with shouts and threats that they would be sacked, but then stopped and

⁵⁰ Tarubarov, secretary of the city Party committee, worked on the list of demands together with the remnants of the strike committee (Sharipov, interview). The strike committee included a number of mine directors, including one who was elected a deputy president – Viktor Petrenko, director of Karagailinskaya mine, a ‘convinced Communist’, though twice expelled by the Party – who was delegated to announce the end of the strike to the workers in the square (an impressionistic account of the strike in Kiselevsk, including later interviews with leading activists, is given by Vera Karzova in *Nasha gazeta*, 10 July 1993; 13 July 1993; 15 July 1993).

The general director of the Vakhrusheva mine in Kiselevsk managed to get his workers to call off the strike by explaining his plans to establish the mine’s independence by leasing it from the state. Shchadov signed his approval of the mine’s plan, which had been resisted by the Coal Association, on the steps of his plane as he left Kuzbass.

went into his office to phone his bosses. After a long conversation he ran out of his office and greeted the miners, 'Lads, I am with you'.

A city meeting elected a strike committee which drew up 60 demands, and appealed to essential enterprises not to stop work. However, the strike committee in Belovo continued to work 'in close contact' with the city Party committee (*Kuzbass*, 19 July 1989), and its main functions were to maintain order and keep the population informed.

3.4.6 Leninsk-Kuznetsk

Leninsk-Kuznetsk is between Belovo and Kemerovo and is a mining city with the most prosperous mines in Kuzbass. The mines began to come out on 13 July and by 14 July were all closed. A workers' (not strike) committee was established and a delegate meeting in the Leninskugol' Coal Association drew up a list of 37 demands (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 47). However, the fact that the committee was under the supervision of the association did not mean that it could ignore the workers' aspirations or the achievements of the workers in Mezhdurechensk. Thus the list embraced the normal range of economic demands, some of which were quite radical, but which contained no reference to financial independence for the mines: pay for evening and night shifts; an increase in the regional wage coefficient for all workers and pensioners; indexation of pay to prices; increased holidays; introduction of time-wages and full payment for travel to the coal face; review of norms for special clothes and soap; a common day off (Sunday) for everyone; the placing of Kuzbass into Category One for supply of consumption goods (the same category as Moscow and Leningrad); improvement in medical services; cutting of institutional car parks and transferral of personal cars to police and emergency

services; permission for the export of above-plan coal to buy technical equipment and consumer goods; immediate re-election of gorispolkom and gorkom; cutting of staff of the ministry by two-thirds; liquidation of the local office of the ministry; cutting of management of associations and mines by 30 per cent by 1 January 1990; liquidation of special shops; reduction of the plan for the days lost during the strike and payment of average pay for its duration; constitution of strike committees as workers' committees to monitor the implementation of the demands (Lopatin, 1993: 42–3). The committee also forbade the continuation of coal production, which perhaps indicates that the strike was not as strong as the figures suggest.

3.4.7 Kemerovo

Kemerovo is the capital of the region, an administrative centre with a large chemical industry (not coal-based) and five mines, employing fewer than 10,000 people in all, at some distance from the city, the nearest mine being Severnaya, the mine shown to visitors and enjoying the best conditions because of its proximity to the city.

Gennadii Mikhailets had worked for seventeen years in Severnaya mine as a development worker, combine driver, deputy head of section several times, and assistant head of section, and was a Party activist. When the strike broke out at Mezhdurechensk the pace of work slowed and everybody just talked about the strike. When he came to work for the night shift on the evening of 13 July he found that work had stopped, but the workers just sat around in the hall and looked at one another, not knowing what to do, although it was obvious to Mikhailets and his comrades that the issues were much deeper than sausage and miners' gloves,

however much the miners tried to tell everybody that the strike was not political.⁵¹ They set up a strike committee and Mikhailets was elected from his section. They were then given a telephone and got themselves organized.

The following day, the miners gathered in the construction yard near the mine, even those on vacation coming in, and decided to wait for representatives of the other mines who were reported to be on their way. The general director of the association and the mine directors offered them buses to go into town, but they decided to go on foot. The whole process was much more orderly than in South Kuzbass, as they formed up in a column of two hundred representatives in civilian clothes, to march silently to the city centre, where they elected a city strike committee and presented their demands to the city executive committee. The first secretary of the city Party committee declared his support for the just demands of the miners. The leaders decided that they needed to link up with the other cities, and the general director of the association gave them a car so that the main leaders could go to Prokop'evsk, where Mikhailets eventually ended up as the Kemerovo

⁵¹ According to Aslanidi, Mikhailets joined the strike having spent two hours discussing it in the city Party committee, where it was decided to stop work in the mine and then across the city. Aleksandr Yevsyukov, an electrical fitter from Severnaya, Party member, and first chair of the Kemerovo Workers' Committee was quoted in *Pravda* (16 July 1989) as saying 'For four straight hours we held a dialogue with Party and soviet leaders of the town and oblast ... on the majority of our demands we were not given a straight answer' (quoted in *Soviet Labour Review*, 2, 7, August 1989, 2), putting a different slant on the meeting. Lyakin agrees that the administration played the leading role in drawing up the miners' demands, and that such leaders as Mikhailets and Avaliani were effectively their appointees.

representative on the regional strike committee.⁵² The meeting continued in the city square, but the majority of those present were non-miners and, as in Novokuznetsk, the informal political movements were well represented, although apparently the activists of the ultra-radical Democratic Union were rebuffed.

Because Kemerovo is not a miners' city, alongside with directors of the striking mines the initiative of negotiating with the initiative group (later transformed into a city strike committee) fell to the city and regional administration. As against other cities of Kuzbass, where the coal directors added the demand for independence of the enterprises to the initial miners' demands, in Kemerovo the first place was taken by the demands of the regional administration for a change in the system of taxation of the region (which in the final account was expressed in the demand for a transition to regional self-financing) and the demand to upgrade the region to a higher category for the supply of food. Both the directors, and the regional administration understood perfectly well what an opportunity for the satisfaction of their interests the strike represented and prepared for participation in negotiations with the Party-governmental commission.⁵³ As in other cities, the leaders of the

⁵² Mikhalets later left the workers' committee, having been elected a people's deputy of Russia, and became a full-time worker in the official trade union apparatus.

⁵³ By the afternoon of 14th July there was already an initiative group from among the strikers which took upon itself the function of working out the demands expressed by the miners in the course of their meetings, and of participating in negotiations with representatives of the local and Central administration. In a speech at the city meeting a representative of the regional administration spoke as follows: 'Tomorrow this initiative group, headed by the chiefs of our mines, must meet and discuss all the questions with the Coal Industry Minister and the first secretary of the Regional Party Committee as has happened in Osinniki, as happened in Mezhdurechensk and as is now going on in Novokuznetsk'.

strike committee rejected bread and butter demands in favour of the resolution of more global questions.⁵⁴

3.4.8 Berezovskii

Berezovskii is a mining city to the north of Kemerovo. Here the local Party committee did not quite have things all its own way, largely as a result of the activity of the Golikov brothers.

According to Vyacheslav Golikov, the strike in Berezovskii was absolutely unexpected and spontaneous, and although there might have been talk, nobody had prepared anything. The mines in Berezovskii had sent a delegation, including the

Aleksei Antonovich Sukharenko (representative of the regional leadership): 'Comrades! Well, I should advise you that the leadership of the oblispolkom and the obkom of the Party has addressed 48 questions to the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, M. S. Gorbachev, and also when he arrived N.I. Ryzhkov (sounds of disapproval from the crowd) ... Listen, just a minute! We appealed to them with 48 questions which you probably have noticed we have added to what you formulated this morning. Some of these concern the provision of building materials, some the supply of foodstuffs. On the foodstuffs: we start with the proposal that the USSR government stops providing subsidies and we supply 50% of our needs for milk products from our own production and the state subsidises the supply of the other 50% from other oblasts so that the level of subsidy is frozen at the 1987-8 level. And the whole amount which is provided by our agriculture would stay in the oblast and so improve the supply situation. So, this is a demand which we have brought today and on many other questions, understand, I have given back to the members of the strike committee, you understand, all our requests and all the answers, you understand. I think, that our *экспомт*, demonstrations, with you today will help us, the administration of the region, to resolve those questions with the government, which we have not been able to bring to a conclusion in the course of a year's work' (Tape recording of the city meeting in Kemerovo, 14.07.89, made by the sociology laboratory of Kemerovo State University, headed by P. Bizyukov).

54 The people of Mezhdurechensk 'put forward 42 questions right up to those about "groats and soap" and so on and so on. Having had our own demonstration this morning, we have decided not to put forward such trifling questions here. We can resolve them in the normal way in the mines. We have put forward other, global questions, which interest us, the association, all Kuzbass and the whole oblast' (sounds of discontent, excitement in the crowd) (Tape recording, *ibid.*).

Golikov brothers, to Mezhdurechensk to find out what was happening, and they stayed there until the agreement was signed with Shchadov.⁵⁵ On the drive back they found that all the mines on the way had stopped work, but when Vyacheslav Golikov returned to Berezovskii early in the morning of 14 July he went to sleep. However, he was soon woken up by his friends who said ‘You are kidding here, but everyone is on the square, Pervomaiskaya first, Biryulinskaya second, Berezovskaya and Yuzhnaya’. When he came to the square the Secretary of the city Party committee was speaking and trying to tell people that all their demands were just ‘sausage’, and that they should adopt the Mezhdurechensk demands, which he completely misrepresented. Golikov yelled from the crowd that he was just back from Mezhdurechensk with their demands in his pocket, and that the Party secretary was a liar. Golikov was given the microphone, and he read out the Mezhdurechensk

⁵⁵ Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Golikov was born in Komsomol’sk-na-Amure in 1952, moving with his family to Berezovskii in 1957. During his military service he was his company Komsomol organizer, but did not later join the Party. He went to the Anzhero-Sudzhensk Mining Tekhnikum, but left following an incident in which a man was killed during a fight in 1972, although Golikov was acquitted of causing his death, receiving two years’ probation for manslaughter. He completed his higher education by correspondence in 1988. He had worked as an electrical fitter in the Pervomaiskaya mine in Berezovskii, but had been on sick leave for a year following an accident. His two brothers were sent to Mezhdurechensk (his brother Gennadii, who worked in Berezovskaya mine, became a founder member of the regional strike committee), and took him along with them. It was Vyacheslav Golikov who raised the issue of mine independence in Mezhdurechensk (see above page 119). In 1989 he declared that Lenin was the political figure with whom he had most sympathy, because of his ability to analyse the real situation and change his position in response to the changing situation (*Stroitel’* [*Nasha gazeta*], 62–3, 20 December 1989. He also confessed that he liked beer, although others had the impression that he liked something a bit stronger than beer). He later became President of the Regional Council of Workers’ Committees.

demands, adding some of his own. Immediately afterward he was elected on to the city strike committee by the miners of his mine assembled on the square, and at the first meeting of the committee he was elected president. The next day all the deep and open-cast mines were on strike.

Most strike committees were initially content to send their demands to the local or regional authorities, but the Berezovskii Committee went to the top, sending a list of 44 demands to the Supreme Soviet, the Prime Minister, the Coal Minister and the president of the trade union. The first four demands bear the radical stamp of Vyacheslav Golikov, and eventually became the basis of the demands of the regional strike committee and of the programme of the Kuzbass Regional Council of Workers' Committees. The remaining demands largely derived from Mezhdurechensk, modified and supplemented to take account of local conditions. The Berezovskii demands were much the most sophisticated and comprehensive of any city.

The first demand was for the full economic and juridical independence of enterprises and the extension of the law on state enterprises to them, followed by: the demand for the right of labour collectives to determine the form of property themselves ('within a socialist framework'); the introduction of a single fixed-sum tax in place of the confiscation of profits by the ministry, not less than 40 per cent of export earnings to go to the enterprise; the right of the enterprise to make direct sale contracts; the abolition of the decree linking increases in pay to productivity; the payment of evening and night-shift premiums; an increase in the regional coefficient by 60 per cent, and its application to pensions, as recommended by the Siberian Academy of Science; pay to be indexed to prices of production and industrial goods; increased holidays; an increase in the wholesale price of coal to

the world level; people's record of service to be kept inviolable; increased danger money; improved pension rights, invalidity benefit and maternity leave; Kuzbass to be added to the first category regions for the supply of consumption goods; improvement of the supply of medical goods and disposable syringes to Berezovskii; improvement of rest facilities and the building of a sports complex; the creation of a city rest area in the forest; preservation of the green zone; at least double housing construction and improvement of repairs; declaration of an absence of confidence and demand for the re-election of the city soviet; cutting of administrative staff under the supervision of the Labour Collective Council; cutting of the plan for the strike days; transferral of Nissan automobiles bought by enterprises to the emergency services; payment for travel to and from the face; 75 per cent of road tax to stay in the city budget; uniting of city construction organizations; and lots more specific local demands (including the transfer of heating plants and a new electric power station to the use of gas); and transfer of the city newspaper from Party control to that of the city soviet (Lopatin, 1993: 45–7).

The process of elaborating the demands was heated. According to Golikov, every member of the strike committee proposed his own demands, which were then discussed by the committee. However, the workers on the square were distrustful of this discussion going on behind closed doors. It was their first experience of a strike, and it was very hot, they were excited, and frightened, and cautious, expecting provocations from all sides. Suddenly somebody in the square asked 'What are they doing in there? It is obvious that the administration has bought them all already, they have betrayed us and are talking about doing something against us'. In response a group of miners burst into the room where the strike committee was discussing its demands and shouted at them 'What are you doing here? Show us

what you have done?', so Golikov proposed that after they had adopted a decision on each point they should go to the square and announce it and ask people to agree with it, and then go on to the next point.

The strike committee had taken over the conference hall in the city executive building by the square without asking the city administration, but the chairman of the gorispolkom arranged for a telephone to be installed. However, telephone communications were not very good – lines kept going down, and provocateurs kept phoning in to report that this or that city had gone back to work, so they decided to go to Prokop'evsk to find out what was going on. With them they took a thousand copies of their list of demands.

3.4.9 Anzhero-Sudzhensk

Anzhero-Sudzhensk is an isolated town in the north of the region, whose old and unprofitable mines joined the strike late, only coming out on 15 July. The gorkom and gorispolkom sent a telegram to Shchadov, Mel'nikov and Lyutenko asking them to come: 'the workers of Anzhero-Sudzhensk, the majority supporting the justice of the demands of the Mezhdurechensk miners, have continued to work expecting a solution covering the whole of Kuzbass, and not separate solutions for each city. But in an interview on Kemerovo television on 14 July 1989 you did not give a clear answer to the question of how issues will be resolved for the whole of Kuzbass, and concentrated basically on measures taken in each separate city. As a result the situation in miners' collectives has sharply deteriorated' (Lopatin, 1993: 44). The fear that everything would be allocated for the benefit of other cities and it will be even worse than before united the population, both workers and chiefs of the enterprises and associations. It pushed the chiefs of the local administration into

supporting the strikers and inviting the regional administration and government representatives to their cities (the best reason for them to come being a strike). According to the evidence of the participants of the strike in Anzhero-Sudzhensk, the directors of the coal enterprises and local administration undertook organised efforts to direct the indignation of the workers into the 'correct' strike channel. Arkadii Sintsov, the chief of a group of the engineers for the development and introduction of new methods of explosive works, spoke about this: 'I would suggest, I heard about it from others too, that the heat of the strike passions in the south of Kuzbass came from the outside. The discontent was warmed up by the mine directors, among whom were Krushinskii, Yevtushenko, some "visitors" from Moscow (I do not know, who). Krushinskii willingly provided transport for trips to the striking south, even when all was silent up here' (Lopatin, 1998: 293).⁵⁶ On 14 July an evening meeting in the central square elected a strike committee and decided to stop coal production but to maintain deliveries. The strike committee was enormous, with over one hundred members from all enterprises in the city, headed by Nikolai Smirnov, a deputy chief engineer and a member of the Regional Party Committee, with its offices in the gorkom building.

56 The same opinion was expressed by Valerii Lisov, deputy president of the Anzhero-Sudzhensk Workers' Committee: 'Probably, the row in Anzherka began with the agreement of the bosses. And maybe even under their initiative. Anyway, the initiator of the city meeting from which the strike began, was the Sibirskoe mine administration and, in particular, its chief engineer Nikolai Smirnov and section head Sekachev. The director of the mine administration was Krushinskii ... the city bosses were afraid that after the All-Kuzbass strike began there would be a division of the spoils and Anzherka would get nothing. You see Anzherka joined the strike after everyone else. In Mezhdurechensk they had already gone back to work when we began to strike. ... Anzherka and Berezovskii were the very last to join the strike. About the same time as Kemerovo. The further north the later' (Lopati, 1998: 163-4).

3.5 *The Formation of a Regional Strike Committee and the End of the Strike*

3.5.1 The Gathering of the Clans

The local and regional authorities did not sit idly by and watch the strike develop. The line had clearly been established very early on that Party, trade union and state bodies would fully recognise the justice and legitimacy of the workers' demands without threatening any punitive measures (not even loss of pay for the days spent on strike), while the threats against Party members participating in strike action were forgotten. The regional Party, trade union and administration leaders accompanied Shchadov, and later the Government–Party Commission, wherever they went. The trade unions immediately sprang into action providing food and drink for the workers, local administrations provided the strikers with premises, telephones and amplification systems for the meetings in the squares, the Party organisation collaborated with the strikers in drawing up their demands, and conducted intensive propaganda work. 'Responsible workers of the apparatus of the obkom of the CPSU participate in meetings in all the miners' cities of the region, meet with leaders of the strike committees, talk to workers, help Party, city and factory newspapers with their evaluation of the situation and constantly keep the obkom informed' (15 July, Lopatin, 1993: 80). However, the local powers were becoming increasingly worried about the situation, and on 15 July the obkom, oblispolkom, oblsovprof, and obkom of the Komsomol issued a joint statement endorsing the request of the Mezhdurechensk Strike Committee to end the strike or 'its further continuation may lead the situation to get out of control, with unpredictable consequences' (*Trud*, 16 July 1989).

The absolute priority was to keep the movement under control and get the workers back to work. However, Shchadov was having little success as he tirelessly ran from place to place trying to negotiate with workers on the city squares, the workers becoming increasingly dismissive of any settlement he proposed. The key to a settlement, as in Mezhdurechensk, was to detach the strike committees from the mass of the workers and draw them into rapid negotiations. Moreover, if the escalation of demands was to be stopped, the priority was to bring the strike committees into negotiation at a regional level on a manageable set of demands. Those in the best position to do this were the local nomenklatura clans.

The most powerful clans were those in Prokop'evsk and Kiselevsk, whose leaders were very close to Shchadov and had the best contacts in Moscow, but as it turned out were also well placed on the ground. As we have already seen, Mikhail Naidov, head of the Prokop'evsk clan as director of Prokop'evskgidrougol and President of the Council of all the Kuzbass Associations, had been chosen as mediator by the workers of Mezhdurechensk, and claimed to have written the demands of those supposedly striking against him in Prokop'evsk (although, hardly surprisingly, the final Prokop'evsk demands were almost entirely addressed to Moscow). However, Naidov was initially met with anger and contempt by the workers in Victory Square in Prokop'evsk. The task of bringing the movement under control fell to the junior members of the clan. Teimuraz Avaliani, people's deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and Deputy Director for Capital Construction of the concern Kiselevskugol', was elected president of the regional

strike committee.⁵⁷ Vyacheslav Sharipov, who was to become president of the Independent Miners' Union of Kuzbass, was a long-standing client of Avaliani, having worked under him in a series of jobs and being related by marriage.⁵⁸ Like

⁵⁷ Avaliani had become well known in Kuzbass. Born in Leningrad in 1932, he had moved to Kiselevsk after military service in 1956, working for seventeen years in the Vakhrusheva mine, and then moved to the shoe industry, where he spent eleven years as director of the shoe production association Kuzbassobuv' in Kiselevsk, but was removed from the post amid rumours of scandal, and transferred to the post of Deputy Director for Capital Construction of Kiselevskugol'. In the run-up to the elections for People's deputy of the Soviet Union in March 1989 it transpired that he had written a personal letter to Brezhnev in 1980 in which, among other things, he had invited Brezhnev to resign in the interests of the Party and of the people. Various attempts were supposedly made to discipline him: he was sent to a psychiatrist, but did not go, and the city Party committee was invited to expel him from the Party, but did not take the hint because he had not violated the Party Constitution. However, when he resumed writing letters to the Central Committee he was removed from his post (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 75). Nevertheless, by the time of the strike he was a member of the Regional Party Committee, and his heroic record had secured him election to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Avaliani was the first to propose the formation of an independent miners' union, immediately after the strike, and later became secretary of the Union of Kuzbass Workers. He left the Regional Council in January 1990 and became First secretary of the Kiselevsk city Party committee which led to his expulsion from the Kiselevsk Union of Kuzbass Workers at the end of July 1990. The following month he was elected to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party. He stood against Gorbachev for the post of General Secretary of the CPSU at the 28th Party Congress, receiving 16 per cent of the votes. With the disbanding of the Party in 1991 he became a leading figure in the Russian Communist Workers' Party.

⁵⁸ Vyacheslav Sharipov, born in 1957, a member of the bureau of the Kiselevsk city Party committee, was Avaliani's trusted lieutenant. He was a graduate of the Mining Tekhnikum and had worked as head of the supply department in Avaliani's shoe factory before moving to work as a mine development brigadier in a model brigade in Kiselevsk where he could earn better money. In 1987

Naidov, these two came through the Tekhnikum which prepared leading cadres, as did Mikhail Kislyuk, chief economist of the Chernigovskii open-cast mine near Kemerovo.⁵⁹ But how did they pull it off?

3.5.2 The Formation of the regional strike committee

The initial objective in Kuzbass, as it had been in Mezhdurechensk, was to establish a committee with which the authorities could negotiate. According to Aslanidi,

he received the 'Laureate of Kuzbass' award. A member of the Regional Council of Workers' Committees, in October 1989 he was elected to the trade union committee of his enterprise and then became President of the city committee of mine development enterprises of the official trade union. However, he soon found that he could achieve nothing within the old trade union. Within the enterprise the collective agreement was prepared in the old way, under the direction of the Party committee, and the oblsobprof was still dominated by the old people, so he was prevented from attending the Miners' Congress. He left the official union after a year to become a member of the executive committee of the newly established Independent Miners' Union (NPG), moving to Moscow for four months, later becoming President of the Kuzbass NPG.

⁵⁹ Mikhail Borisovich Kislyuk was born in Ukraine, but his parents moved to Kuzbass when he was a child. His father worked as a mine foreman at the Kedrovskii open-cast pit near Kemerovo. Kislyuk graduated from the Kemerovo Polytechnical Institute as a mine engineer. He then worked his way up through the open-cast mines, having been secretary of the Party bureau, before becoming deputy chief of the economic planning department of the open-cast association before moving to the post of deputy director of Chernigovskii. Ironically, in 1989 he declared that Gorbachev was the political figure with whom he had most sympathy because he was a centrist (*Khimik* [*Nasha gazeta*], 48, 11 December 1990. Like Aslanidi, Pyatenko and Golikov, Kislyuk declared his favourite music to be the Beatles. Like several other leaders, his current reading was Selyunin's book *Chernaya dyra ekonomiki* (The Economic Black Hole). Kislyuk became Deputy President of the Regional Council of Workers' Committees, and was its chief economic ideologist. He was later appointed by Yeltsin as Chief of Administration in Kuzbass.

there were two attempts to bring the various city strike committees together organized by the Novokuznetsk nomenklatura clan which were unsuccessful. The third attempt was initiated by Prokop'evsk and was much better organised.

On 14 July a curious telegram was sent in the name of the Prokop'evsk Strike Committee to the Regional Party Committee in Kemerovo informing all labour collectives, through the obkom, that the Prokop'evsk miners were on strike, and inviting city strike committees of other cities to meet in Prokop'evsk at 4 p.m. that same day. The curious thing about the telegram is that it was not signed by the leaders of the city strike committee established the previous day, which was headed by Yurii Rudol'f and Vladimir Makhanov, but by S.P. Velikanov, A.G. Shiripinskikh and headed by V.M. Il'in (Lopatin, 1993: 41). Viktor Mikhailovich Il'in was hardly a rank-and-file miner – he was director of a Prokop'evsk mining machinery factory – nor was he a striker – his factory had already transferred to leasehold, and only joined the strike later – nor did he have the full confidence of the workers – he was shouted down in Victory Square because his factory had not joined the strike. However, like Avaliani, he was a people's deputy of the USSR.⁶⁰

In fact it was another day before miners' representatives gathered in Prokop'evsk. People were sent out from Prokop'evsk to all the mines and cities on strike to inform them of the meeting.⁶¹ The committees from the South Kuzbass

⁶⁰ Velikanov later emerged as one of the Kuzbass Committee's nominees to join Grigorii Yavlinskii's group of economists drawing up the 500 days programme, and was one of the delegation which met Yeltsin at the end of 1991.

⁶¹ The meeting was so well organized that Aslanidi was immediately convinced 'that it was organized by Naidov with the support of Avaliani', a suspicion amply confirmed when he got to Prokop'evsk.

cities heard about the meeting when the Prokop'evsk messengers arrived at the Mayakovski culture palace in Novokuznetsk, where they were holding their negotiations with the South Kuzbass Coal Association, and they decided to send five people from each city to Prokop'evsk.

The delegates gathered in Prokop'evsk on the evening of 15 July, but on the first day nothing was achieved beyond establishing the basis of representation for the regional committee, with two people from each city, one from each coal village, and two from the mine rescue service.⁶² The delegates went back to their own cities and gathered the demands to bring back to Prokop'evsk the next day.⁶³

On 16 July delegates gathered to consider their demands at 5 p.m. in the Artem culture palace in Prokop'evsk, a meeting attended by several hundred people sitting in their delegations.⁶⁴ In theory all representatives of official power structures,

⁶² The decision was signed by Yurii L. Rudol'f, President of the Prokop'evsk Committee, as 'Acting President of the Council of Workers' Committees of Kuzbass' (Lopatin, 1993: 48). Rudol'f was a development worker from the Kalinin mine in Prokop'evsk and informal organizer who, according to Maksimova, 1989: was planning the strike for the autumn. He became deputy president of the Regional Council until his resignation in August 1990 to concentrate on his family responsibilities. He was replaced as deputy president by Aleksandr Aslanidi.

⁶³ This account of the meeting is based on Kostyukovskii, 1990: Maksimova, 1989: Lopatin, 1993: *Kuzbass*, transcripts of tapes of part of the broadcast proceedings and interviews with Golikov and Aslanidi. The sources are broadly consistent.

⁶⁴ The strike in Donbass began on 16 July as the Donbass miners began to have doubts that the Kuzbass settlement would be applied to them. Gorbachev and his Prime Minister Ryzhkov sent a telegram to all coal-mining enterprises on 20 July advising them that the Kuzbass settlement would apply to all mining regions, taking account of their specific circumstances. However, the Donbass strike was not settled until 23 July following Gorbachev's appearance on nation-wide television in what proved to be a successful attempt to persuade the Donbass miners back to work. Gorbachev

including in particular Shchadov, were excluded from the meeting, although journalists were admitted. However, Naidov, Il'in, Avaliani and Korovitsyn, head of the regional trade union committee, were not only admitted to the hall, but played a leading role in the deliberations, while Lyutenko, head of the oblispolkom, was allowed to present three questions from the microphone, although he was not well received.

At first the meeting was chaotic. Rudol'f, who was chairing the meeting, proposed that they should separate their demands into two groups, one all Kuzbass, the other local, and take the Prokop'evsk demands as their basis, on the grounds that they were general demands and that they had already spent some time working on them with the minister and his team, and Shchadov had already presented them to Moscow. However, Novokuznetsk proposed their list as the basis for discussion, and in practice demands from both lists were bandied about. There was much shouting and yelling as Rudol'f pleaded at least to be allowed to read the demands to the meeting. At this point Lyutenko put his questions, which provoked even more shouting.⁶⁵

aligned himself with the workers' just demands, which he assimilated to *perestroika*, and blamed local officials hostile to *perestroika* for what had happened (Rutland, 1990, 359). Vorkuta did not come out until 19 July and all their demands had been met by 21 July.

⁶⁵ Lyutenko's questions were: 'Will you put forward a common set of demands?' 'Will you discuss your demands together with the leaders of the industry, who are meeting right now?' 'Will you include demands concerning the future of Kuzbass which cannot be realized locally?' Lyutenko's intervention provoked a sharp reaction from the crowd in the square listening to the relay of the meeting. Makhanov spoke to people in the square, appealing for calm and trying to reassure them that only strike committee members were participating in the meeting in the hall, that ministry

Aslanidi proposed that they establish a regional strike committee to go away and consider the questions calmly, but the meeting continued with Rudol'f at last being allowed to read out the first of the Prokop'evsk demands. The first point of the Prokop'evsk demands was the economic independence of the mines, and increased wholesale prices for coal linked to the world market price. There was a long discussion of the first point, the independence of the mines, with the chief economist of Kuznetskaya mine in Leninsk-Kuznetsk insisting that not all mines wanted to be independent, and that the question should be decided by the labour collective, while Golikov argued that the mines must first establish their independence, and on that basis could then choose to unite if they wished.

For an hour or more there was heated discussion, while Rudol'f stood at the board with only the number '1' written on it, as no agreement could be reached even on the first point, and Rudol'f, who had lost his voice, could only whisper into the microphone. People became more and more frustrated and began to feel that the whole thing was a waste of time. However, Anatolii Malykhin came to the front and said 'Why re-invent the wheel?' and introduced Vyacheslav Golikov, whom Malykhin had met in Mezhdurechensk, although he still did not know his name. Malykhin began to read out the Berezovskii demands, starting with the point that the labour collective should choose the form of property, and then Golikov came forward to introduce the demands that mines should retain their profits, paying only a fixed tax, and then that they should retain a proportion of their export earnings. Someone from the hall asked why they were going on about all this when the real

and city officials were excluded from participation, and that although the second secretary of the gorkom was there he was just sitting quietly and did not intervene (tape).

issue was pay, pensions and supplies, but the reply was that the first group of demands were most important because they embraced most of the others.

Eventually someone proposed that Golikov should join Rudol'f on the platform, instead of bobbing up and down all the time, and so he distributed the leaflet listing the Berezovskii demands and joined Rudol'f. At the same time Lyutenko was thrown out of the hall (*Nasha gazeta*, 30 October 1990). Malykhin proposed that they take the Berezovskii demands as the basis for discussion in place of those of Prokop'evsk.⁶⁶

The discussion continued for a long time, with endless disagreements and little progress, having reached the fourth point after four hours. Then someone suggested that these were technical questions which needed to be considered by economists. Avaliani, who was indeed an economist, then spoke. He said that he thought the most important thing was to elect a regional committee, which could then get down to work which would take at least two weeks, and once it had sorted out all its demands it could negotiate with the government.⁶⁷ Rudol'f agreed that the meeting

⁶⁶ Golikov said that he felt some antipathy to him from the Prokop'evsk and Novokuznetsk delegates as he came from an unknown city but practically dictated all the points.

⁶⁷ Vyacheslav Golikov remembered Avaliani's first speech in Prokop'evsk: 'his name just floated over the hall and his surname was pronounced on all sides. I asked Rudol'f who is Avaliani. Rudol'f explained that he is a very good chap who tries to do everything in the interests of the workers.' Golikov was very interested and waited for Avaliani's speech, but when he began Golikov immediately understood that his position was absolutely opposed to the demands put forward by the miners of Berezovskii and other cities, because Avaliani was clearly against the independence of the enterprise. He said 'what independence are you talking about, what do you need this freedom for, we just need to improve our system and to employ good and honest officials instead of bad ones and to put everything in order. We have to throw out corrupt bastards and to clean the system and

should concentrate on issues which were within its competence. A mine engineer endorsed this, arguing that these were difficult technical issues, so the strike should be suspended for negotiations, and resumed if the government failed to agree to the workers' demands. However, this proposal met with hostility from the hall and in the square, where the discussion was being relayed – 'We want our demands met, these other matters are for specialists to work out'. So it was decided to define the immediate demands which could be resolved by the minister, beginning with the demand for additional pay for evening and night shifts (although Shchadov had already accepted this and provided the money), and then the demand for an increase in the regional coefficient, and the provision of housing according to the Moscow norms, although these were not issues that could be dealt with by Shchadov.

Rudol'f then invited Seleznev, the oblast prosecutor, to speak. Having informed the hall that he had instructed all local prosecutors to give strikers free legal advice and support, he went on to say that at the first stage workers had been distrustful of all managers and Party and trade union officials, with good reason, but had gradually come to realize that not all of them were bad and their distrust had thawed. In the heat of the moment in Prokop'evsk they had demanded the re-election of Naidov, and expressed the same attitude to the trade union, but by then Naidov and Korovitsyn had become theirs. They wouldn't listen to the people's deputies, and cursed at People's Deputy Il'in, basically because his factory joined the strike later than others, although it later came out in solidarity with the miners even though it was already a leasehold company, for which Il'in had fought.

everything will work perfectly'. Golikov concluded. 'we talk about freedom, but he talks about keeping the system' (Golikov interview).

Following a eulogy to his virtues Il'in then spoke, proposing the election of a committee from city representatives, which could then be left to work in peace. The committee should group the demands so that there was one list for the government, one set for the coal ministry, one for the health ministry and so on. 'We don't need polemics and votes; we need to work things out'.

The scene was now set for Naidov to take the stage. Naidov stunned the audience by announcing the imminent arrival of a joint Government–Party–Trade Union Commission from Moscow. He went on to lay out his stall:

'We have to follow this through to the end. If we do so we must get a result, and soon. And not just half a result. You know well that you have raised a lot of problems, and in the past the obkom, the oblispolkom and we have raised them. But what was the point? Time and again resolutions of the Central Committee of the CPSU and Council of Ministers concerning the social development of the region have come to nothing! Nikolai Ivanovich Ryzhkov, as you know, was in Prokop'evsk in March and was horrified to see the way we lived, but again with no result. We do not raise these questions lightly, there is always the possibility that they will silence us, shut us up. But with you it is another matter. Now you have to enter a dialogue with the commission which is coming, and not in the name of the association or the president of some ispolkom, but in your name, in the name of an oblast strike committee elected by you. I absolutely think that you must give the committee complete authority to call off the strike the day the commission arrives, and if the commission does not resolve the problems you can strike again' (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 71–3).

The array of speakers had clearly been set up to win the meeting over to agree to form a regional strike committee and to suspend the strike pending negotiations.

However, the meeting firmly rejected any suggestion of suspending the strike, and to pursue the proposal would have been counter-productive. The other key question was coal deliveries, and the overwhelming majority in the hall wanted to stop them, but the Leninsk delegate objected that they had to meet an export order which was paying for building a hospital. Eventually it was agreed to leave the question of coal deliveries to the city committees.⁶⁸ The meeting then proceeded to the formation of the regional strike committee. There was a long discussion of whether each city should have two or three delegates, and of what counted as a city, before it was decided by 118 votes to 65 to have two delegates from each city. There was then a discussion of the payment of salary and protection of rights of members of the committee, and of whether to elect the committee then or to refer it back to the city committees for nominations, the eventual decision being to establish the committee at once, following a break for the city representatives to get together to discuss the procedure.⁶⁹ The Mezhdurechensk delegate from Lenin mine proposed that Naidov should be invited to chair a commission to prepare their demands, a proposal that

⁶⁸ The meeting received telegrams from a number of metallurgical complexes asking the miners to maintain supplies with dire warnings of the consequences of a shut-down. At the beginning of the strike there were 12 million tons of coal sitting in heaps, many of which were burning; at the end of the strike four million tons had been delivered (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 100) – there was not one case of a plant closing for lack of coal, indeed it looks as though deliveries were maintained at pretty well their normal level.

⁶⁹ There was a lot of discussion of whether it should be a committee or a commission, and whether it should be a strike committee or a workers' committee. There seems to have been a tacit assumption that the strike would be called off once the commission arrived, although the crowd reacted angrily to the suggestion, and it was eventually decided that this would be a matter for the regional committee in agreement with the representatives of the city committees (tape).

was firmly rejected (although it was agreed to invite Naidov as a consultant). By this time basically the positions of the actual and potential leaders of the regional strike committee had been determined. Having left the stage Naidov proposed to transfer the further work of the regional strike committee to the nearby Engineering Centre, on the grounds that it had a greater capacity and better opportunities for radio transmissions. Because more delegates had arrived than could fit in to the hall of the Artem Palace of Culture, everybody agreed and began to assemble amicably. ‘I reckoned’ – Naidov said later – ‘that while we went from the Palace of Culture to the Engineering Centre (it is about ten minutes walk along the railway line) I would be able to persuade the representatives of the cities to select Avaliani as the chairman and Rudol’f as his deputy. I had already convinced Rudol’f by then and had agreed with him that he would make this proposal himself. Though I saw that Rudol’f was dying to be president’ (Lopatin, 1998: 454).

A committee of 26 persons was established (22 from eleven cities, two from villages, two from mine rescue), although according to Aslanidi, who was elected from Osinniki, there was no proper process of nomination or election.⁷⁰ A majority of the committee (fourteen persons) were declared Party members, including two secretaries of enterprise Party committees. A majority (sixteen persons) were identified as workers, but certainly the most active of these workers had relatively

⁷⁰ According to Aslanidi, one of the ‘representatives’ of Leninsk-Kuznetsk was not a representative at all. Aslanidi and Kirienko, both from Malinovka, were elected to represent Osinniki on the grounds that Aslanidi was ‘some kind of engineer’ and Kirienko was chief engineer of the motor pool. In general, the most highly educated members of the delegations were selected as representatives on the committee, on the grounds that they would understand the issues. The first committee is listed in Lopatin, 1993: 49–50.

high levels of education, and in several cases extensive management experience. Vyacheslav Golikov was elected from Berezovskii, but had to go back to the doctor, so declined in favour of his brother Gennadii, although he joined the committee later.

The elections completed, Rudol'f read out the telegram from Gorbachev and Ryzhkov which had just been forwarded from Kemerovo announcing the arrival of the commission established to consider 'the question of the socio-economic development of the region' (*Kuzbass* 18 July 1989).⁷¹

3.5.3 The Settlement of the Strike

The meeting was adjourned, and the newly elected regional strike committee went into closed session to draw up the list of demands. Avaliani, who was one of the representatives from Kiselevsk, insisted that the committee should elect the president, rather than the larger meeting of representatives, on the grounds that the

⁷¹ The commission was sent 'to consider your proposals' and 'to investigate problems on the ground, to take practical measures about urgent questions concerning the development of Kuzbass with a view to preparing proposals together with you and presenting them to the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation and the Government of the USSR'. The commission comprised N.N. Slyun'kov, member of the Politburo, L.A. Voronin, First Deputy Prime Minister, and S.A. Shalaev, President of the Soviet trade union federation VTsSPS. It was by no means clear with whom the commission was supposed to negotiate, since the telegram was addressed not to the strikers, but to the obkom, gorkoms, miners and all Kuzbass workers. Since Mel'nikov and Lyutenko accompanied it wherever it went, they could claim to be a party to the negotiations.

committee had to work with him (there were no women on the committee) and the meeting duly elected Avaliani to the post.⁷²

The committee tried to sort out all the demands that had come from the various cities, with a number of specialists providing them with advice. According to Aslanidi it was real bedlam – they had two mountains of paper with demands, one of those waiting to be analysed and one of those with which they had finished. Avaliani just moved papers across with demands with which he did not agree, without any discussion. Once the demands were adopted they were passed to a typist who typed them up. They put together a list of thirty-two demands, to which a further eleven were added (probably the main administration demands, according to Aslanidi) when the commission arrived.

The commission arrived in Kemerovo at 2 p.m. on 17 July and after a short meeting with the obkom, Slyun'kov spoke in the square. The commission proposed to negotiate with the strikers in Kemerovo, but the strike committee insisted that it come to Prokop'evsk, for fear of being cut off from the miners in Kemerovo. The commission immediately flew to Prokop'evsk and went into negotiation in the city Party committee hall that evening.

The commission fully acknowledged the legitimacy of the miners' grievances, assimilated their demands to the movement for *perestroika*, and identified the opposition to the miners as the conservative ministerial system and backward managers and local Party and executive bodies, while arguing that strike action was unjustified and unnecessary because the miners' legitimate demands would be met

⁷² Avaliani remained in Kiselevsk and rarely attended meetings of the committee, which were at first held in Kemerovo, most of its documents being signed by Rudol'f, who was effectively the president until Avaliani resigned in January 1990.

now that they had been brought to the government's attention. The demands for mine independence in particular were entirely in accordance with the general direction of *perestroika*.⁷³

In the hall the three members of the commission sat on the platform alongside Avaliani, Rudol'f and Gerol'd representing the strikers, while the rest of the strike committee sat in the hall and listened to the discussion.⁷⁴ The negotiations were

⁷³ Enterprise independence in principle lay at the heart of the programme of *perestroika*, which proposed the replacement of the discipline of the Plan with the discipline of the market, enforced by strict financial control from the centre. However, despite the 1987 Law on the State Enterprise (Association), virtually nothing had been done to implement the strategy. Although the miners' demands for independence were never realised, their attack on the power of the Ministry opened the floodgates in other branches of production as enterprises threw off the shackles of central control to exploit market opportunities. But at the same time the collapse of governmental authority made it impossible to enforce the strict financial controls which were the essential complement to enterprise independence. It is in this sense that the 1989 miners' strike proved to be the last straw for the Soviet system, its result being its economic and political collapse. However, this collapse owed more to the weaknesses of the system exposed by the miners' action than to the strength of the miners (Clarke, Fairbothor and Borisov, 1993, Chapter 2).

⁷⁴ Yurii Anatolevich Gerol'd was a 29-year-old graduate of the mining institute and a Party member. He worked as a combine driver in Baidaevskaya mine and was then a foreman, assistant chief of section and chief of section before returning to the post of foreman in the Polosukhinskaya mine in Novokuznetsk, although his family, all miners, was from Prokop'evsk. He joined the strike to realise the aims of *perestroika* defined by Gorbachev in 1985, and in 1989 declared his political heroes to be Gavriil Popov and Yurii Afanas'ev (*Stroitel'* [*Nasha gazeta*], 62–3, 20 December 1989). After the strike he was elected head of the STK of his mine. He was elected a people's deputy of Russia in spring 1990, but was soon putting most of his energies into organising his mine into a Soviet–British joint venture and withdrew from active participation in the workers' movement,

dominated by Avaliani, who had surrounded himself with a large team of consultants, specialists, economists and lawyers who were in a small room near the hall, so that when they faced problems formulating or resolving questions these were often referred to the consultants, who provided one more filter for the strikers' demands. The behaviour of different representatives of the commission was different. Slyunkov tried to reach a compromise, but Voronin was more wily and constantly tried to defer discussion by proposing to refer the issues to the next meeting of the Council of Ministers. By four o'clock in the morning agreement had been reached on nine points, and the meeting adjourned until later that day.

According to Aslanidi, the most active participants in the discussion from the floor were the representatives from South Kuzbass, and the mine rescue people who always emphasized that the same demands must be implemented for mine rescue, giving rise to a common saying: 'to resolve things for all the people of Kuzbass, and also for the mine rescue service'. The most passive representatives were from the north of Kuzbass, who seemed largely to have been selected by the administration.

Despite the start of negotiations an increasing number of non-mining enterprises joined the strike on 17 July. At a televised joint session of the Supreme Soviet and Soviet of Nationalities that same day V. Medikov, a people's deputy from Novokuznetsk, prepared the ground for the next phase of assimilation of the strike movement, declaring that 'the strike is not leading the country to ruin, but to the acceleration of the process of *perestroika*. For that reason I fully support the workers and inhabitants of Kuzbass and I beg to consider myself as the permanent representative of the workers' committee in the Supreme Soviet. The justice of the

leaving the Regional Council in August 1990, although remaining a member of the Novokuznetsk

demands is demonstrated by the fact that the Coal Ministry, the Council of Ministers, Party and Soviet organs have adopted all these demands. These are not demands for meat and sausage as many try to represent them. The basic demand is to grant independence and the right to resolve their fate themselves, to escape from the dictates of Moscow and other bureaucrats’.

Medikov called for immediate local elections, with the strike activists ‘as the fundamental core of the new soviets’, but he ended with an appeal to stop the strike, proposing that the guarantors that the promises would be fulfilled would be the Supreme Soviet, the Congress of People’s Deputies and the new Council of Ministers. Ryzhkov made a counter-productive speech, claiming that large quantities of goods had already been sent to Kuzbass, which only provoked distrust because nobody in Kuzbass had seen them (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 79–80).

On 18 July the strike wave began to recede. Slyun’kov and Avaliani made speeches in the square which were broadcast on the regional radio, declaring their satisfaction with the progress of the negotiations and promising that once the negotiations in Prokop’evsk were concluded the commission would visit every city to investigate their particular problems. In his speech Avaliani appealed to city strike committees to suspend the strike from the third shift that day, with a promise to resume in the event of failure to reach agreement (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 88–91).

Although Avaliani had called for an end to the strike, the square in Prokop’evsk was more packed than ever, the crowd overflowing into the neighbouring streets, and the general mood was one of distrust both of the government and of their own committee, and of determination to continue the strike. Members of the regional

committee toured the mines to explain the settlement, but in every city the announcement was greeted initially with disbelief, since only nine points had been agreed, and there were no guarantees at all.

The Kiselevsk Committee, once it had been reconstituted, decided to continue the strike, only finally reaching a majority decision to suspend it late the following evening. In Kemerovo the strike committee voted by 19 to 3 to continue the strike, in Leninsk-Kuznetsk the same decision was taken by a majority of 13 to 2. In Belovo the meeting in the square decided to continue the strike and demanded that Gorbachev himself come to Kuzbass. Workers in Novokuznetsk and Osinniki also voted to continue the strike. In Berezovskii the city strike committee decided at 8 p.m. to suspend the strike, but only after midnight did they get the workers in the square to agree. In Anzhero-Sudzhensk the city committee faced the same problem having decided to suspend the strike, with the situation remaining tense as committee members went around enterprises explaining the decision (*Kuzbass*, 19, 20 July 1989). Nevertheless the peak of the strike in Kuzbass had been reached on 17 July, when 158 enterprises and almost 180,000 workers were on strike, and by 21 July everybody was back at work.

The commission resumed its work, and later on 18 July a thirty-five point agreement was signed between the members of the commission and Avaliani, Rudol'f and Gerol'd on behalf of the regional strike committee. This agreement, with the additional nine measures agreed a week later, was incorporated into Resolution 608 of the Council of Ministers adopted on 3 August. Seven representatives from workers' committees around the country were included in the membership of a government Commission to monitor the implementation of the

resolution, although the workers' committees themselves had no defined role to play in the process.

The deal made substantial and wide-ranging concessions to the miners. The agreement included large increases in pay and benefits, additional payment for evening and night shifts, an increase in the regional coefficient to apply to all workers, increased maternity leave, improved pensions and invalidity benefits, a common day off, payment for travel to and from the coal face, improved holidays, full economic and juridical independence for the mines, regional self-financing, re-organisation of the associations and a wide range of property forms, an increase in regional and local budgets, a reformed system of profit taxation, autonomy in the determination of work practices, reform of the normative relation between productivity and wages, the right to sell above-plan coal for hard currency, an increase in the domestic price of coal with an interim increase from 12 to 20 roubles per ton from 20 July,⁷⁵ a cut in mine management staff and in the amount of paperwork, improved equipment for the police, improved supplies, medical facilities, repair and maintenance of housing and communal facilities, the abandonment of construction of the Krapivinskii reservoir, strike pay, payment for members of strike committees, support from the regional trade union in establishing control groups to monitor the distribution of goods etc., and a promise of no

⁷⁵ The rise in the coal price, when it was eventually implemented in January 1990, cut into the profits of energy users, such as steel and pulp mills, immediately leading to a fall in bonuses for workers. Threats of strike action, supported or inspired by management, soon led to compensation payments to neutralise the effect of the price rise (Rutland, 1990, 374). Energy price rises were constantly postponed in 1992 so that the mines remained one of the most tightly regulated branches of production.

reprisals. The miners' one obligation was to consider dissolving the strike committees on 1 August, subject to the situation (Protocol, Lopatin, 1993: 68–73, dated 17–18 July. Additional measures, mainly concerning ecological issues, leisure and pensions, were agreed on 22 July).

Following agreement with the regional committee, the commission set off on its tour of Kemerovo cities to discuss the local demands drawn up in each place, accompanied everywhere by Mel'nikov and Lyutenko. Thus the process of formulating demands was reproduced from one city to another over the next week, although at the local level it seems that the local Party and administration were at least as active as the strike committees in drawing up demands, the local administration at last seeing the chance to acquire some of the power that it had never had in the past.⁷⁶

3.6 *The Aftermath of the Strike: Order and Good Government?*

The general strategy of the regional and local authorities after the strike was to co-operate with the strike committees, while drawing the activists back into the official trade union, Party and soviet structures. The Party leadership seemed completely confident that the strike movement, which had at first looked as though it could

⁷⁶ Members of local soviets were in general selected by the local Party as trusty and worthy voluntary workers. On 18 July *Kuzbass* reported that the Kemerovo gorispolkom had helped organise the collating and reproduction of demands and proposals from various branches of production. Mikhailets later defended this practice, on the grounds that the workers lacked the knowledge and experience to draw up their demands. The result was that the Kemerovo agreement was more comprehensive than that from other cities. This meant that the Kemerovo agreement was not signed on the spot, but only later in Moscow.

bring the whole world crashing down around their ears, had been entrusted to responsible hands and assimilated to the movement for *perestroika* and for the rights and interests of the region – such confidence is not surprising since the president of the regional strike committee was at the same time a loyal member of the Regional Party Committee .

On 19 July there was a meeting of regional Party economic activists in Novokuznetsk. Mel'nikov's speech was triumphalist: 'The reserves of the working-class, as we see in this business, are inexhaustible, and so it is too early to assign to the archives the leading role of the working-class, as some comrades sometimes do.... The role of the Party is not weakened but strengthened if you see that Communists play a leading role in the strike movement and work there actively'. Forgetting his denunciation of the involvement of Communists in strikes only three months before, he endorsed the work of the Party with the regional strike committee, and acclaimed the role of the strike committees in maintaining order and reducing crime: 'That is what is meant by the power of the working-class' (Kostyukovskii, 1990: 100–101).

On 25 July the obkom held an expanded meeting, also attended by the Government–Party Commission just before its return to Moscow, to consider the political situation in the region. The obkom still denounced strikes as harmful, but recognised the positive aspects of demands for widening the rights and economic independence of enterprises, for the destruction of the administrative-command system of management, and for giving real powers to soviets, thus paving the way for new initiatives. It also recognised the positive role of the strike committees in formulating socio-economic demands and in maintaining order, discipline and public services, which facilitated the participation of Communists, managers and

specialists in the strike committees. The committees had decisively rebuffed attempts to introduce political slogans, and in this situation the participation of Communists in the strike and their support for the workers' demands was justified. Thus, the obkom concluded, it would be right to continue to participate actively in the positive development of these processes, although the demand for the re-election of soviets was a hasty demand. The meeting concluded by stressing the need to explain the law on meetings, demonstrations and other mass measures to labour collectives (Lopatin, 1993: 85–6; *Kuzbass*, 27 July 1989).

At the end of July a plenum of all gorkoms considered the lessons of the strike and concluded that it was necessary to reconsider existing methods of resolution of socio-economic questions, renew personnel, improve communication, encourage more active primary groups, explain the law on meetings, and similar measures. The Party had had a profound shock, but it was now confident that it had matters in hand (Lopatin, 1993: 90–91). During August it began to take symbolic measures in accordance with the local agreements: the obkom ordered an end to separate dining facilities for managers within two weeks, the transfer of various state and Party buildings to hospitals and children's homes, a ban on privileges for managers and so on (Lopatin, 1993: 92–3).

On 8 August the obkom held a plenary meeting on the lessons of the strike which began to draw out a plan for the future. A.M. Zaitsev, first secretary of the Belovo gorkom, and later to become first secretary of the obkom, had collaborated closely with his strike committee from the beginning. He proposed that the Party should make maximum use of the activists of the strike committees, getting Communists into the gorkom apparatus and recommending ordinary comrades to local soviets. This seemed to reflect a general view at the meeting that the main lesson of the

strike was that the Party was out of touch with workers and was losing members, collaboration with the activists of the workers' committees providing a way forward. Smirnov, President of the Anzhero-Sudzhensk Workers' Committee, proposed new Party elections to bring working-class members more actively into the Party, concluding that the priority at that time was to implement the agreement, reconsider cadre policy, and increase political and ideological work. Naidov neatly summarised his own activity as an expression of the laws of history in explaining the strike wave as a result of the decentralisation of power with *perestroika*, through which the centre tended to unite local powers and the working-class against itself. Avaliani stressed the need to prepare for self-financing and to move immediately to the market economy (Lopatin, 1993: 98–105).

This strategy of the obkom in practice corresponded reasonably closely with the predominant thinking within the workers' committees, and not only among their Communist members. The workers' committees were not seen as institutions exercising dual power, but as organisations which sprang up to fill a power vacuum. Thus the first stage in the development of the workers' movement was focused on putting pressure on existing institutions to fulfil their functions and strengthening them through an infusion of new personnel, reinforced by legislative changes concerning the rights and responsibilities of such bodies. In this way, as the new wave of activists permeated existing power structures, the workers' committees themselves would dissolve.

The Second Conference of Workers' Committees, which was held in Prokop'evsk on 26 July, decided that the strike committees would remain in being, renamed workers' committees in token accordance with the agreement with the Party–Government Commission that the strike committees would be suspended on

1 August, with each city committee deciding its own structure and principles of representation.⁷⁷ The conference issued a statement to all workers and to the Supreme Soviet, stressing that their first demand was for the economic independence of enterprises and regions. They were not looking to better their own position at the expense of others, but to make *perestroika* an urgent and progressive movement. The first task was declared to be the establishment of effective control of the implementation of the agreement. To do this new elections to trade union committees and local soviets were declared to be necessary. It was necessary to return trade unions to their basic function of defending the interests of workers, for which purpose members of strike committees needed to join trade union committees. The second stage would be to seek election to local executive committees. 'We can declare with full confidence that our movement is conducted in support of *perestroika*' (Lopatin, 1993: 87–8).

The illusion of an harmonious convergence between the forces for *perestroika* in the Regional Party Committee and the Regional Council was not one that could be sustained for long. The workers' committees had been entrusted to safe hands, but most of the members of the Regional Council were genuinely committed to a radical *perestroika*, unlike the Regional Party Committee, which was by and large only paying lip-service to the latest Party line, and using the workers' committees as a battering ram to press its own claims on Moscow.

⁷⁷ The Regional Strike Committee was renamed the Regional Council (*sovet*) of Workers' Committees, the term *sovet* being chosen to emphasise the committee's associative character. The city workers' committees had to register with the local authorities, which in many cases procrastinated.

3.7 Conclusion

We can identify two distinctive features of the 1989 strike in comparison with subsequent strikes: the high discipline among the strikers, and also solidarity of the miners' actions and the general support for their actions on the part of the workers of other branches.

It is possible to identify various reasons for the high discipline during the first strike: both high moral spirit and consciousness of the working class, civic responsibility and class feeling. However, there is a lot of evidence that the determining factor of the high moral spirit was the strikers' fear of possible reprisals for 'illegal actions'. The fear of possible provocations forced them to distance themselves as much as possible from political demands and from representatives of informal political organizations (there are plenty of documented cases in which the strikers did not allow a speaker to speak and pulled him from the platform if he criticised the CPSU and the existing system; representatives of the national front of Lithuania, Democratic Union and other political organizations were detained and thrown out of the cities). The fear of possible provocations forced them to create control posts on roads and to block deliveries of alcohol to the striking cities, and also to organize workers battalions to keep order in the cities. And, incidentally, fear in the face of the punitive machine was the reason why, despite criticism during the strike of all local organs of power, the speeches of the chiefs of the law-enforcement agencies were supported by the strikers and it was with them that they began to cooperate first of all, keeping order together and involving the police and prosecutors as experts at sessions of the strike committees in taking their decisions.

There were several causes of the solidarity of the actions. It is absolutely impossible to leave out of account the psychological mood of that time – the expectation of real changes supported by the personal position of Gorbachev and the processes of glasnost which had begun, opening up many things which had previously been considered forbidden. Television broadcasts of the whole proceedings of Party Conferences, the USSR Supreme Soviet and Congress of People's Deputies etc. created among ordinary workers a sense of personal participation in the adoption of decisions at a state level. The same mood of community was connected with the expectation of something unusual, that suddenly at once life will change for the best (it was a habit of decades for the Soviet authorities to speak about the world-historical role of the next congress of the CPSU – 'the congress will be held, it will take a decision and everything will change'). Among the people there was still a child-like faith in the force of a single decision, if that decision was taken 'at the very top'. The miners' actions coincided in time with popular expectations of change. It seemed that 'This is IT! It has come true! It has begun!' Therefore at all levels the miners' demands for the improvement of the quality of products, the provision of gloves and soap at their workplace and so on were immediately rejected as trivial, as inappropriate 'to the importance of the historical moment'. Everybody saw that the sharpest demands of the miners rose higher and higher and were directed to the Centre, and it brought general support for the miners, since everything was in the hands of the Centre, and the destiny of *everyone* depended on its decisions. Thus, almost immediately after their election, the miners' strike committees acted on behalf of all workers, and not just the coal-miners. The uniformity of Soviet society was one more reason for the support of the miners' actions by all workers.

The process of change of the initial demands of the miners and their reference to chiefs of a higher and higher level is of special interest. As this procedure, having been tested once, then was regularly repeated in subsequent strikes, it is possible to speak about a kind of law of the existing system. As is well known, the initial demands of the miners were basically directed to the directors of the mines and were reduced to the satisfaction of subsistence and economic questions. However, each of the representatives of the administrative-command system had very limited powers which did not allow him to meet the full demands of the strikers. Each of them, beginning with the enterprise directors, was ready to recognise that the decision of questions was not in his competence and to transfer the anger of the workers and their demands to a higher level. Thus, the directors were interested in pushing the conflict out of the framework of the enterprise, as only the involvement of a higher level of official structures could resolve it. After the workers directed their demands to a higher level, the directors became 'equal' with them, demanding from 'the top' the resolution of common problems. In conditions when all authority (political, economic, managerial, distributive) was in the hands of the Centre, everyone at a lower level of an all-union pyramid had a common interest in the face of the higher level and united all forces for lobbying these interests. This was precisely how, after the recognition of the city and regional chiefs that they did not have the power to meet the demands put forward by the strikers, they, probably not even consciously, raised the conflict to higher and higher levels; the arrival of Shchadov and his limited powers led to the demands for the arrival of a Party-government commission from Moscow. Corresponding to the increasing status of the persons (and bodies represented by them) drawn in to the resolution of conflict, there was a change in the demands which were put forward by the strikers. While

the workers addressed their demands to the director, they were reduced to ‘soap and mittens’, i.e. basically to domestic and economic questions, many of which were in the competence of the chiefs of this level. As soon as the demands went beyond the limit of the enterprise, *the labour collective of the whole enterprise* (including the directors) began to act for their rights as a single unit before the higher instance. It corresponded precisely to the traditional policy of joint lobbying of the director and advanced workers (leading workers and Heroes of Socialist Labour) of the interests of the enterprise at regional and All-Union levels. Precisely as the local and regional authorities, including Party officials, translated the demands of the workers ever higher and higher, being united on a platform *of lobbying of regional interests*. Each level of the included structure added, in pointing ‘upwards’, additional demands to the initial lists of the workers, but first in the queue stood the directors of the enterprises with their demands for the independence of the enterprises and increase in the price of coal.

The 1989 miners’ strike in Kuzbass undoubtedly arose out of the general dissatisfaction of the miners with their working and living conditions and the miners’ demands were initially directed at management, but the generalisation of their struggle and of their demands took place within the specific social context of ‘collective bargaining’ handed down by the soviet system, in which the workers’ grievances were taken up by branch and local managers in the system of lobbying to ever higher levels. The strike had become a weapon in the new pluralistic version of the competition for state resources. But, as we shall see in the next two chapters, it did not take the state long to learn to play the game on its own terms.

4 **The General strike in Donbass (7 – 20 June 1993)**

4.1 *The outbreak of the strike*

This chapter is based on material collected during the general strike in Donbass and includes interviews with worker leaders, recordings of speeches given by participants in the strike and during negotiations with two government commissions, observations, including participant observation of the development of the strike, and also material from the local press. My presence in the Ukraine made it possible for me to follow the whole process of how the strike developed at the level of one coal enterprise up to regional level, from the first stoppages to the last sparks of spontaneous action; to observe the course of meetings and gatherings which provided the stimulus for the institutionalisation of the conflict; and to attend meetings of the newly created self-governing strike institutions and negotiations with government commissions.

The strike was provoked by repeated increases (of between 3 and 5 times) in state prices adopted by the Ukrainian government, without any corresponding index-linking of wages. As Donbass is a coal region, the miners were the driving force behind most of the protests. The increase in the price of smoked sausage to 30,000 karbovantsy per kilo and of semi-smoked, which was the staple food of underground miners and was the main ingredient in their lunch packs (*tormozok*), to 20,000 karbovantsy, set against the average miner's wage of between 120–180,000 per month, sharply increased social tension in enterprises.

Events unfolded as follows. On Monday 7 June, the government increased the cost of food products by between 3 and 5 times. At 13.30 at Zasyad'ko mine, with one of the steepest inclines, a spontaneous strike broke out. (Zasyad'ko mine is one of the most materially favoured mines in the town. It was the only mine to have transferred over to the lease-system. In the past a branch of the Independent Miners' Union (NPG) had been created. The mine management, however, was very strong: pressure was brought to bear on the union and the NPG chairman had been compelled to leave the mine. According to the miners, the union then comprised 12 people, although no-one was able to name a single member.) The whole of the first shift, which did not know about the price increases, went to work as usual. Most of the miners on the second shift found out about the price increases from their wives returning from the shops, many from conversations on public transport, and some – those who did the shopping themselves – found out about it first hand. People in the shops were angered by the price increases. Appeals were made to ransack the shops. Miners on the second shift came to work confused and angry.

After the planning meetings, workers from several shops met near the mine shaft and continued to discuss the developing situation. The new mine director approached the crowd and asked why the miners were not going to work. *'And what are we working for?'*; *'We don't intend to risk our lives for a piece of sausage'*; argued the workers surrounding him. As Zasyad'ko mine was the only one in the Donbass region to have become a lease-holding enterprise, the miners asked the director whether he could resolve their problems himself. The director replied in the negative, and began to explain the reasons why the government had increased prices. Under such circumstances, this signified that he supported the government and was trying to justify its actions. As a consequence, he received a hostile

response from the miners surrounding him. *'Can you imagine,'* one of them later explained, *'he agreed to the point of saying that there was nothing to pay the pensioners with. Prices were increased so there was something to pay them with'.* *'Well, if that's the case, go to work yourself',* replied the miners. Someone shouted, *'Let's go guys'.* The crowd supported this appeal and almost the whole of the second shift (with the exception of those who were occupied in maintenance work to keep the drifts in working order) set off towards the Kiev district executive committee building – the raispolkom.⁷⁸

The column of about 300 miners, stretched over tens of metres along Kiev Prospect, were seen from the window of the local newspaper offices by one of the journalists, who called the city strike committee and the city's Independent Miners' Union (the organisations had adjacent offices in the building of the Donetskugol' Coal Association). The co-chairman of the strike committee, Mikhail Krylov, went immediately to the raispolkom building.

The leadership of the city NPG was in a more complicated position and rang around all the mines which had NPG grass roots organisations. Within two hours almost all the NPG representatives in Donetsk's mines had visited the head office to express their opinion on the spontaneous strike that had begun. Despite the irritation of the leadership of the city NPG, who had planned a strike for a later date, they decided to use every effort to support it since, in their opinion, as expressed by the NPG chairman in Donetsk, Nikolai Volynko, the miners were irritated and in their desire to start a strike had bypassed them.

⁷⁸ From interview with A. Stakhov, assistant shop chief, Shop No. 4, member of the strike committee at Zasyad'ko mine, 11/07/93

When the column arrived at the raiispolkom building, the local chiefs were already aware of what had happened. The chairman of the executive committee, Rybakov, came out to the miners to hear their demands. As no-one was prepared for the strike, contributions were muddled, and demands vague and undefined. At Rybakov's request, the miners were given paper on which to formulate clearly exactly what they wanted. This was, in essence, the first step towards the institutionalisation of the conflict. This institutionalisation was instigated by the official structures which, as the experience of previous strikes, including Kuzbass in 1989, showed, could be seen to have a definite regularity. Representatives of the authorities always prefer to do business with organised strikers, represented by some elected body or other (more often in the form of a strike committee or an initiative group), than with an unorganised crowd, the conduct of which is spontaneous and unpredictable.

Having got together in a small group, the miners began to put together their demands. Towards 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the co-chairman of the city strike committee, which was actively involved in this activity, approached the raiispolkom. With his help, the following had been formulated by 4 p.m.:

DEMANDS

of the inhabitants of independent Ukraine

In relation to price increases, and the consequent fall in our living standards, we cannot and do not want to die from hunger. We demand:

1. the Supreme Soviet urgently consider the issue of cutting exorbitant income taxes;

2. the question of prices (regional differentiation in prices and their outrageous levels) be reviewed;
3. the Supreme Soviet consider the issue of the payment of wages, where there is a lack of cash, in manufactured products, with a subsequent permission to sell them;
4. that the Supreme Soviet consider a law on the income declaration of every citizen of Ukraine;
5. that it is necessary to increase the minimum pension and wage to the level of a normal standard of living;
6. the resignation of the Supreme Soviet, as its present composition does not reflect the people's will;
7. that the government's decrees aimed at lowering the living standards of Ukrainian citizens be cancelled;
8. the savings of the population be indexed;
9. the formulation of the government's budget from the bottom up.

After a discussion at the city NPG, the representatives of the grass roots organisations went off to bring the mines to a standstill and involve them in the strike. The members of the city strike committee contacted the mine trade unions by telephone to ask for their support (appealing to both the NPG and the official unions). Where the trade union leaders were not to be found on site, they appealed to the directors with a request to support the Zasyad'ko strikers. As everyone was in fighting mood, and the directors found themselves in the same desperate situation as the workers, no-one had to be persuaded. On the first day of the strike, however, not a single mine apart from Zasyad'ko came to a complete standstill.

4.2 *The generalisation of the strike*

To see how events developed, we can take Oktyabr'skaya mine as an example. Although, unlike at other mines, the NPG was dominant at Oktyabr'skaya, the attitude of the workers and the administration to the strike and their mutual attitude to the question of 'whether or not to take part in the strike' was characteristic of most mines (the main reason was the critical financial situation of mines: debts, fines, loans provided at 250% annual interest rates, which they were compelled to take from banks etc.)

As the NPG and PRUP had already appealed for a strike in February and April, the trade union leaders had already prepared the ground and knew the extent to which the miners were prepared to strike. According to Georgii Babunov, NPG chairman at Oktyabr'skaya mine, the workers of the main shops had long been prepared to strike, while auxiliary shops were less resolutely prepared and did not want to risk even their then existing desolation. '*And how will we live?*' was the unanswerable question given in response to the NPG chairman's request that they strike (interview, 07/07/93). The price increases, however, took even this desolation from them and rallied the miners in their desire to go on strike.

Immediately after receiving news of the work stoppage at Zasyad'ko mine, Georgii Babunov met with the director of Oktyabr'skaya mine to ask what his attitude was to the mine joining the strike. The director replied that he fully supported the miners' demands, but warned that they should proceed with caution and first of all go to the city strike committee, then to the local Kiev district executive committee to find out everything.

By the time the third shift was due to start work in the evening, Babunov had already returned from the city and was in possession of all the relevant information on what was happening. Miners who had arrived for their shift stood around outside the mine administration building talking about prices and *'how to survive on this money'*. Their general mood may be summed up in one phrase, *'Something has to be done'*. Everyone waited to hear what management had to say.

Two people appeared before those gathered at the general planning meeting – the NPG chairman and the mine director. The NPG chairman produced information on the stoppage at Zasyad'ko mine and the miners' demands, and appealed for the miners to be actively supported. Speaking next, the director supported the demands, but suggested *'not to clamber, like in previous years, for the front ranks so that others could then be carried on your shoulders'*, but to begin by sending a delegation from the mine to the square. *'Then, if we see that this is serious, the whole mine will become involved in the strike'* (recording of meeting of third shift at Oktyabr'skaya mine, 07/07/93). He read out how many people could be sent to the square from each shop and mine service without any particular loss to production, and requested that the shift chiefs name specific people to go. At this point, the meeting ended. Everything had occurred in a peaceful and organised fashion. People agreed that in such uncertain conditions, this was the optimum solution.

Forty minutes later the miners, having changed into their work clothes, got on to a bus ordered by the director to take them to the town's main square – October Square – where all strikes since 1989 had been held. Before they left, the mine director got onto the bus to inform them that he had called the directors of other mines, who had also decided to send delegations.

In the evening, when the third shift from Zasyad'ko mine and delegations from five mines arrived on October Square, representatives of the mines were elected at the initiative of the city strike committee to discuss 'what the strike was for', that is, to define their priorities. After an hour-long discussion, a decision was taken on a suggestion from the co-chairman of the strike committee, Mikhail Krylov, to focus on three main demands:

1. Regional independence;
2. A vote of no-confidence in the Soviets at all levels;
3. A vote of no-confidence in the President.

The miners' main argument in favour of putting forward political priorities was as follows: *'They'll increase wages to 500,000, but from the first of July prices will rise again by five times. If we don't resolve the political issue, we'll be back where we started in three or four months'*.

The following day, strike committees began to appear at striking enterprises and the initial spontaneity began to enter an organised channel. A group of five people was elected from the mine representatives on the square to conduct negotiations on behalf of the city with members of a government commission, who were flying in to Donetsk on the evening of 8 June.

4.3 Negotiations with the government commission

The commission of 11 people, headed by the 'father of Ukraine's economic reforms', the deputy Prime Minister, Viktor Pinzenik, refused to discuss the strikers' political demands, referring to their lack of competence to resolve such issues. After this announcement, the initiative group representing the strikers'

interests decided to leave the meeting, as a decision had been taken on the square not to participate in negotiations on economic issues until the political issues had been resolved. Viktor Pinzenik, flatly refusing to appear in front of the miners on the square owing to 'a lack of oratory skills', suggested that the initiative group stated the miners' economic demands in any case. He assured them that this was not in any way to be seen as negotiations, but only as a presentation and discussion of their demands with the commission, since the government had to know exactly what was being demanded.

After an hour of fruitless talks between the government commission and the initiative group, the general directors of the coal concerns of Donetsk region and the directors of Donetsk's largest enterprises entered the room. The discussion then assumed the nature of a production meeting, although it cannot be said that it became any more specific. While earlier, in response to the miners' complaints that they already couldn't afford to take 'tomozky' underground because this was too expensive, and that the rest of the population were on the verge of starvation, Viktor Pinzenik had replied that he 'also earned 50,000 karbovantsy'; in response to the directors' reproaches 'to stand in our shoes', and to the very specific fact that in the Donetsk region, owing to ill-conceived government policy there was not a single prosperous enterprise ('Is there really not a single sensible boss in Donbass?'), the deputy Prime Minister replied like a demagogue that it would give him great pleasure to work in a mine. Having evaluated the commission's stance as a reluctance '*to solve the problems*', the initiative group left the room after 90 minutes, declaring that '*these are not negotiations, we have agreed nothing with you and evidently we have nothing to talk about*'. Other, more cutting expressions

were also used (Recording of negotiations between the strikers and the government commission, 08/07/93).

The directors left in the room were bewildered for some time and did not immediately respond to Pinzenik's proposal '*to continue the negotiations*'. Talks proceeded only after the city mayor, Efim Zvyagil'skii, who was also present in the room (and who until two months previously had been the director of Zasyad'ko mine, and who three days after the negotiations being described took place was appointed deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine) announced, '*We shall conduct negotiations*'. The directors formulated demands, which were then considered by the government as the striking miners' demands. Moreover, after the initiative group had walked out, the PRUP representative, who had requested that he be included in the group, did not leave the room with them, but took part in the discussions that followed. This allowed Viktor Pinzenik to declare on Ukrainian national television the following day that '*trade union representatives had participated in the negotiations*'.

The protest continued on the city square on 9 June. A decision was taken to send representatives from the mines to Donetsk's industrial enterprises to encourage labour collectives to become involved in the strike. A request was sent to the President that he appear on national television and consequently those on the square waited to hear what he would have to say.

The painful expectation lasted two days. The President of Ukraine, Leonid Kravchuk, only appeared on television on the evening of 10 June. In a 35-minute speech he did not even refer to events in Donbass, vaguely hinting at some forces that were exploiting the dissent between the eastern and western regions of Ukraine

for their own purposes. At the same time, however, those people standing on the square understood perfectly that President Kravchuk's television appearance had taken place at their request, and that this was his response to the striking workers. The television standing in the wings of the city ispolkom was switched off and the irritation of all of those present, which had been building for days, exploded from the microphone. *'It's time to strike for real!'* and *'We have to be heard in Kiev!'* were the leitmotifs. Someone sadly noted that, *'We did the right thing rising up. The government understands no other language'*. The people on the square voted to move onto a strict strike regime.

By Friday 11 June, 202 mines were on strike in Donbass. After the previous evening's appearance by Kravchuk, the city strike committee issued a request that the region's banks be monitored to prevent resources being transferred to Kiev.

There were about 60 enterprises represented on the square by 10 a.m. A representative of the strike committee appealed to enterprise collectives to select representatives to participate in the newly created Co-ordinating Committee (CC). One hour was given for the elections to take place. It was also said that to increase the strike movement, the roads would probably be blocked so that people would have no choice but to gather on the square.

At this time, the second conference of the Union of Workers in the Coal Industry (PRUP) of the Ukraine was beginning in the *'Shakhter'* (Miner) press centre building. There were around 240 delegates. The conference had been planned earlier and only incidentally coincided with the strike. The agenda was changed so that the report of the chairman of the republican PRUP *'On the current situation'* became the first item. After the report was discussed by the delegates, the

conference adopted a resolution which declared the pre-strike status of all coal industry enterprises. 'What are they, completely stupid?': 'Come Monday the whole of Donbass will be at a standstill, and they are declaring a pre-strike status!', was the reaction of the striking workers on the square when they were read the resolution of the conference.

In the afternoon the Co-ordinating Committee (of 72 people, including three women) was elected and held its first meeting, where a working group of seven people was elected to lead the strike in an official capacity.

By this time many representatives from other cities had contacted Donetsk – the centre of the strike. For its part, the city strike committee was heavily involved in co-ordinating the activity of those on strike in various cities and regions. Calls were thus made to striking mines in other regions through the intercom. While some still had no strike committee, others did not yet have a strike committee. In many towns there were no city strike committees. The NPG was entirely responsible for organisation in Makeevka, while in Gorlovka it almost didn't exist. The NPG chairman, a cutter at Kochegarka mine, and a member of the organisation committee for the re-establishment of the Ukrainian Communist Party (*Kochegarka* newspaper, 12/07/93), was in charge of the city strike committee, which had existed since 1989. In the town of Pervomaisk in the Lugansk region 80% of the members of the city strike committee were also NPG members. The Co-ordinating Committee in Dnepropetrovsk and Lugansk regions resolved to send invitations to the representatives of striking enterprises to meet in Donetsk in Monday 14 June to establish an Inter-regional Co-ordinating Centre (ICC).

On 12 and 13 June no particular action was taken by the strikers. The forecast that those who could not make it to the square for one reason or another during the week would come on Saturday and Sunday was not justified. People had come to see the strike as a hum-drum week day occurrence, just as they perceived work, and the majority went to their allotments and gardens. The square simmered during the weekend, awaiting the meeting of the Supreme Soviet which had been brought forward from Tuesday to Monday.

On the evening of 12 June local television broadcast a report on the appointment of the mayor of Donetsk, Efim Zvyagil'skii, as the First Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine. This provided the ground on which to plant erroneous interpretations and rumours about the strike at Zasyad'ko being provoked 'from above' and to sow the seeds of distrust amongst the strikers. Efim Zvyagil'skii, for his part, persistently began to offer to enter negotiations with the miners. He simultaneously invited enterprise directors and the 'generals' of coal companies to talks to try to make attempts to enlist their support. The strike leaders knew of this meeting and found themselves under constant pressure, being unable to rule out the possibility that the directors and Zvyagil'skii would reach an agreement. Such psychological pressure was very strong, since many realised that Zvyagil'skii could reach an agreement with the directors and the official trade union behind the strikers' backs. The directors, however, did not decide to go against the workers. So, when on 13 June at 7:30 in the morning one of the representatives of the CC approached the person on duty at the Donetsk metallurgical plant about the factory workers' participation in the demonstration of 14 June, he replied, 'I shall help organise the demonstration'. A similar position was adopted by the directors in negotiations with the first government commission, headed by Viktor Pinzenik,

when they defended the workers with all their might. Commenting on the directors' position, Mikhail Krylov said that 'they understood that it was dog eat dog, either from above, or from below (the directors). They were compelled to help us'.

On 13 June the information blockade was broken through. It was announced at a meeting of the CC that Ukrainian television had broadcast what had been happening in Donetsk, Gorlovka, and other towns during the previous week. Donetsk television began to provide information on the course of the strike objectively three days after it began. The information given was quite detailed. The chairman of the CC meeting said that, *'Donetsk television is giving us between one and two hours a day. They're already asking us how to include us so that everything can be shown'*. Donetsk television announced that a demonstration would be held the following Monday. Appearing on television, Zvyagil'skii appealed for the Supreme Soviet's deputies to use their common sense in deciding on the issue of the referendum on their dismissal. The members of the Co-ordinating Council held negotiations between themselves: *'Today even Pinzenik gave an interview in Russian'. 'Half an hour ago on 'Mayak' they provided complete coverage. A pre-strike situation has been declared in the western regions. A meeting is now being held in L'vov. They are also in favour of a referendum'* (it was later discovered, that the exact opposite of the last statement was true).

The general impression was that events had been set in motion. The silence of the central press had been breached and pressure had to be maintained. The following day's demonstration would be a powerful factor to influence the government and the Supreme Soviet and the outcome of the strike would depend on its mass nature and organisation. A decision was made that even if negotiations

were to begin on economic issues, the strike was not to be suspended. Negotiations would be conducted against the background hum of the strike.

During this time there was one constant: the permanent meetings held on the squares of miners' town (though not all of them). In other towns strikes were held in enterprises and no decision was taken to go to the squares. This enabled the Ukrainian and city authorities to pretend that nothing was happening.

On 14 June at 9 a.m., the GAI (State Motor-Vehicle Inspectorate – traffic police) stopped traffic in the streets along which the columns of demonstrators planned to walk; police cars drove in front of the columns of marchers, and everything was organised in close cooperation between the strike committee and the Interior Ministry.

A mass meeting began at 10 a.m. It was impossible to count the total number of participants. Many of those present had taken part in the demonstration for the traditionally main reason – to come and be noticed (to have participated). Having stood for some time, people left the square; they were replaced by others; there was a constant circulation of people.

A meeting of the Inter-regional Co-ordinating Centre began at 12 noon in the building of the socio-political centre which adjoins the city executive committee. Despite a request from Donetsk that the other regions not send large delegations, which would disrupt the normal work of the centre, around 200 people arrived from the three regions. Even the small town of Gorlovka (Donetsk region) sent only a few short of 40, as they were afraid that Donetsk would dominate and decide 'to knock everyone over with their votes'. About 90 minutes was spent trying to resolve organisational issues, in particular whether to allow the chairman

of the republican PRUP, K. Fesenko, and the deputy chairman of the Ukraine NPG, S. Klimov, who had no mandate from striking enterprises, which was compulsory for attendance at the meeting, to attend. Under pressure from the Dnepropetrovsk delegation, they were finally permitted to attend the meeting as observers.

In elections to the working group, which it was proposed would represent the interests of the three regions in negotiations with the government commission, it was decided to elect 5 people from each region, plus one person to represent the interests of disabled workers (since the level of accidents at work was very high, the number of disabled workers in all towns was quite high: in the small town of Enakievo, for example, with a little more than 120,000 inhabitants, there were around 15,000 registered disabled). As the course of the meeting showed, the delegation from Dnepropetrovsk was the most disjointed, they did not know each other and selected two named trade union representatives, while the other three places reserved for their region were not filled for this reason.

The political demands signed by the representatives of the Inter-regional Coordinating Centre were sent by fax to the Supreme Soviet to reach the session which was to start at 16.00. According to one of the members of the city CC, *'At our meeting, there was no sense of the ICC, but machinations meant that information about its creation went all over'*.

The session was broadcast by radio, and by the evening those on the square knew the results of the deputies' discussion on the issue of a referendum. According to a preliminary agreement, Deputy Aleksandr Charodeev was given the opportunity to speak first to the Supreme Soviet session and to read out the Donetsk strikers' demands. However, it became clear during the discussions that, in

accordance with the Ukrainian Constitution, the Supreme Soviet's deputies had no right to initiate a referendum. Many hours of discussion amongst the deputies thus came to nothing that day.

On 15 June at 10:10 the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet session was being broadcast by radio on the square. President Leonid Kravchuk spoke of taking the initiative in holding a vote of no-confidence in the president, explaining that insofar as the Supreme Soviet could not resolve the issue of holding a vote without the initiative of the public, he would take the initiative to prevent any amendments having to be made to the constitution (noise in the Supreme Soviet). Kravchuk thus took on himself responsibility for holding the vote, having calculated that the Supreme Soviet would not solve the issue in a positive way. Simultaneously, this was an attempt at self-vindication, to grab the initiative and work on strengthening his authority by saying that the referendum was taking place at the initiative of the president.

At this time, the Donetsk Co-ordinating Council was holding its own meeting and declared to the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet that if a decision was not taken by 15 June on the political demands adopted at the city meeting of 8 June, the Co-ordinating Council would be compelled to adopt more serious measures of civil disobedience:

1. To picket banks and enterprises;
2. To conduct sit-down strikes on the main roads into Donetsk (on 18 June)
3. To organise an 'empty pot' march (on 17 June)
4. To send representatives to the towns of Kramatorsk and Mariupol' to activate strike action there;

5. To determine which branches of the national economy are necessary to support the life of the city;
6. To establish contact with striking enterprises in Kiev;
7. To attach legal status to the Donetsk co-ordinating council by opening a bank account and creating a strike fund on this basis;
8. To send representatives to enterprises in Donetsk that were not yet on strike to campaign for them to join the strike;
9. To appeal to the international trade union movement to support Donbass's striking workers.⁷⁹

As expected, the proposal for a referendum was not passed during the session. With the assistance of the city strike committee, the Co-ordinating Council began to prepare civil disobedience actions. The manager of the regional department of the Bank of Ukraine was invited to a meeting of the Co-ordinating Council to discuss the mechanism for blocking the transfer of funds from the region to Kiev. A plan for road blocks began to be developed jointly with the Interior Ministry and representatives of the Traffic Police. According to plans already developed, preparations began to hold an empty pot march to mark the beginning of the civil disobedience protest. The strikers simultaneously conducted continuous telephone negotiations with the government.

On the morning of the 16 June the co-chairman of the city strike committee, Mikhail Krylov, held talks by telephone with the Ukrainian President, Leonid Kravchuk. On behalf of the strikers he demanded that Kravchuk find the courage to

⁷⁹ Protocol from the Co-ordinating Council of the city of Donetsk, 15/07/93

demand in the form of an ultimatum that the Supreme Soviet hold a referendum. Kravchuk again appeared before the Supreme Soviet to offer to hold a referendum, but the expected result was not obtained and after the lunch break the deputies dispersed for committee work. The Co-ordinating Council continued to prepare for the following day's march, sending protocols to the government and the Supreme Soviet on its decision and the strikers' demands.

The march took place on 17 June and was generally considered to have attracted more participants than the previous demonstration. One middle-aged woman taking part in the march appealed to her colleagues: *'Girls, there's loads of people! Even more than on Monday. Those who held back then have come out now'*. According to press reports, 'The strike started by the miners of Donetsk has become a general Ukrainian strike. 230 of the 250 mines are at a standstill, as well as around 40 mine-building enterprises, and 400 metallurgical, machine-building, chemical and other plants' (*Vestnik*, 19/07/93).

During the meeting, information on what was happening at the Supreme Soviet session reached the square. It was announced at 10:55 that voting had just taken place in the Supreme Soviet and that the results would soon be made known. At 10:58 – 'The issue on the referendum has been decided. We await a commission from Kiev'.

The city strike committee sent an invitation to the members of the ICC working group. Negotiations with the second government commission, headed by Efim Zvyagil'skii, began at 18:15. Of the 34 demands put forward by the strikers, many related to financial issues could not be decided *in situ* and required consultation with the Prime-Minister, Leonid Kuchma. So as not to waste time,

these questions were passed over by the negotiators, who moved on to subsequent issues. By midnight, eight such issues, relating to an increase in the minimum wage, cash payments, a cut in the amount paid to the Ukraine budget, and index-linked wages etc. had been noted. The participants in the negotiations broke off at 1 a.m., having obtained an assurance from Zvyagil'skii to call Kuchma at 8 a.m. to resolve the most important financial issues.

At 10:45 on 18 June, as the members of the ICC working group waited in the corridor of the city executive committee to begin negotiations, they begin to talk to the members of the government commission who walked by. Conversations were 'heart to heart'. The Deputy Minister of Social Assistance reacted with apparent sympathy to the strikers. The female representative of a cotton-paper plant talked to the Deputy Employment Minister, trying to resolve some financial issues. The adversaries nodded to each other like old acquaintances. A strange spirit of unity prevailed. Both sides were waiting the response of the Prime Minister, Kuchma and in this sense it was as if they stood on the same side of the barricade. The commission's principle was clear: 'We would be happy to fulfil all the demands and to understand you in a civilised way, but what can we do? There's no money'. Kuchma's decision was awaited. With an empty treasury, however, a positive response would not be an economic, but a political response.

Economics and politics came face to face. The strikers' demands were being made to a strong state, in whose hands rested all authority, money and enterprises. The problem which the government came up against was that it could not continue to manage as before, but could not find the strength to give the enterprises their freedom. If there was no state control and restrictions, enterprises would try to scramble out one by one. 80% of all of the Donetsk region's production was

oriented towards the Russian economy, but the border was locked; customs had only just been introduced and many additional barriers to economic relations between Ukrainian and Russian enterprises had appeared.

Zvyagil'skii appeared and the negotiations continued. Although everyone was waiting to hear what resulted from his conversation with the Ukrainian president, he was in no hurry to tell them, and did so only two hours after the negotiations began. *'There is no money. If you tell us who to take this money from, we'll take it.'* After many hours of negotiations, no progress had been made except to increase the tariff rates for the first grade to 20,700 karbovantsy and an assurance to increase miners' wages to 300-400,000 karbovantsy. The government commission rejected proposals to increase the minimum wage, on the basis of which numerous charges, material assistance etc. are calculated (in total bonuses and payments based on the minimum wage are made according to 12 laws, adopted in Ukraine). *'The budget is already in deficit to the tune of 5 trillion karbovantsy, and fulfilling the demands we accept will increase this to 11 trillion. If we increase the minimum wage, the deficit will increase to 52 trillion. Our economy cannot take this. There is no money in Ukraine'*, announced Zvyagil'skii. At the same time, those demands that took into consideration the interests of the directors and were aimed at a return to a system of fines for state enterprises for increasing their consumption, and subsidies etc. were accepted. The directors received everything they had demanded and ceased to be on the side of those interested in prolonging the strike.

After Zvyagil'skii's announcement, the members of the ICC working group organised a break and went out to talk amongst themselves.

4.4 *The end of the strike*

The representatives of the city strike committee informed Krylov that following the decision on the referendum, some enterprises had gone back to work: *'Because there have been cases of drunkenness amongst the strikers, the strike committee in Makeevka yesterday decided, in order not to discredit the movement, that everyone would go back to work tomorrow from the second shift.'* Everyone realised that the protocol had to be signed that day since the following day the commission would refuse to do it if everyone was going back to work anyway. It was nevertheless decided to 'press' the commission to raise the level of the minimum wage from 6,900 to 21,000 karbovantsy.

After the break, Zvyagil'skii listened to the strikers' demands, and after several unsuccessful attempts to take the negotiations out of stale-mate, asked that only the miners remain in the room, while all others left temporarily. Immediately following talks with the miners, the government commission left the room at their request, allowing the strikers to discuss the situation.

Zvyagil'skii had issued an ultimatum: if you all return to work by the fourth shift, we will pay double the tariff. Once again this only concerned the miners. At once there was a split between 'us' – the miners – and 'them' – everyone else. The miners in their defence began to attack: *'Yesterday we were asked directly for whom we were striking? There were no factory workers on the square last night, only miners. Once again you want to gain something on our backs!'*

A teacher was sitting with her head in her hands, on the verge of tears. The feeling was that management had once again deceived everyone, having thrown a bone to the miners, but spat on everyone else.

- *Will there be a document? Which protocol do we sign?*
- *If we don't end this, people will simply ask, 'So why did we stand here?'*

A discussion began about whether or not to sign the document. It was decided to find out what the labour collectives thought about it. The representatives began to have their say:

- *At the Stakhanov mine in Krasnoarmeisk everyone is in a resolute mood. This is the last time we play. This is our last strike.*
- *Back to work tomorrow in Makeevka.*
- *Prices were increased yesterday in the Lugansk region and the guys are mad... We shouldn't end the strike, we should suspend it, since the protocol contained stipulated time periods of 4, 7 or 20 days.*

At the initiative of Krylov, all the members of the Donetsk Co-ordinating Committee who had been on the square were invited into the hall to participate in the vote on signing the protocol and ending the strike. The discussion continued:

- *The drivers are involved in the strike. They are angry and soon won't even carry bread.*
- *The strike is only just gathering strength in Lugansk region. Prices were raised only yesterday. The strike should go on.*

There was a regional division of opinions. Some were already tired, while others had only just become involved.

- *Everyone expected quick solutions, but the government keeps silent and we just worry...*
- *For three days the strike has been waning...*
- *Zvyagil'skii said that he would pass on nothing to the people; the 'generals' alone will bring everything to them. We are now being attacked by the directors.*
- *Not a single enterprise is on strike in Lugansk. They are at a standstill because there are no raw materials...*
- *The bone was tossed to the 'generals', not to the workers.*
- *We can sign anything they want...*
- *There were 72 members of the Co-ordinating Council, but now there are only 40. Where are the others?*
- *The mines are not waiting for us, they are going back to work.*

After the question was put to a vote, 60 people voted to suspend the strike, and 12 against. Everyone realised that this was an unpopular decision and feared the reaction of the square. In the early hours of the 19 June, after Krylov read out the protocol signed by the government commission and the ICC working group, he was whistled at by those miners standing on the square who had decided to continue the strike. The strike had entered a spontaneous phase.

Pressure then began on workers at mining enterprises. The director of Skochinskaya mine announced: *'Get to work! If you don't go, you'll be marked up as absent from work'*. In most mines, the buses that had taken people to the square were no longer provided. Telephone links between mines were disconnected. It was

possible to call from Zasyad'ko mine only to Butovka-Donetska. The switchboard operators in the mines replied that they were not allowed to connect callers. The same thing occurred at other enterprises. Even before the signing of the protocol, the shop chiefs at Tochmash had announced that those who were not at work, apart from a small number registered on the square, would be punished.

As the signing of the protocol occurred at the weekend, there were very few people on the square in the morning. Amongst the 'non-miners', most were pensioners making more radical appeals, including that the mines be prepared to be flooded.

People's confusion at the content of the signed protocol fuelled a new short-term wave of protest. It was headed by those radically atuned strikers who had not previously had the opportunity to realise their leadership ambitions. They gathered together a delegation from amongst the mine representatives to resume negotiations with the government. However, the Deputy Prime Minister, Zvyagil'skii, met them at the entrance to the 11th floor (mayor's residence) and the whole conversation took place in the corridor. Zvyagil'skii referred to documents and confirmed information, while the group representing the interests of the strikers on the square referred to rumours and conjecture. The conversation ended fairly swiftly. The Deputy Prime Minister declared that he had held talks with the representatives of the labour collectives of striking enterprises; these people had the necessary mandates, and he wanted to meet with no-one else since the protocol had been signed on a lawful basis.

Having gone downstairs, the leaders of the spontaneous protest made attempts to send representatives from the square into the enterprises, to once again

involve them in the strike, but this idea failed. There were no communications, no transport, and no organisation. Some mines, however, including Gor'ky mine, managed to stop work for a short period of time.

On the morning of 19 June, a meeting was held as usual. At 2 p.m. Krylov continued to answer questions: it was reported by telephone that all the mines in Makeevka were working, while all except one were back at work in Krasnoarmeisk. At 6.30 p.m. three people arrived from Lisichansk. They said the whole town was at a standstill. At 8:55 p.m. the car with the megaphone had already gone. There was no communication between mines. No-one knew who was on strike and who wasn't in the town itself, let alone in any other town. By evening only representatives from Zasyad'ko, Lidievki and Skochinskya mines remained on the square. On the morning of 20 June a few representatives of the mines stood in the wings of the city executive talking to representatives of the city strike committee. They were finding out how to get their representatives onto the strike committee. The strike had come to an end.

4.5 *After the strike: the fight for a referendum*

As political demands, particularly the demand for regional independence and a vote of no confidence in the president and the Supreme Soviet, had been put forward during the strike, political forces became involved in the struggle. In historical terms, a situation had developed whereby there was opposition between the western regions of Ukraine, oriented towards a withdrawal from Russia, and the eastern regions, where Russians formed a majority of the population. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and Ukraine obtaining its independence activated the processes of development of national consciousness, which sometimes took overtly nationalistic

forms. For this reason, the political demands of the strikers in Donbass were negatively perceived by the people of the western regions and provoked an openly hostile reaction.

In response to the organisation of the Donbass strike, for example, a meeting was held in the regional centre of Volynsk under the slogan 'We defend Ukrainian sovereignty'. The participants unanimously spoke in favour of the introduction of Presidential rule in the country:

The speakers did not support the position of the striking Donetsk miners, who under the pretext of economic demands have also advanced political aims which threaten the very existence of the Ukrainian state. Presidential authority today, indicated the speakers, best expresses the interests of the population, and should therefore be supported in every way. The meeting resolved to demand that the president take power into his own hands (Z. Zhizhara, *Pravda Ukrainy*, 18/06/93).

From all sides, those striking in the eastern regions called for custom controls with Russia to be removed, while calls for a return to the rouble zone invariably received support. During a two-month strike, miners in Krasnodon (Lugansk region) sent a telegram to the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, in which they issued an ultimatum that their demands be considered. Otherwise, as written in the telegram, 'we the miners and inhabitants of Krasnodon and its settlements will appeal to the Russian parliament and personally to the President to decide on the issue of accepting the city of Krasnodon into Russia's jurisdiction (*Zhizn'*, 20/08/93).

Advancing the interests of Ukrainian sovereignty, representatives of the nationalist party RUKh and the various national socio-political associations, began to conduct a policy of strengthening presidential power and rejecting a referendum as a threat to the very existence of the state (it is worth noting in this respect that Leonid Kravchuk was victorious in the elections thanks to the support of the eastern regions. Having lost the confidence of the voters, he was forced to take the side of the RUKh to protect his position). 'The result was that the issue of the referendum was left hanging in the air; the Central Election Committee, having declared it physically impossible to hold a referendum within the time scale given – by the 26 September – said that this did not infer that the referendum would not take place.' Similar 'inarticulate' expressions testify to the unprincipled position and also support allegations, as stressed by those present, that the chairman of the Central Election Committee, A. Lavrinovich, the deputy chairman of the RUKh, acted against holding the referendum. According to the co-chairman of the Donetsk strike committee, Krylov, who had recently met with V. Durdin, the first deputy chairman of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, he argued that it was necessary to cancel the referendum because of the huge number of letters and telegrams received by the Supreme Soviet, literally from every family, in which people referred to the 'expense' of such a measure, which would cost in excess of 23 billion karbovantsy (N. Birchakova, *Zhizn'*, 20/08/93). The last hopes of a referendum had vanished by autumn, when a declaration was received from the government that holding a referendum in the present circumstances would be a fatal disaster. Another promise evaporated into thin air.

4.6 *Who won?*

In the ashes of mutual recriminations, trade union leaders somehow overlooked one detail, which appears to me to be quite relevant. Perhaps it will enable us to answer the question of who betrayed or was sold out, or to remove this question entirely from the agenda. We are trying to discover simply whether anyone was the winner in this story. Increasing prices did not save the government; as a result the workers' strikes only temporarily improved their miserable budget and only two months later the government again carried out centralised price increases.⁸⁰ If we seek to discover who won on a personal level, we immediately come across the interesting figure of Efim Zvyagil'skii, nicknamed the 'man-mountain' as a result of his size. The career of this person is astounding. Four months before the strike began he was the director of Zasyad'ko mine, which is where the strike began. Two months before the earlier described events took place, he was elected mayor of the city of Donetsk. On the fourth day of the strike he was appointed First Deputy Prime Minister of the Ukrainian government.

If we return to the text and follow closely the role he played in this strike, there are many interesting details to note. On the first day of the strike, Zvyagil'skii returned from Kiev, where he had held negotiations with the Prime Minister, Kuchma, on the possibility of increasing miners' wages in response to repeated price increases. That same evening, Zvyagil'skii read through all the points noted in

⁸⁰ Moreover, all victories almost immediately resulted in hyperinflation. It is possible to draw an impression of the level from the following newspaper report: 'From 1 July 1993 the State Savings Bank of Ukraine sets the average annual rate for fixed deposits over six months at 220%.' (*Donbass*, 07/07/93)

his notebook, offering them to the miners as weapons in the form of basic demands to be made during negotiations with the government commission. The following day, after the leaders from striking enterprises refused to continue to negotiate with the commission as a result of its non-competency in resolving the questions raised by the strikers, Zvyagil'skii insisted that negotiations continue and read his demands, which were also sent by the commission to Pinzenik in Kiev as the strikers' main demands. Four days later Zvyagil'skii, now the first deputy premier again reads his list, but now as the demands officially accepted by the government side from the striking regions. During the negotiations he was extremely frank with the workers. *'The Council of Ministers will not accept all 31 points'*, he said, *'but there are five main points amongst them, which I promise to push through'*. Zvyagil'skii kept his promise and the main demands related to the miners were adopted by the government. These were the same demands that Zvyagil'skii had read to the miners that first day of the strike. Two weeks of tense confrontation between the miners and the authorities were only an emotionally-draining background against which the demands earlier agreed by Zvyagil'skii and Kuchma could be realised. There were no provocateurs amongst the miners, no-one sold anyone else out; everyone was on strike honestly. Everything was spontaneous, but anticipated and, as such, able to be manipulated.

Two months later, this whole scenario was repeated, almost to the smallest detail. There is no sense in describing it here: I shall only include two small segments from the newspapers.

The cost of basic food and industrial products increased on average by 3 times from 1 September, while the population maintained previous wage levels... A decision on the resumption of strike activity

was adopted at a meeting of the DGR(S)k, to which leaders of all mining unions and representatives of labour collectives at the city's mines and enterprises were invited (N. Birchakova, Eto znachit, opyat' zabastovka? (Does this mean another strike?) Zhizn', 15/09/93).

To assign to Efim Leonidovich Zvyagil'skii, the First Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine, the executive duty of the Prime Minister of Ukraine. President of Ukraine, L. Kravchuk, Kiev, 22 September 1993 (Zhizn', 24/09/93).

As a result of his desire not to be a whipping boy, the Prime Minister, Leonid Kuchma, had resigned. Under such extreme circumstances, Efim Zvyagil'skii remained the only person in the country who knew how to find a common language with the miners. In a short time, he was to become the first person in the government of Ukraine – Prime Minister Efim Zvyagil'skii.

4.7 Conclusions

The example of the Donetsk strike enables some generalisations to be made on the approach to the strike as a form of industrial conflict.

1. First of all, I would like to approach critically the perception of a strike as a breakdown in industrial relations. This approach is quite widespread in western literature on industrial conflicts (Gouldner, 1995). In the example studied here, it is clear that industrial relations were not broken off during the conflict. With regard to the coal and metallurgical industry, the specifics of these industries do not allow for the industrial process to be stopped, as

this destroys jobs and sometimes makes it impossible or much too expensive to resume production: as a rule, in these industries' enterprises, work continues on an emergency rota, which ensures that their survival is maintained. This enables us to say that the strike is only a specific form of industrial relations (usually relations between the workers and the employers) concerning the main issues such as wages, health and safety and so on, which are expressed to restore the balance between the interests of labour and capital (in our case, between labour and the government as a specific employer) either by means of a return to the former norms of relations (which were breached and more than likely led to the strike), or of an agreement on new norms. Although work comes to a halt, relations between the workers and the employers continue (in the form of confrontation or negotiations). In other words, relations are maintained. And although production comes to a standstill, these relations concern production. It can thus be asserted that the strike is a special form of industrial relations between the workers and the employers in conditions of a stoppage in production at the initiative of employees.

2. The mass nature of the strike and the fact that it immediately left the framework of one enterprise and swept the whole region is an indicator of the preservation of a centrally-planned (run) economy. All enterprises were still in the state economic sector and continued as before to depend on the state. Even those rare enterprises which had become lease-holders had no economic freedom and along with state enterprises had a strictly limited consumption fund, overspending on which resulted in them being forced to pay a fine to the state treasury. For this reason the strikers made no demands

either to enterprise administrations or to the regional leaders: all their appeals were directed at the government and the Supreme Soviet of Ukraine. This explains the fact that the demands advanced were primarily political. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the leadership of Ukraine, which proclaimed the republic's independence in August 1991, has avoided shocks and radical personnel reshuffles. It is not for nothing that the population calls its country a 'communist reserve'. The strikers did not believe that the Supreme Soviet and the government, in their present structure, were in a position to implement progressive economic reforms and demanded the resignation of both the Supreme Soviet and the 'former ideologue of the Ukrainian Communist Party', Kravchuk.

3. On the other hand, it was almost impossible to fulfil the demands of the strikers in the then existing economic situation. Negotiations with the government commission showed the strikers' attempts to resolve economic problems by political means. Correspondingly, the strikers used the methods of 1989: to 'press', and to 'extort' from the government everything they were demanding. In essence, these were demands made to a strong communist state on the redistribution of financial resources and their use. This was possible in 1989, but had become impossible by 1993. The strike showed that in spite of the declared course towards a market economy, the activity of both the government and the population was determined by the mentality for resolving economic problems which referred to non-economic categories.

4. In many press publications on the workers' actions, the phrase 'directors' strike' was often used, highlighting the dependence of the workers' and

trade unions' protest activity on the directors' will and decrees. I shall not try to refute the accuracy of this statement, since in every specific case much depends on the circumstances. It can however be asserted with conviction that the Donbass strike was not agreed in advance between the trade union and the representatives of enterprise management. Moreover, the strike was unexpected even to the trade unions themselves. In this sense it can be asserted that the beginning of the strike was a spontaneous (and therefore independent) expression of protest against the Ukrainian government's price increases. From the very beginning, the strikers' demands were directed towards the government, since the lower levels of authority were not in a position to resolve issues linking the level of prices with the level of wages. Insofar as the directors' representatives were, as a rule, more discerning in achieving their aims, the strike was supported by them and used to resolve the financial problems of their enterprises (in particular removing fines from the tax debts and returning fines that had already been paid to the enterprises' accounts). In the 'state – employer – worker' triangle, the directors are a unique force permanently on the move, sometimes taking the side of the state and sometimes the workers, using each of the parties for their own purposes. As soon as the government made its decisions, the nature of which were rather vague from the point of view of the workers, but quite satisfactory for the directors, constant pressure began to be put on the workers, who were dispirited by a fortnight of futile confrontation with the authorities. In relation to this, we can talk of directors' strikes in two senses: firstly, procedurally, that is whether the protest action was agreed between the trade union and the enterprise management. Secondly, substantively, that

is, who gained the greater satisfaction of their interests as a result of the strike?

5. The beginning of the strike at Zasyad'ko mine confirms the conjecture that the final drop which made the workers' cup of patience overflow and provoked the explosion of emotions that led to a stoppage in production was their dialogue with a representative of the enterprise administration. In the conditions of a sharp decline in living standards, any compulsion to work, and to do anything which stresses the workers' dependence is experienced by them particularly painfully. The administration's activity becomes a provocation for the appearance of protest action on the part of the workers. In other words, while there is no-one in front of them against whom to strike, strike activity is in a potential phase. The events in Novocherkassk were similarly provoked by the enterprise director (Mandel, 1992). As in the Donetsk case, prices had also been increased. As in Donetsk, this was heatedly discussed by the workers. And as here, it was the director's appearance, speaking roughly, trying to force them to go to work that led to the protest. It can be said that any changes which bring about a deterioration in the workers' living standards are perceived as a violation of justice, a loss of status, and an increase in feelings of insult and anger. The appearance of the administrations' representatives, who stand on the other side of the barricade, is a catalyst for revolt and personifies the appearance. The personification of the humiliating party is an important factor in the transition of the conflict from a latent to an open form.

6. If we consider the Donbass strike through the prism of indicators traditionally adopted for measurement (the number of work stoppages, the

duration of the strike, the number of person-days lost as a result of work stoppages), its rather long duration (13 days) and the number of enterprises participating are conspicuous. Given open access, I was unable to find data on the number of participants in the strike or the number of person days lost as a result of the strike, since this would make apparent the true scope of the protest action, which was hidden by the ruling structures for political reasons. Instead of this, the representatives of the highest executive powers constantly spoke of the losses borne by the country's national economy each day of the strike.⁸¹

7. The demands put forward by the strikers were mixed, being both economic and political. A distinguishing feature of this strike was the transfer of the focus of the struggle during the confrontation from economic to political, and the advancement of the latter by the strike leaders as the main aim of the strike, despite the fact that in the consciousness of the rank and file strikers, the economic aims were more important (the demand for increased wages, lower prices etc.). The advancement of political demands as priorities guaranteed the involvement in the conflict of opposing political forces, which organised and rallied the workers to protest,⁸² but which also played into the hands of the authorities in Kiev by isolating the strikers from

⁸¹ Using approximate figures, one day of the strike cost between 60 and 100 billion karbovantsy: 'Going into the strike as poor people, we'll come out of it even worse off', stressed the Prime Minister. (*Tyu'ma i volya*, June 1993)

⁸² In this regard, we can talk of the exploitation by the strike committee leaders of the spontaneous explosion of protest activity from the rank and file workers to solve those problems, not directly related to the demands of those participating in the strike.

Western Ukraine. At the same time, the directors, amid a show of support for the strikers, were able to substitute their own more modest economic demands for those of the workers, and abandoned the strikers as soon as those demands had been achieved.

8. The Donbass strike became a powerful social elevator for the representatives of the regional elite, who, thanks to the strike took up management posts in the central authorities. The domination of the regional elite in the central apparatus determined in turn the domination of the interests of the sector which occupied the dominant position in the Donbass region – coal. The fight for places in the centre was traditionally conducted between the representatives of the Dnepropetrovsk region, where machine-building dominated, and Donetsk, the representatives of which fought for the payment of a greater share from the government budget to the coal industry. The take-off of the Donbass team guaranteed an opportunity for regional lobbying in the government of the dominating sector's interests.

The superiority, however, was temporary. The break up of the traditional arrangement for the distribution of government subsidies to the coal industry and the realisation of the restructuring of the coal industry proposed by the World Bank became possible following the subsequent removal from the government of the 'Donetsk clan' and their replacement with a team from the Dnepropetrovsk region, who embarked on a radical cut in state subsidies to coal. The realisation of these plans required not only a personnel clear-out above, but also the demolition of the social elevator which guaranteed entry of the regional elite to the corridors of Kiev, that is the miners' movement, which represents a powerful social and political

force in Ukraine. For this purpose, the bodies of law and order were involved. After one of the strikes was declared illegal, the movement was 'beheaded' – the leader of the city strike committee was arrested and held at Zaporozh'e.⁸³ Strike activity had thus reached a specific scale, which enabled pressure to be put on the government to become involved in the picture of political life as an important segment and to become a significant factor in the struggle for power in the state.

9. Although they were largely formulated **before** the strike began, the demands themselves were realised and made public by the initiators only **during** the strike. For the initiators of the strike – the miners at Zasyad'ko mine – the demands were introduced from outside, having been adopted by the leadership of the city strike committee, which existed as a result of the previous strike activity of enterprise workers (mainly coal enterprises) in the town of Donetsk. As the strike reached significant proportions, the existing body was not sufficient to co-ordinate the action of its participants. During the continuous protest action, governing bodies were set up in the region's towns, followed by the Inter-regional Co-ordinating Centre. Moreover, at many enterprises, which had previously not been involved in strike action, strike committees were created two or three days after the strike began. One of the attributes of the development of the labour conflict under

⁸³ Swain, 1998, a paper based on the findings of a joint research project entitled "The Industrial and Regional Restructuring of Donetsk Oblast (Ukraine): Evolution or Involution?"

consideration can thus be seen as the formation of bodies of worker self-management **during** the strike.

10. The feature of the Donbass strike that distinguished it from most of the previous strikes was the miners' endeavours to involve workers from other enterprises in their protest action. Thanks to their use of two methods of action – halting coal deliveries to consumers and sending strike representatives into the towns' other enterprises and sectors, workers from other sectors became involved in the strike. The first method (**pressure**) combined with the second (**persuasion and lobbying** of the labour collectives at enterprises that continued to work) resulted mainly in technological enterprises becoming involved in the strike: mineworkers, energy workers, coke workers, metallurgical workers and machine-building workers. In comparison with previous protest action, when the miners had acted on behalf of all workers, and as a rule refused to include 'strangers' in protests initiated by them, the Donbass strike of June 1993 was much better supported and became one of the first examples of a miners' strike leaving the framework of one branch.⁸⁴

11. Since none of the procedures that are necessary to sanction a labour conflict were observed by the participants, in accordance with criteria contained in specialist literature, this can without a doubt be characterised as

⁸⁴ During the miners' strike of 1989, for example, Oktyabr'skaya square in Donetsk was fenced with ropes with red flags; mine representatives stood around the perimeter wearing red bands and only those wearing miners' uniforms were allowed onto the square. The representatives of other enterprises, like the rest of the inhabitants of Donetsk, were allocated the role of outside observers by the mineworkers.

an illegal protest. It was also illegal with regard to the way in which demands were made, since the issue of the dismissal of the Supreme Soviet and the holding of a vote of no-confidence in the country's President had no legitimate basis, other than the miners' demands, but rather inferred an observance of the procedures defined in the country's Constitution.

12. An interesting aspect of the strike's development was the existence of a serious conflict between the republican and territorial organisations of the NPG, and the lack of any co-ordination of the strike activity of the grass roots organisations on the part of PRUP. In both cases the strike can be characterised as *unofficial*, since it was not supported by the republican organisations of either union. The situation was aggravated when the PRUP conference, which took place during the strike, adopted a decision on declaring a pre-strike situation; this put the strike leaders at territorial and enterprise level in a vulnerable position, leaving them without the defence of the union as a unified organisation. As for the Ukrainian NPG, similar actions were taken later. When the Protocol was signed by the government and the strikers, and the strike began to wane, they declared themselves responsible (even legally) for its continuation, having assumed the leadership of the naturally declining strike.

13. A detailed description of the strike from its inception to its end enables us to understand the model (or algorithm) of the process. In the example considered here, there is a genuine division of a three-phased model of strike development. The first phase is the spontaneous appearance, without demands being formulated, of an emotional explosion. The second phase is the entry of the strike into an organised channel, the creation of self-

management bodies, the issuing of demands, and the defining of parties to whom appeals will be addressed and with whom to conduct strike negotiations. The third phase (which begins after the signing by the parties of final documents) is the phase of the strike's natural decay. Since 100% of the demands made will not be defended by the strikers' representatives during the negotiations, and some concessions will have to be made, a number of the strike participants, for whom the non-satisfaction of their demands is the most important factor, may not subjugate themselves to the general decision to end the protest action, and thus continue to strike. The duration of the third phase largely depends on the scale of the strikes conducted (individual enterprises, the enterprises of a district, region, a branch strike, general strike). As a rule, the larger the scale of strikes and the higher the number of people involved in the strike, the longer this phase will last. The new strike wave (the third 'spontaneous phase') brings new leaders to the forefront who were unable to realise their potential during the strike as a result of the domination of the 'first wave' leaders. As a rule, the new leaders are more radical, even to the point of being uncompromising and thus already unable to achieve success in negotiations with the representatives of the official structures.

14. The example of the Donbass strike enables us to draw the conclusion that the people who are the creators and founders of any self-governing bodies have, as a rule, some major rights (although these are not formally

consolidated) in comparison with those who later join such organisations.⁸⁵ This is the 'right of the creator'. The founders of organisations create them under themselves; those who enter later are compelled to play by the rules already accepted by others, and cannot, at least for some time, claim to be included in the 'inner circle'. This requires some sort of crisis, which will allow the 'novice' to surface and claim a more powerful role in the organisation.

15. The strike in Donbass allows us to track the process of the institutionalisation of the conflict between the workers who brought the enterprise to a standstill and the power structures. Several stages are discernible:

- the spontaneous stoppage at Zasyad'ko mine and the march to the Kiev regional executive committee building. The fact that the executive committee chairman was disposed to provide the striking miners with paper on which to formulate their demands is only a minor detail, indicative of the authorities' need to conduct negotiations with the leaders of a more or less organised group. As a rule, the process of formulating demands is conducted by the initiative group, which, having drawn up the demands, often enters into negotiations with official bodies in order to defend them;
- the involvement of the city strike committee and the stoppage of other mines;

⁸⁵ 'I've been here since the first day' – for the strikers this indicates a serious approach to business, which testifies that you are not just here by chance.

- negotiations with the first government commission (5 people from amongst the representatives of the enterprises on the square, except for Krylov);
- elections of strike committees at the mines;
- sending representatives of the striking miners into other enterprises with the aim of involving them in the strike. The escalation of the miners' strike in general;
- elections of strike committees at other enterprises;
- elections to the city Co-ordinating Council;
- elections to the Inter-regional Co-ordinating Centre;
- co-ordination of the activity of the Co-ordinating Council and the city strike committee. A distinctive feature of this strike was the existence of a co-ordinating council alongside the strike committee and the clear division of functions between them: representative and legal functions, consolidated by the Co-ordinating Council and the executive functions fulfilled by the city strike committee. The Co-ordinating Council was actually allocated to some extent a decorative role, insofar as the main work was conducted by the strike committee. However, the existence of the Co-ordinating Council allowed the strike committee to remove itself from the line of fire and to protect itself after such an unpopular protocol (amongst the miners) was signed in agreement with the government commission.

16. The only group which appears to have won as a result of the strike is the directors of the large, mainly coal-producing enterprises. The 'management

strike' label was thus consolidated behind them, and was used quite frequently by the participants of the numerous meetings which took place each day on the square.

17. On the final day of the strike, workers from many enterprises approached the members of the city strike committee with one question – how to get their representatives onto the strike committee. Given previous experience, it is possible to note this as a sufficiently widespread reaction. Very often the leaders who have appeared at enterprises during a strike are sent to the city strike committee by the labour collectives. There is a general tendency that genuine leaders are thrown out of labour collectives so as not to muddy the water at enterprises, and the administration welcomes this. All of the city strike committee members were capable of returning to their native mines, 'to stand it on its head', since they have all the necessary data to do so: and the ability to convince the miners, etc. Delegating mine representatives to the city strike committee has two consequences: firstly, the development of an authoritative body leads to a loss of drive (energy) and capability for work; secondly, it involves a separation from the collective, which leads to the enterprise representatives on the strike committee not receiving daily information on the situation in their native mines and frequently they begin to lose the confidence of the collective. They begin to be perceived by the rank and file workers as guests, inspectors, bosses, in short as 'alien elements'.

18. The Donbass strike provides an example of how a strike with economic demands extremely quickly acquires a new resonance, if the workers put forward political demands. The politicisation of industrial conflicts and

attempts to use the striking workers' grievances by opposing political forces is a general feature of most labour conflicts, which is confirmed in the following chapters.

19. The miners struck spontaneously without any prepared list of demands. The directors and the trade unions, by contrast, already had their demands to hand, and it was on the basis of these demands, as in 1989, that the strike was generalised. The contrast with the 1989 strike, whose course in Donbass followed very closely that of Kuzbass examined in the previous chapter, lies in the fact that in this case the political context within which the miners' strike was politicised was much less auspicious, as a result of the ability of the President to exploit the 'national question' and the divisions of branch and local interest, and, most particularly, in much more difficult economic conditions there was a much clearer division between the interests of the directors and those of the strikers, so that the directors were able to achieve their main demands, while the strikers got nothing. In the face of a politically weak and financially bankrupt state the old lobbying system was breaking down. Nevertheless, neither trade union nor the strike committee was in a position to mobilise the workers as an independent force.

The fact that the strikes went beyond the framework of one enterprise and extended to the regions and branch as a whole was an indicator of the preservation of the centralised management of economy. In spite of the fact that legally many enterprises had come to be leased (as was the case in Donbass) or privatised, in reality they continued to be in the public sector of the economy and continued to receive grants from the state. For this reason the strikers did not put forward any demands to the management of the enterprises; all their demands were directed to

the government and the President. Even those initial demands which were heard from the mouths of the workers during the strikes and were addressed directly to the directors of the enterprises were eventually edited and were generalised by the leaders of the enterprise and regional trade union committees, at which stage reference to the directors in the list of demands, as a rule, disappeared.

The example of the Donbass strike shows that as soon as the government adopts decisions which have an indeterminate character from the point of view of the workers, but quite satisfy the chiefs of the enterprises, the latter begin to put pressure on the workers and force them to go back to work. This indicates that at the level of the enterprises the trade-union organisations represent only the leaders of the trade union committee, who are not able to resist the directors on their own; the trade unions have formal membership, but their leaders can not, are not able and, maybe, do not want to organize the members of trade union in a struggle for their rights at the level of the enterprise. As result, conflicts as result of labour relations are extinguished, instead of being resolved. Thus external resources are used, while nothing changes at the level of the enterprise; and a bit later conflict is renewed. Both employers and leaders of trade unions, instead of forming a new system of labour relations at the enterprise try to resolve the problems of labour relations outside the framework of the separate enterprises. Thus the trade-union leaders do not wish to spoil their personal relations with the directors, and the latter use the ideology of social partnership and fact of existence of tripartite structures to transfer onto them the responsibility for those conflicts which arise at the enterprises.

5 The development of the trade-union movement after the first miners' strike: the All-Russian protest actions of 1995 and 1996

The miners' strikes of 1989–91 were co-ordinated by the workers' committees and the Independent Miners' Union (NPG) which arose on their foundation (Clarke, Fairbothor and Borisov, 1995). The latter tried to give the miners' strikes a critical political dimension, as they aligned themselves increasingly with the 'democratic movement' headed by Boris Yeltsin, while the former 'official' union, re-named the Russian Independent Union of Coal Industry Employees (NPRUP), was sidelined. This situation was radically changed when Yeltsin overthrew Gorbachev and the position of the two trade unions in relation to the government was reversed. Since the coal industry remained as heavily dependent on the government as ever, the demands of the miners were no less political than they had been in the soviet period. However, NPG was now committed to the defence of Yeltsin and his governments, while the former official union was aligned with the opposition. While NPG sought to contain conflict within the enterprise, by directing the demands of miners against the directors, Rosugleprof articulated the demands of miners against the former ministerial bodies and the Russian government. NPG was at first able to use its political connections with Yeltsin and his circle to lobby for the miners in Moscow, while Rosugleprof was able to lobby for the miners' interests on the basis of its connections with the heirs of the coal ministry, Ugol' Rossii and then Rosugol'.

The issue of miners' wages moved to the front of the stage with the liberalisation of prices, with the principal exception of fuel and energy, at the beginning of 1992. With the price of coal remaining fixed at a low level, the question was how coal enterprises were to compensate miners for the sharp increase in the cost of living. The miners' leaders agreed with Gaidar that the government would provide a subsidy to the coal-mining industry to cover the increased cost of wages agreed in the annual branch tariff agreement (OTS). This meant that the level and payment of miners' wages depended increasingly on the scale of the subsidy allocated to coal-mining in the budget and on the degree to which the government met its commitments by transferring this money to the coal companies. As part of its 'stabilisation' programme, in order to meet the demands of the IMF and the World Bank, the government has been attempting to reduce the scale of the subsidy year by year, which implies pit closures and wage cuts, keeping the industry under pressure by deferring and delaying payment of the subsidy for as long as it can. Moreover, the coal industry has also suffered to an exceptional degree from non-payment by its customers, above all municipal heating plants and electricity generators as the latter's own customers have failed to pay their bills. The decline in the subsidy, delays in its payment and the growth of commercial debt have been associated with a relative decline in the real wages and living standards of the miners, deteriorating working conditions and long delays in the payment of their wages, delays of three to four months being normal, with no indexation of the wage to account for inflation when it eventually is paid.

The form of the subsidy to the coal-mining industry, which linked the size of the subsidy directly to the level of wages, underpinned the common interest of miners and management in extracting resources from the government. At first this common

interest was expressed not in collective action but in the lobbying of the government by NPG and the bureaucratic collaboration of NPRUP with management in their negotiations with the government. However, such lobbying and negotiation took place against the background of spontaneous strikes at mine and section level over the non-payment of wages, which became the norm throughout the industry from 1992, so that miners' strikes immediately became a regular feature of the bargaining process between the mining trade unions, the coal industry and the government over the scale, payment and distribution of the subsidy. For a period such spontaneous strikes were successful in securing the payment of wages to the section or mine which struck, but this tended simply to involve the diversion of payment from one group of workers to another, on which grounds these strikes were usually opposed by Rosugleprof, while they were supported by NPG, which used them to build its authority, asserting that non-payment of wages arose because of management incompetence and corruption rather than because of non-payment of the subsidy by the government. Conversely, the regional and national leadership of Rosugleprof consistently tried to hold back spontaneous militancy, which was against the interests of management, in anticipation of being able to mobilise the miners in co-ordinated national action to press the interests of the branch on the government, preferring picketing and lobbying to strike action.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Both NPG and Rosugleprof refused to support a spontaneous strike at Yuzhnaya mine in Vorkuta which lasted from 14 to 20 November 1995, calling on the workers to return to work pending a Vorkuta-wide strike on 1 December which had been called by Rosugleprof on 14 November and endorsed by NPG the following day. The workers vociferously rejected the appeals by representatives of both trade unions and the City Workers' Committee at a meeting on 15 November. The mine director then locked out the production workers by closing the mine for repair, and used a

However, pressure for more militant action mounted as spontaneous strikes became more widespread, forcing the regional and national leadership of both trade unions to sanction such actions. NPG's attempts to mobilise on a wider basis were shackled by the fact that its membership was confined to underground miners and by its reluctance to enter into opposition to the government. NPRUP, on the other hand, was able to co-ordinate its actions with the management of the industry at all levels. Thus, the first national one-day strike called by NPRUP on 6 September 1993, to demand fulfilment of the tariff agreement and the payment of promised subsidies, was called at a telephone conference of regional trade union leaders organised by Rosugol' and NPRUP, in which the general directors of coal associations and concerns also participated (*Nasha gazeta*, 4 September 1993). NPRUP claimed that 133 of the 259 Russian deep mines and 39 of the 95 open-cast had struck, with around 400,000 involved in one way or another, claims broadly supported by Rosugol', while NPG claimed that no more than 15 mines had struck – the issue was confused because many mines were not shipping and/or producing anyway as a result of a lack of orders or supplies (*Nasha gazeta*, 9 September 1993). The one-day warning strike on March 1 1994 called by Rosugleprof was an equally formal and ritualistic attempt to harness the militancy of the miners to the bargaining process in Moscow. It was not until 1995 that the union was able to organise effective nationwide strike action. However, such a display of unity was a precarious and short-lived phenomenon as the government, following the advice of the World Bank, changed the system of subsidising the industry from an employment-based wage subsidy to a more differentiated system designed to divide

small amount of money arriving at the mine not to pay the strikers, as would have been the case in

the workers and encourage closures. In this chapter I will explain the fragmentation of the miners' movement by exploring the financing of the industry that was the basis of the divisions of interest that were exploited by the government. I will then look at the strengths and limitations of the national miners' strikes of 1995 and 1996.

5.1 *The financing of the coal-mining industry and the erosion of solidarity*

After the end of the 1989 strike some time was required to coordinate the numerous demands of the strike committees and of the labour collective and city meetings, which were collected and collated by the Kuzbass Council of Workers' Committees.⁸⁷ The outcome was that the main demands put forward were for the independence of mines, regional self-financing, and the adoption at federal level of a programme for the regional development of Kuzbass for the next five year period.⁸⁸ The regional and local administrations were the main beneficiaries of the strike that had taken place. According to the Protocol signed with the government,

the past, but to pay the repair workers (Ilyin, 1995).

⁸⁷ For a full account of the development of the workers' committees see Clarke, et al., 1995.

⁸⁸ 'The task of workers' committees at all levels is to conclude the formulation of demands and to establish strict control and organisation over their implementation. Three main issues are pertinent:

- *the transfer of enterprises in the oblast to full independence;*
- *the transfer of Kemerovo oblast to regional self-accounting;*
- *the development and implementation of a resolution of the Council of Ministers of the*

USSR on the socio-economic development of Kuzbass for 1990-5 (From the report of the President of the Kuzbass Council of Workers' Committees, T. G. Avaliani to the III Conference of Kuzbass Workers' Committees, 5 September, 1989, Lopatin, 1993: 114).

additional financing was provided by the Centre, to the extent that Kuzbass could be said to be 'swimming in money'.⁸⁹ Though the directors mobilised all the forces of the labour collectives to achieve their aims,⁹⁰ the transformation of coal enterprises into independent entities was a very slow process, as it met with resistance from the Ministry of the Coal Industry. However, a number of mines, where the directors

⁸⁹ 'The "Protocol"... Kuzbass received pretty good money. A great deal. So much that some chiefs refused to take it. I remember that we allocated Novokuznetsk 60 million roubles to build housing. In those days that was very good money. Blinov, the president of the gorispolkom, phoned and said that he did not need that much, that he could not cope with it. The workers' committees, of course, helped Kuzbass wonderfully' (Interview with Aleksei Grebinnikov, First Deputy President of Kemerovo oblispolkom, Lopatin, 1998: 519).

⁹⁰ As an example of a director entrusting his interests to the hands of the labour collective we can quote the following minutes of a labour collective conference. This is by no means a solitary example, but is typical. 'Information for the Kuzbass Council of Workers' Committees on the decision of the conference of the labour collective of the Lenin mine on the granting of economic independence to the mine.

31 August 1989

Mezhdurechensk

24.07.89 a labour collective conference was held in the mine at which the transfer of the mine to full economic and juridical independence was considered.

According to the decision taken by the conference, the mine must become independent from 01/10/89 in accordance with the Law on state enterprise with the subsequent transfer to leasehold.

At the present time coal prices are being calculated under leasehold conditions.'

The resolution was signed by the director of the mine, the secretary of the party committee, the president of the trade union committee, the president of the council of the labour collective and the president of the workers' committee (Lopatin, 1993 : 110)

were especially active during the protest action, had managed to win their independence during the strike itself.⁹¹

Ever since the miners' strike swept across the Soviet Union in July 1989, the coal miners have been seen, and have seen themselves, as the vanguard of the workers' movement. The 1989 and 1991 miners' strikes played a decisive role in accelerating the disintegration of the Soviet system and then of the Soviet Union itself. After 1992, supported by successive strikes and strike threats, the miners extracted concessions from the government which for a time enabled them to reduce the impact of the catastrophic decline in production on their work and living standards. Although the government has consistently sought to isolate the miners, following the example of Margaret Thatcher, by conceding their demands so as subsequently to condemn them as selfish and sectional, successive miners' strikes have enjoyed mass support, both in society and in political circles. Thus the miners have been able to represent themselves as the vanguard of the working class, struggling not only for their own sectional interests but for the interests of the population as a whole. The fact that the World Bank has been devoting its attention to the industry over the past 8 years, proposing a closure programme modelled on that carried through in Britain, only elevates the significance of the miners' struggle to the global scale.

⁹¹ 'Dranichnikov (director of Vakhrusheva mine) recounted the delights of the privatisation of the enterprise. During the strike two mines in the town: Kiselevskaya and Vakhrusheva, won the status of leasehold enterprises' (Interview with Aleksandr Veretennikov, 'Belaz' driver and participant in the strike, Lopatin, 1998: 193).

Yet, at the same time the miners' trade union organisation is in many respects very weak. In the first place, the miners are divided between two trade unions. The Independent Miners' Union (NPG) emerged from the workers' committees which grew out of the 1989 strike. Although it is much smaller than Rosugleprof, the union which was developed from the former state trade union, and its membership is patchily distributed, it has a strength disproportionate to its numbers because it organises primarily the key underground workers. The NPG leadership has always been closely associated with Yeltsin, the union's president, Aleksandr Sergeev, being a member of Yeltsin's advisory Presidential Council, and received substantial support from the AFL-CIO on which it came increasingly to depend.⁹² Accordingly, the NPG has tended to support a market economy, to defend the government, and to blame the management of the industry at all levels for its problems. Most of the Rosugleprof leaders, like those of the NPG, emerged from the strike movement of 1989, but Rosugleprof identifies much more closely with management and directs the bulk of the blame for the condition of the coal industry at the government. Although at mine and regional level (apart from Kuzbass) the two unions frequently co-operate nowadays, with NPG members participating in Rosugleprof protests,⁹³

⁹² The withdrawal of AFL-CIO support at the beginning of 1996, following the latter's change of policy with the removal of its former chief, Lane Kirkland, dealt what eventually proved to be the fatal blow to the NPG leadership, which came increasingly to depend on support from the management of Norilsk nickel, in which it established a position as the house trade union, and its connections with criminal and commercial organisations.

⁹³ The NPG has been too weak to initiate any national action of its own since 1994. The February 1996 strike was endorsed by most NPG regions, but not Kuzbass. NPG representatives joined the

the political division between their leaderships has presented a serious barrier to collaboration in representing the common trade union interests of their members.⁹⁴

Second, neither trade union has a very effective trade union organisation. On the one hand, both trade unions are heavily dependent on management at all levels: the main function of the trade union at enterprise level remains that of administering the social and welfare apparatus, trade union leaders usually seeing themselves as part of the management apparatus. Where the NPG has established primary groups, they too are usually assimilated into management, while the NPG's national offices were for a long time provided by Rosugol', the industry's governing body. As a reaction against the 'democratic centralism' of the Soviet era, both trade unions have decentralised constitutions so that the bulk of union dues remain at local level where they are used mainly to pay for welfare benefits, there is limited communication between the centre and the primary organisations, and decisions of higher bodies are not binding on lower bodies. In these circumstances it has proved very difficult to conduct organised and disciplined strikes as an instrument of trade unionism. The 1989 strike was a purely spontaneous outburst, with the then official trade union leaders sitting opposite the strikers in the negotiations as members of the joint government-Party-union delegation. The 1991 strike began as a one-day strike which developed spontaneously and largely beyond the control of the workers' committees and newly founded NPG. The majority of subsequent strikes and strike calls were 'directors' strikes', strikes which were encouraged by, or at

picketing of the White House, but Rosugleprof would not permit them to carry their NPG banners, since the union had contributed nothing to the organisation of the protest.

⁹⁴ For a full account of the development of the NPG see Clarke, Fairbairn and Borisov, 1995, Chapters 1 and 2.

least had the tacit support of, mine and association directors as part of their struggle to extract resources from Moscow.

The struggle of the directors and branch management for sources of financing in many respects determined the direction and forms of expression of the workers' discontent. So, some time after the 1989 strike, having seen the financial prosperity of those enterprises which had been the pioneers of coal privatisation, the majority of enterprises in the industry set themselves on a course towards privatisation. According to the procedures determined by Russian legislation, the directors, together with the presidents of the trade union committees, held meetings of the labour collectives and sent their decisions regarding privatisation to Rosugol',⁹⁵ together with letters requesting that Rosugol' implement these decisions. Rosugol', however, could not see any reason to let control of these enterprises slip out of its hands since all state subsidies passed through it. At the same time, coal mining equipment was purchased through numerous commercial structures created under the roof of Rosugol'.⁹⁶ This overlapping of the distribution of state subsidies and commercial activity allowed Rosugol' to keep the enterprises and associations in

⁹⁵ The state company Rosugol' was created as the central management body for the coal industry after the liquidation of the Ministry of the Coal Industry (an intermediate link between them was the corporation Ugol' Rossii, which did not last for long).

⁹⁶ According to the president of the miners' union, Rosugleprof, 'Rosugol' controls more than 20 companies'. There was a similar situation in the regions. Thus, according to the president of the Rostov regional committee of Rosugleprof, Vladimir Katal'nikov, 19 commercial structures had been established around the association Rostovugol'. As a result of the activity of the trade union only seven remain (from speeches to the meeting of the presidium of Rosugleprof, 25 October 1995).

the regions dependent on it for the distribution of state financial support and the supply of mining equipment, which enabled it to increase its financial opportunities.

The forms of conflict in the coal industry have been fundamentally shaped by how the industry was financed. In the Soviet period the coal industry had been heavily subsidised in order to keep down the price of energy, which was why the coal-mining regions in particular looked to Moscow to solve their acute economic and social problems during the perestroika period. With the onset of radical reform and the liberalisation of prices at the end of 1991 the government shied away from freeing the prices of fuels and energy in order to reduce the inflationary impact of price liberalisation, which implied that the coal industry would require subsidies on an even larger scale. Rather than subsidising the production of coal, however, Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar decided to support the industry through wage subsidies, which formed the focus of annual negotiations on the branch tariff agreement (OTS). This immediately politicised wage bargaining in the industry and sealed the solidarity of workers and directors in trying to maximise the subsidy for the industry and to ensure that Moscow paid out the funds to which it was committed. On the other hand, it laid the miners wide open to the charge, soon laid against them, that the government was diverting scarce budget resources to the payment of sky-high miners' wages.

The beginning of real transformations in the coal industry dates from the Russian government's Order No. 727 'On measures of state support for enterprises of the coal industry and rate of excise duty on coal' of July 27, 1993 which liberalised the prices of fuel and energy. By this time the prices of all other goods and raw materials, which had been liberalised in January 1992, had increased well over one hundred-fold to reach world levels, while subsidies to the coal-mining industry were

escalating out of control. The liberalisation of coal prices was a direct result of the state's attempt to reduce the level of subsidies and to force the mining industry to operate according to commercial principles, giving the mine directors the freedom they had been demanding since 1989. However, the increase in coal prices did not bring the mines the profits expected. Coal consumers could not pay the higher coal prices, which would have pushed their own prices above world levels, so price liberalisation led to a sharp fall in the demand for coal and to rapidly increasing levels of non-payment by consumers. Then, when the coal miners demanded increased budget subsidies to maintain their working and living standards, they were subjected from all sides to the accusation, widely picked up by the mass media, that 'the miners are pulling the blanket over themselves'. The basis of solidarity between the workers of different branches was undermined by a sharp cut in state budget resources and by groups of workers putting forward demands for their own industries.

At the same time, Rosugol' began to carry out the privatisation of coal enterprises, using as the basis for their decision the appeals which had been adopted by labour collectives under completely different economic conditions. What the miners had long been demanding, and what enterprise directors had been crucially interested in, was achieved: the mines were given their legal and financial independence and the right to determine the price of the coal which they extracted. However, in the new economic conditions this meant that the majority of Russian mines immediately became unprofitable and could not continue their activity without financial injections from the state. Following the sharp shock of such 'therapy', the leaders of the miners' trade union did a complete U-turn in their position and again became firm supporters of state intervention, forgetting about their recent demands for

independence, and now insisting on the preservation of centralised management in the sector and an increased level of state subsidies. In the latter they found support from enterprise directors, who continued to receive state subsidies while, having become the chiefs of independent enterprises, they had virtually no responsibility towards the Centre for their proper use.

Rosugol' defined various different levels of subsidy to be allocated to mines depending on whether they were promising, stable or without prospects.⁹⁷ The most promising enterprises were expected to support themselves on a commercial basis and were deprived of state support and in this respect were excluded from the branch tariff agreement (OTS), since wages depended on the enterprise's own efforts. The practical effect of this was to undermine solidarity between the enterprises which appeared in different groups, since the form and level of state support depended on the group to which they belonged. It also undermined solidarity between the trade unions of enterprises which appeared in different groups, since until then the OTS had been the banner under which the trade union rallied all miners. The demand to fulfil the conditions of the OTS was the main demand behind which all coal enterprises traditionally fell in line.

⁹⁷ The first version of Rosugol's plan, 'Conceptions of the Structural Reconstruction of the Branch', issued in 1993, identified forty two mines for closure, with eleven to be closed between 1993 and 1995. This report was then extensively revised in the light of further research and of the World Bank's November 1993 report. The revised draft, issued in May 1994 as 'Basic Directions of the Restructuring of the Russian Coal Industry', was approved by the Inter-Departmental Commission for the Socio-Economic Problems of the Coal-Producing Regions, a tripartite body bringing together government departments and trade union representatives concerned with the coal-mining industry,

The management of Rosugol' also had an interest in extracting as much as possible from the government, but they were also determined that this money should be used to develop the industry (especially to purchase equipment through Rosugol'-affiliated companies), not to protect the jobs and living standards of the miners, however much social pressure there might be to secure the latter. Commenting on the purposeful use of state financial support, the management of Rosugol' remarked:

'In conditions of constantly limited funds (only about 60% of needs are met) *the choice of priorities in the distribution of the total subsidy has special significance* [my emphasis, V.B.] in relation to the coal-producing regions, enterprises and the direction of state support. Among the main priorities are support for the most efficient and promising open-cast and deep mines ... and simultaneously – a constant reduction and the gradual complete discontinuance of state support for particularly unprofitable and unpromising coal-producing enterprises. However, *the actual distribution of state support funds did not initially (1993) correspond to the strategic aims of restructuring* [my emphasis, V.B.] ... The subsidisation of coal-mining enterprises was obligatory in view of social conditions and to a significant extent served as a means of support for the most technically backward parts of the mining industry ... Promising deep and open-cast mines, which produce around half of total coal production, received only about a quarter of the total

on 8 May, and a further revised version, taking account of the Commission's comments, was issued in July under the same title.

amount of state support and, in contrast, 27% of the total subsidy was directed to unpromising enterprises whose share of coal production was about 10%'.⁹⁸

The measures carried out by the Russian government had adverse repercussions on solidarity amongst the miners. The rate of reduction in state subsidies resulted in an increase in the contradictions between the main coal regions and led to practical difficulties for the Russian Committee of Rosugleprof in trying to call an all-Russian strike in conditions in which, for example, the Rostov region insisted on an increase in the subsidy per tonne of coal extracted, Kuzbass demanded a reduction of railroad rates on the transportation of coal, and cold Vorkuta demanded that the additional northern charges be subsidised instead of being covered by the price of coal (which in practice would result in an increase in the Vorkuta share of the common pie, causing a counter reaction from the other regions). The branch tariff agreement no longer provided any state subsidy for coal enterprises which were defined as promising. The result was that when the majority of enterprises went on strike, the largest deep and open-cast mines in particular increased their production and took the markets of their striking competitors, nullifying the effects of protest action.⁹⁹

The implementation of the programme of re-structuring for the coal industry proposed by the World Bank and begun in 1994 amounted to the closure of

⁹⁸ Malyshev, et al. 1996: 387–388. This is the official volume prepared by the leaders of both Rosugol' and the Russian Ministry of Fuel and Energy so it can be considered to be an expression of the official position of these branch structures.

⁹⁹ This was the case, for example, during the February 1996 strike, when the open cast mines of Kuzbassrazrezugol' immediately began to sell their coal to the Novolipetsk and Cherepovets Metallurgical Combines, which had traditionally been supplied by Vorkuta.

unprofitable enterprises (the money from the World Bank's coal loans was basically for the liquidation of unprofitable mines and social payments to redundant workers). Although everyone spoke out against the World Bank programme, Rosugol's 'wild' closure of Cherkasovskaya mine (part of the Prokop'evskugol' joint-stock company) in June 1994, completely unregulated by any laws or documents, won over the leaders of both miners' trade unions to the idea that it would be better to accept a programme which provided at least some compensation for the damage done and some mitigation of the social consequences of mine closures for the workers. In the social partnership body created at federal level – The Interdepartmental Commission on the Socio-Economic Problems of Coal-producing Regions (MVK), joint activity between the government, coal industry management and the leadership of both trade unions was undertaken to agree the conditions and procedures of colliery closures.

The beginning of mine closures marked a new stage of protest activity of the workers with a change in the social context in which the strikes were taking place. The financial aspects of the government's programme were as follows: the lion's share of budget funds was allocated to so-called 'good' subsidies, that is for the liquidation of unprofitable enterprises. No state budget funds remained to support stable mines or for renewing their mining equipment. This led after a short time to a situation in which the depreciation of their equipment reached between 60% and 80%, their economic indicators deteriorated, and their closure became a matter for Rosugol' to decide and the MVK to approve. The workers' initial protests against

mine closures¹⁰⁰ were very quickly replaced by resignation, since in conditions where many months of wage delays had accumulated, the closure of the enterprise became for many almost the only chance of receiving 'live money'. At the same time, inside each coal company the contradictions between enterprises which were closed down, where workers received social payments, and those which continued to work, where wages were not paid for months on end, were exacerbated.

Finally, in May 1995 the basis for the calculation of state support was changed from the system of wage subsidies introduced by Gaidar, in which the subsidy was based on the number employed, to one in which the subsidy was based on the number of tonnes of coal produced. This change in the subsidy system removed the incentive for employers to maximise the level of employment and promoted the beginning of large-scale employment reductions. At the same time, mine closures and

¹⁰⁰ The protest of workers against mine closures was weakly organised and did not extend beyond individual enterprises. Neither Rosugleprof nor the NPG made any attempt to organise all-Russian or even regional protest actions against mine closures. The experience of mine closures showed all mine directors that it was very profitable to be the director of a mine being closed since, apart from the funds allocated for closure and without any supervision on the part of the state, all of the equipment could be written off (and then sold to neighbouring mines at the price of new equipment, sharing the profits). Limited state funds meant that mine directors competed with one another for inclusion on the list of mines slated for closure. Faced with many months of wage delays it was not uncommon for directors to persuade the workers that the only way in which they would receive money from the budget for their wages would be for the mine to be closed on the basis of a technical and economic assessment (TEO). If this was not done, the mine would be closed in any case as non-competitive, but without any help from the state. Thus, at a meeting with employees, the director of the Vorkutaugol' coal association, A. Stepanov, declared: 'If we find ourselves on the government

redundancies meant that employers no longer had any incentive to hold on to workers in case of labour shortages. The directors' lack of interest in maintaining the number employed undermined the solidarity between them and workers that had previously existed in order to obtain state subsidies in accordance with the OTS.

As a result of the reforms undertaken in the country and in the coal industry, the basis of solidarity was thus undermined:

between the coal miners and workers of other branches of the economy;

between the workers of coal-extracting enterprises and those working in the industry's infrastructure (note, for example, the coal union leaders constant desire 'to overlook or forget' the mine construction workers when negotiating and signing the OTS);

between the workers of different coal regions;

between the workers of associations in which promising, stable or unprofitable enterprises dominated;

within individual coal companies – between mines which were closed and those which continued to operate;

within individual enterprises – directors were no longer interested in maintaining a superfluous number of workers; a barrier began to appear between the directors' interests and those of the workers.

This is the context within which protest action in the coal-mining industry, directed at obtaining additional funding from the Centre, developed through the 1990s.

list [of mines for closure, V.B.], we can run out with flags of joy. Because the money for the closure of mines will be allocated centrally' (field notes, 17.04.94).

5.2 ***The Struggle over State support: union, ministry and government***

From the very beginning of coal industry restructuring in Russia the aim was to reduce the level of state support to the coal sector. In its activity the Russian government was consistent in implementing the programme specified in the World Bank’s report, *The Restructuring of the Russian Coal Industry: Putting People First*. This report took a primarily banking or financial approach to resolving industrial and socio-economic problems, in particular by means of cutting the state budget deficit and then strengthening it through a reduction and eventually the liquidation of all state subsidies to the coal industry.

Table 5.1: Volume of state subsidies to the coal industry in Russia

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
budgeted	1.9	6.9	7.6 trillion	10	6.5	5.2	10
demanded		11.9	10				12
received	1.6		7.4				

The subsidy to the industry had increased rapidly in order to cover costs which were escalating as a result of inflation, with no prospect of sales revenues covering the costs even after the freeing of the price of coal. Negotiations over the subsidy followed a common pattern each year. The government would allow a certain amount of money to subsidise the coal industry in its annual budget, usually prepared in the late autumn. Rosugol’ would then calculate the amount of subsidy that would be required to sustain the industry and to allow it to maintain wages at the level agreed with Rosugleprof, and Rosugleprof would demand an increase in

the level of state subsidies to the amount specified by Rosugol'. According to Rosugol's calculations state subsidies amounted to between only 40% and 60% of what was needed to maintain the livelihood of the coal sector. However, it was not only the form and level of financing that was an important aspect of the battles of the miners' union. Control over such enormous amounts of money was also a significant factor in the struggle for power between different factions within the government apparatus, with the liberal reformers anxious to wrest control of these funds from the vested interests of quasi-ministerial bodies.

The miners' battle to maintain and even to increase the level of state support to the sector was an important factor in the struggle of various political forces within the government, in this case between those who supported Rosugol' and those who were implementing the World Bank's policies. Very briefly, as a result of a detailed study of the situation in the Russian coal industry, specialists from the World Bank had recommended to the Russian government that they liquidate Rosugol' to improve the system of management within the coal industry. As Rosugol' had initiated the involvement of specialists from outside the country in the collection of information for the study, the Bank's recommendation was perceived as an insult. The battle between the World Bank and Rosugol' for influence over state policy and for the right to distribute state subsidies began with the publication of the first World Bank report (November 1993). Rosugleprof gave its full support to Rosugol' and spoke out aggressively against the World Bank's programme (see 'The Position of Rosugleprof', 21 September 1994), although Rosugol's deeds in the sphere of

mine closures subsequently proved to be much worse than what the World Bank had proposed.¹⁰¹

As the government was introducing radical coal industry reforms it was impossible, in spite of the decisive mood of some political leaders,¹⁰² to liquidate Rosugol' immediately, but preparations towards the allocation of the loan continued, with the World Bank making attempts to create an alternative structure, independent from Rosugol', through which the distribution of the coal loan funds was planned. To this end the idea of creating the Coal Reform Fund (Reformugol') was developed in September 1995. The original idea behind the creation of the fund was much larger in scope, namely to use it to distribute not only the World Bank loan but all state subsidies to the Russian coal industry. Discussions with the World Bank were led on the Russian side by someone who had risen from the ranks of the Novokuznetsk workers' committee to become the director of the coal department at the Ministry of

¹⁰¹ See the Report of the Kemerovo branch of ISITO on the closure of Cherkasovskaya mine (June, 1994) and chapter seven of this thesis, on the closure of Tsentral'naya mine (April 1997).

¹⁰² This refers to all those politicians who during various years headed the Interdepartmental commission on socio-economic problems in the coal regions (MVK) on behalf of the government: E. Gaidar, A. Shokhin, A. Chubais, V. Kadannikov, V. Potanin. The significance attached to the question of implementing the World Bank programme is highlighted by a seemingly minor detail. At a meeting of the MVK held on 21/09/94 the agenda contained many points, the first of which was a discussion of the World Bank programme. Jonathan Brown, the leader of the team which had prepared the report for the World Bank, came from Washington to take part in the discussions. The chairman of the MVK, the government's deputy Prime Minister, Shokhin, was in attendance for as long as the discussion on the World Bank lasted, at which point he handed over to his deputy and left, in spite of requests from the trade union leaders that he stay as the regions were in pre-strike mode.

Economics – Igor’ Kozhukhovskii – an ally of Anatolii Chubais and a personal enemy of Rosugol’s General Director, Yurii Malyshev, who was the chief contender to distribute state subsidies and World Bank loans. These plans, however, subsequently fell through. The resources from the first two loans went to the state budget, from which they were distributed through Rosugol’s channels. Consequently, Reformugol’ was given the rather modest status of a sub-department responsible for the distribution of funds¹⁰³ for pilot projects and the monitoring of the restructuring of the coal industry¹⁰⁴ while the World Bank remained in charge of finances. A Reformugol’ investigation into the use of the World Bank’s coal loan funds in January 1996 uncovered cases of funds being misused. This again led to accusations against Rosugol’ that it was a risky organisation to be allowed to implement structural reform and to demands to the government to close Rosugol’ down. Under such circumstances, Rosugleprof’s support was of the utmost importance to Rosugol’ as it was the only organised force interested in the existence of a centrally-financed coal sector which was not subordinated to the government but capable of standing in opposition to it.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ The Reformugol’ Fund received \$25 million from the World Bank loan for pilot projects and monitoring in 1996.

¹⁰⁴ Following a short period as head of Reformugol’, Kozhukhovskii was appointed Deputy Minister for Fuel and Energy where, after the liquidation of Rosugol’, he undertook the distribution of state subsidies to the coal industry.

¹⁰⁵ The television appearances of Rosugol’s General Director, Yurii Malyshev, during the strikes, where he called for an end to the strike and accused the unions of ruining the coal sector, can therefore be explained by his independence from government decisions. Simultaneously, however, were the miners to beat state subsidies out of the government he would be the main person to whom these funds would be allocated. For its part, although Rosugleprof was to a great extent dissatisfied

In October 1997 Rosugol' was finally liquidated by decree 1243 and resolution 1462 of the Russian government 'On the modernisation of the mechanism of management of the coal industry'. The delight of those in favour of the World Bank's policies was, however, short-lived. Immediately following the liquidation of Rosugol', Rosugleprof demanded the creation of a centralised branch organisation within the Ministry of Fuel and Energy, similar to the one that had existed in the USSR. During the 'rail wars' (May – June 1998) and the subsequent picketing of the parliament building in Moscow, it turned out that the government had no-one capable of holding talks with the miners, as the various aspects of the coal sector were covered by different departments within the Ministry of Fuel and Energy. This meant the striking miners put pressure directly on government leaders and the President without any mitigation via the intermediary of Rosugol'. Taking on board the undesirable political consequences for itself, the Russian government took the decision to re-establish a unitary governing body for the coal industry in the form of a State Committee for Coal (Government Order No. 470 of 28.04.99 'On the confirmation of the situation regarding the Committee on the Coal Industry of the Ministry of Fuel and Energy of the Russian Federation'). The Coal Committee was headed by the former Deputy General Director of Rosugol', Al'bert Salamatina, who returned to his previously lost power base within an identical structure, but now

with Malyshev (representatives from the regions would raise the issue of his resignation at every plenary session of the union), the union never took this to government level in the form of an official demand from the miners of Russia. The union leadership was afraid that certain forces within the government could use Malyshev's resignation to close Rosugol' (in the end Rosugol' was liquidated but Malyshev went on to head the Union of Coal-Industrialists which he had set up not long before Rosugol' was wound up).

under a different name. Meanwhile, Kozhukhovskii lost his post as Deputy Minister for Fuel and Energy and left the main field of play.

As Rosugleprof was the active subject of the negotiating process at federal level, the strikes organised by it and the logic of the social partners, in the guise of branch management and Rosugleprof, in the organisation of the all-Russian protests directed against the Russian government's policies are of particular interest. Rosugleprof had been very active in lobbying the government in association with Rosugol', but this lobbying had been conducted almost entirely through bureaucratic channels.

5.3 *The all-Russian miners' strike of February 1995*

The main demand of the miners at all-Russian level was always that the government should include sufficient provision in the budget to cover the wage costs of the industry and that it should then meet its obligations to pay the subsidy due to the miners under the branch tariff agreement (OTS). Monitoring of the implementation of the OTS was carried out by the Russian Committee of Rosugleprof, whose interests coincided to a great extent with those of coal sector management and enterprise directors as they received funds from the budget which, despite the need for their expedient use, could from time to time be spent by independent enterprises at their own discretion. However, while this meant the payment of state subsidies to Rosugol' (the Russian state coal committee), it did not resolve the real problem of workers receiving their wages since the bulk of non-payment was not due to the failure of the government to pay the subsidy, but to the failure of the coal consumers to pay for their coal. Thus, there were objective factors underlying the problems that the union faced in co-ordinating the spontaneous action of rank-and-

file miners seeking to secure payment of their wages with the bureaucratic processes of negotiations surrounding the tariff agreement and budget subsidies to the coal-mining industry. This is one reason why it was not until 1995 that Rosugleprof was able to call a national miners' strike as part of the struggle over the budget, the first time since 1991 that the miners played a central role in 'big politics'.

Strike action of miners during 1992-3, provoked by the failure to raise wages in line with inflation and, increasingly, the failure to pay wages at all, had taken place at a local and regional level, without any national co-ordination. In general, as the momentum of local strikes built up the leaders of both trade unions would come under pressure to co-ordinate regional actions, although each trade union was very jealous of its independence and did not want to be associated with the actions of its competitor, and the rhythm of conflict in different regions did not necessarily coincide, so there was no pressure for a national action until the situation reached a new peak during November and December 1993,¹⁰⁶ in the run-up to the Duma election, following the bombardment of the White House by Yeltsin, when strikes had swept across Vorkuta and Kuzbass, to be settled by Yegor Gaidar literally flying around the coalfields with a plane-load of money. Spontaneous strikes and hunger strikes continued at both NPRUP and NPG mines after the election, and both trade unions independently called a one-day strike for 1 March 1994, although NPG withdrew its strike call rather than be associated with NPRUP, and the Kemerovo regional committee of NPRUP declared the strike premature

¹⁰⁶ The one-day strike of 6 September 1993 was more of a ritualistic act of protest, closely co-ordinated with management, than a serious national strike.

(*Profsoyuznoe obozrenie*, 2, 1994), following a further injection of money in Kuzbass. NPRUP claimed that 80 per cent of coal-mining enterprises participated in this, its first national day of action, with 500,000 people involved, although in Kuzbass there was little response. Wildcat strikes continued, each time being settled by the release of funds to meet the back payment of wages, but in fact NPRUP was as cautious as NPG about unleashing collective action and followed this up not with further strike action, but with a picketing of the White House at the end of March, in which NPG from Chelyabinsk and Vorkuta, although not from Kuzbass, also participated.

Wage arrears became chronic during 1994, provoking local strikes throughout the year: sometimes the protests gripped one or two coal-producing enterprises while at other times they affected a whole region. Examples include a strike in Chelyabinsk region during February - March 1994, in which most mines in the Chelyabinsk coal basin took part; the April strike at Yuzhnaya mine in Vorkuta, and individual strikes in Kuzbass (Sudzhenskaya) and Tula region (Nikulinskaya mine) amongst others. The government and Rosugol' adopted a strategy of provoking micro-explosions which resulted in some of the arrears being paid off, leading to a loss of the miners' and their unions' strength and complicating the preparation and holding of branch strikes. In the regions, enterprise directors took part in all the events organised by the strikers, supporting their demands while insisting on the need to hold not local but national strikes.¹⁰⁷ The main demand was the payment of wages. When workers

¹⁰⁷ On 21 March a meeting was held by striking miners at Kapital'naya mine (part of the Chelyabinskugol' concern) which was attended by the leaders of both unions (Rosugleprof and the NPG), the mayor of the town (Kopeisk) and representatives from other mines on strike. The main demand was the payment of wage arrears. Many of the speakers mentioned that the directors had

issued their main demand of 'Settle all wage arrears!' to the government, the directors often tactfully changed the demands, since the government was at that time paying the arrears due to many regions and what was at stake for the directors was not so much the allocation of additional funds from the centre,¹⁰⁸ as improving

urged their collectives to strike. The NPG president for Chelyabinsk region, Vladimir Ivanovich Radyuk, for example, declared that 'All the directors say, "Let's rouse the WHOLE of Russia." But they distance themselves from this'. As the issue of whether to take part in the picketing of the Russian parliament building was being discussed, the NPG chairman from Komsomol'skaya mine had this to say: 'The directors' position is as follows: okay guys, you dig the coal here so go and get the money from them. I propose that we elect the directors and send them to Moscow to beat the money out of them, especially since they are always saying they support us' (field notes).

At a meeting held on 15 April between the director of the Vorkutaugol' concern (OVU), Yurii Lobes, and the presidents of the coal enterprises, Lobes accused the union leaders of being incapable of organising joint action between the regions: 'Do I have to organise the strike for you?' The minutes also show that 'We have to act together. The unions (both of them) are preparing an appeal to the government. The sending of a telegram to Yeltsin on 15 April from the OVU was approved by Spiridonov. If the Centre does not react to our proposals, the unions are prepared to begin a strike on 1 May. There is no need to seek enemies in Vorkuta'. He was supported by the chair of the Board of Directors, Aleksandr Stepanov: 'Only Vorkuta is afraid of no-one... We should talk with the other regions. If they stop, we already have a mechanism ready: we can take Vorkuta in two days. This can be done only through an all-Russian protest... We should read Lenin. He knew how to organise a strike'. On behalf of the directors of the coal enterprises, they reaffirmed their readiness to pay trade union representatives' expenses to travel to other regions to organise joint protests (field notes).

¹⁰⁸ According to Gorenok, Vorkutaugol's technical director: 'We should never say that we'll give a little bit more and we'll get something back. We'll get nothing from above. They've already paid everything. We have over-spent 80 billion roubles'.

their finances by securing additional tax privileges and the deferment of payments to the budget etc.¹⁰⁹

The miners' picket of the Russian parliament building between the 30 March and the 1 April 1994 had forced the government for the first time to make concessions.¹¹⁰ During negotiations between the government and the striking miners a schedule of wage payments was adopted for implementation over a 3 to 4 month period. Summer then arrived, the traditional holiday period, and the then vice premier of the Russian government, Aleksandr Shokhin, handed over responsibility for the payment schedule to a less authoritative figure. As a result, by September 1994 wages were once again in arrears by between 3 and 4 months and discontent was growing in the coal regions.

During a meeting of Rosugleprof's Presidium in October 1994 the participants discussed the question of a further picket of the parliament building. The threat of a picket coincided with 'black Tuesday'.¹¹¹ Afraid, the government decided not to

¹⁰⁹ By this time NPG had lost its easy access to the government, and began to try to exert influence through other political channels, particularly Zhirinovskii's Liberal Democratic Party, which, like the Communist Party, was courting the miners (see the next chapter). Asked why NPG leaders did not meet with the government's chief officials, the former NPG president in Vorkuta, Nikita Shulga, replied: 'It was possible to meet with Chernomyrdin but only through Zhirinovskii. Other miners had said that Zhirinovskii and other leaders of political parties wanted to meet with the miners.'

¹¹⁰ In spite of the joint decision adopted by the Chelyabinsk region Rosugleprof and NPG during the March strike not to take part in the picket, representatives from the region did participate, which once again shows that the directors had pushed through their decision to 'send their heralds to Moscow'.

¹¹¹ That day the dollar exchange rate unexpectedly jumped by 25% (from 3000 to 4000 roubles) which signified a collapse of the financial system as in calculating roubles, buyers and sellers alike

intensify an already tricky situation. A schedule to settle the miners' wage arrears was drawn up and this time signed by First Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian government, Oleg Soskovets. The schedule envisaged the payment of all wages and the settlement of all government arrears by the end of 1994.

In November 1994 the government's proposed budget for 1995 was discussed by the State Duma. Rosugol's General Director, Yurii Malyshev, addressed the Duma, insisting on an increase in the amount of state subsidies to the coal industry. As work on preparing the budget drew to a close, Yurii Shafranik, the Russian Minister for Fuel and Energy, met with representatives of the Duma and proposed that the term 'state support' be rejected while the amount of finance provided by the government for the restructuring of the coal industry, i.e. for the closure of 42 mines, be increased.¹¹² Acceptance of this proposal would signify the complete implementation of the government's plan to reject state financing of the coal sector. Once the heading 'state support' was removed from the state budget for 1995, there would simply be no such support, providing resonance to the subsequent argument – 'Last year the industry managed without state support, so under what article should it be included in this year's budget? It can be provided again for

used the so-called 'agreed unit' (universal equivalent) equal to \$1. Panic began on the stock exchanges with many banks not exchanging dollars, creating an unstable situation and increasing social tension in society.

¹¹² Yurii Shafranik: 'Yesterday I met with the State Duma Council. I told them: "We don't need money for subsidies, we need money to restructure the coal industry". What difference does the way they pay us money make?' (From talks with participants in the all-Russian session of coal industry trade union committee presidents; Moscow 21 December 1994, Ministry of Fuel and Energy building).

reconstruction'. In other words, funds were only to be distributed for mine closure and to pay financial compensation for job losses.

The struggle to have the budget approved was a bitter one. In December 1994, during a meeting with ministers, the Prime Minister (Chernomyrdin) said, 'Those in favour of the budget will work, those against will not'. As a result of the demands of the miners (who were part of the structure of the Ministry of Fuel and Energy) to increase state subsidies and therefore to review the budget, Yurii Shafranik's position as the Minister for Fuel and Energy became very unstable. According to Shafranik, 'Three ministers signed a request to remove me from my post because I did not correctly understand the course of reform'. Self-preservation therefore became imperative for Shafranik. He accepted the budget, which meant that he 'dumped' the miners. Attempting somehow to smooth over his guilt to the miners, Shafranik promised he would begin to resolve the problem of non-payment between enterprises, which most of all concerned the heating and energy suppliers which were, in turn, not being paid by their customers. The issue was raised of replacing the entire board of directors of the national electricity-generating network, RAO UES Russia, if the energy enterprises did not settle their debts.¹¹³ The struggle for the receipt of funds from the centre therefore concealed the conflict between the various levels of management in the fuel and energy complex and intensified the

¹¹³ Yurii Shafranik: 'I used to work with the energy lot and I think that we have to change the directors completely, although this would also not resolve the problem. Either they begin to collect payments or we give up on them. As is always the case during difficult times, someone has to be sacrificed. Someone has to be left behind. I've decided that it should be the energy lot this time.' (From talks with participants in the all-Russian session of coal industry trade union committee presidents; Moscow 21 December 1994, Ministry of Fuel and Energy building)

internal battle between various groups within the government for budget funds. Moreover, both Malyshev and Shafranik benefited from the rebellion in the miners' ranks as this strengthened their position in the eyes of chief government officials, providing an additional trump in the struggle for an extra share of the budget and removing them personally from the criticism of their opponents, as they were only 'articulating' the demands of ordinary miners. It is interesting to note that Malyshev used such support from the miners to put pressure on Shafranik, while Shafranik used it to pressure the higher echelons of the government.¹¹⁴

By December 1994 it was already clear that the government did not intend to fulfil the promises it had made. At a conference of Rosugleprof's trade union presidents (20–21 December) the president of the Rostov territorial committee, Vladimir Katal'nikov, put forward a proposal to hold an all-Russian protest in January 1995 without waiting for the arrival of spring. His proposal received no support, for the

¹¹⁴ The following episode is indicative of this:

On 21 December 1994 at the end of the plenary session and the all-Russian session of trade union presidents of coal-producing enterprises, those who wanted to (25 people) met with Shafranik in the Ministry of Fuel and Energy building.

The General Director of Rosugol', Yurii Malyshev, was sitting amongst the Rosugleprof representatives but appeared to be on the other side during the talks with Shafranik. From time to time during the meeting he was asked a question, which he answered. As the questions came from both sides, Malyshev superficially appeared to be the third party in relations between Rosugleprof and the Ministry of Fuel and Energy.

Shafranik opened with an apology for not having been in a position to meet with the miners the previous day. He said that 'The union and the Ministry of Fuel and Energy must go over their positions in order to present a united front to the government... We need to beat resources for restructuring (out of them), for the closure of 42 mines. We don't need any handouts'. (Field notes)

usual reason that the trade union leadership did not want additional problems appearing during the signing of the tariff agreement (OTS) for 1995.¹¹⁵ Preparatory work on the OTS was rather successful¹¹⁶ and on 11 January the tariff agreement for 1995 was signed by Bud'ko and on 14 January was approved by Chubais.¹¹⁷

As the government was not hurrying to fulfil its obligations to settle wage arrears, the situation in the regions remained very tense. The state budget for 1995 was adopted, including state subsidies of 6.3 trillion roubles to the coal industry instead of the 10 trillion insisted upon by Rosugol' and the unions. On 1 February the largest territorial committee in the Russian coal industry, Rostov, decided to begin a strike.¹¹⁸ Purely economic demands were put forward initially, supplemented during the strike by political demands.¹¹⁹ On 31 January, during a joint meeting between

¹¹⁵ Negotiating and signing the OTS and obtaining state subsidies, and in this respect fulfilling their duty to Rosugol', overturned all the arguments of the representatives from the regions on the need to prepare for an all-Russian strike.

¹¹⁶ This usually involves initial preparation of a special trade union committee to add to the previous OTS text and then for all points to be agreed with Rosugol' experts. Only then do the union and the branch management go to the government together, maintaining a common front.

¹¹⁷ 'On 19 January 1995 I went into the tariff agreement department, where tense work was underway. The OTS for 1995 had already been signed by everyone (Chubais, Bud'ko, Shafranik...) but they were reworking the already signed agreement! Antonov from Rosugol' was constantly calling to find out how things were going.' (From coal industry field diary, 1994-1996)

¹¹⁸ When the strike began Rostovugol had 26 mines compared to an average of between 10 and 12 in Russia's other coal associations.

¹¹⁹ On 5 February 1995 on Russian television's 'Itogi' programme rather a lot of time was given to the all-Russian strike and the situation in the regions. Film was shown of what was happening in Rostov region in particular. Vladimir Katal'nikov, the local union president, spoke in an interview of

the NPG and Rosugleprof in Vorkuta, both unions decided to hold a strike on 6 February. It is worth noting that there was no co-ordination of activities between the Rostov and Vorkuta organisations. Links are usually maintained through the Russian Committee (RK), while the territorial presidents keep in touch at meetings and other events organised by the RK.

On 2 February 1995 Rosugleprof held a presidium meeting, which was attended by most of the territorial committee presidents. The presidium was a planning meeting, but the main and almost only question raised for discussion was attitudes towards the strike and the union's subsequent actions. In accordance with the previously approved agenda, it was formulated as '*On Rosugleprof's activities in relation to the Russian government's non-fulfilment of its obligations*'. The Rostov strike, together with the decision taken in Vorkuta to strike and a general fighting mood in the regions forewarned of further action, but the union leadership was as cautious as ever about initiating a national action. The presidium issued a statement to the striking Rostovugol' miners in support of their demands and gave notice of a 24-hour strike on 8 February and of a picket of the Russian parliament building between 27 February and 1 March.

The main problem that arose during the presidium meeting was the formulation of joint demands to issue during the all-Russian strike. The main issue was whether to put forward economic or political demands. With the exception of the Tula territorial committee, the president of which declared that those making political

the demand put forward for the government's resignation, using the following argument: 'The government doesn't need us. Why do we need them?'

demands were hissed at in Tula,¹²⁰ everyone else agreed that it would be impossible to rally people to the strike without political slogans. Yurii Vishnevskii, the chairman of the Vorkuta Trade Union Federation Council, was the most active proponent of political demands. He explained why: 'We alone received our wages in December, while others are still waiting for their wages from October. If we only put forward a demand to pay wages, those working in mines with more favourable conditions will not support us, whereas political demands will involve everyone', already indicating the problems of identifying a coherent basis for the united action of the miners. A compromise decision was therefore reached: to hold the strike and picket with economic demands, to await the outcome, and if these demands were not met, to strike putting forward the political demands that the government resign and new presidential elections be held.¹²¹ During the discussions, the proposal to

¹²⁰ It is interesting to note that despite the presidium's decision not to put forward political demands, three mines in the Tula region did not give in but along with the economic demands also demanded the government's resignation and new presidential elections.

¹²¹ APPEAL to the striking miners of Rostovugol'

DEAR COLLEAGUES!

Having considered the crisis situation emerging in the industry, the presidium of the Russian Union of Mineworkers recognises your demands as just and expresses our full support for your demands and our solidarity with you.

The Presidium also states that in holding such a large-scale protest, there must be agreement on activities. Experience shows that only by uniting our strengths will we be able to force the government to implement the decisions they have already taken.

Taking into account the situation in the industry, the Presidium of the Russian Union of Mineworkers has taken the following decisions:

To hold a 24-hour all-Russian warning strike on 8 February 1995 to demand:

include the resignation of the General Director of Rosugol', Yuri Malyshev, on the list of demands was twice raised from the regions, but both times the suggestion was rebuffed by Rosugleprof's leaders.¹²²

It is worth noting here that, despite the government's accusations against the miners' union, Rosugleprof was not linked to the communists, democrats or any

That all the Russian government's debts for 1994 and January 1995, in particular state subsidies to coal industry enterprises, be paid as a matter of urgency (wage arrears, maintenance of social sphere and so on);

To accelerate a solution to the problem of non-payment. Until the non-payment problem is resolved, the way in which funds obtained by enterprises' accounting departments in accordance with a telegram received from Minfin on 14 September 1994 (No. NR - 1-35/64) and the State Tax Service of Russia dated 14 September 1994 (No. NR - VP-6-13/349) will continue.

If these demands are not met:

A picket of 1000 people will be held of the Russian parliament building between 27 February and 1 March.

An indefinite all-Russian strike will begin on 1 March to demand the government's resignation and early presidential elections.

We suggest that you take the decisions of the Presidium of the Russian Union of Mineworkers into account in your future actions and that you join the all-Russian mineworkers' protest.

Signed by Chairman of Rosugleprof, V. Bud'ko

¹²² This was done once by Kuzbass leader Mikhailets, who quoted a newspaper article which mentioned the commercial activity of Rosugol' (possibly an article by Andrei Baranovskii '*Rosugol' has become the budget's largest trader*' in the newspaper *Segodnya* on 31 January 1995). Bud'ko spoke in defence of Rosugol', declaring that in this situation nothing depended on Malyshev and that he should be left alone. The deputy chairman, Mokhnachuk, also spoke in defence of Malyshev, saying, 'Malyshev has such a job that no matter whoever was in the job, nothing would change'.

other political force 'wanting to get into the Kremlin on the miners' backs'. According to Vitalii Bud'ko, 'the union is ready to co-operate with any government which fulfils the obligations it takes upon itself. Demands that the government resign and for new presidential elections were therefore dictated by economic and not ideological reasons'.¹²³

As preparations for the all-Russian strike were taking place against the background of a national discussion on the start of military actions against Chechnya, which intensified the struggle within the government, the appearance of yet another destabilising factor in the form of the miners presented a danger to Yeltsin's team. Everyone linked to preparations for the strike was investigated by government organisations and reported on by the mass media. An Interfax correspondent, Anatolii Zhuravlev, was present at the presidium meeting: immediately after the decision to hold a one-day strike on 8 February was taken, he relayed this information to his agency. About 40 minutes later the phone rang in the office of Rosugleprof's president. First Deputy Prime Minister, Anatolii Chubais was on the line, interested to know more about the miners' decision. Bud'ko replied that the issue of what the miners would do was still being discussed but that the decision to strike on the 8th had already been taken. He was invited to visit Chubais that evening. 30 minutes later a call was received from the secretary of Chernomyrdin, the Prime Minister.

¹²³ This was a ruse used by the union leaders to avoid accusations that they were involved in politics as their official position was expressed in the statement, 'the unions are not involved in politics'. Rosugleprof then brought a civil case to the Supreme Court against Chernomyrdin, accusing him of not fulfilling his duties in his capacity as Prime Minister.

After the Rosugleprof presidium meeting of 2 February, a meeting was held between the leaders of both miners' unions and the government in the office of Chubais. It was agreed during the meeting that by 4 February a working group under the leadership of the Deputy Finance Minister, Nikolai Shamraev, would prepare its proposals for the payment of government funds to the coal industry.

When the government and the trade unions failed to come to an agreement on 4 February, it became evident that the strike was unavoidable. After Chubais had refused to provide money for the miners and to hold discussions on the amount of state subsidies, the NPG leader Aleksandr Sergeev declared that while the NPG had always supported the government and Chubais, this time he would support Rosugleprof's president, Vitalii Bud'ko. The previous day Bud'ko had signed an appeal to the NPG's regional, city and primary organisations asking them to join the all-Russian strike being organised by Rosugleprof. 'By a strange coincidence' the 'hot line' (government telephone link) of Bud'ko and leaders of Russia's 12 other largest branch unions was then disconnected.

The days leading up to the strike passed in anticipation of how events would unfold. Most of the territorial committees informed the Russian Committee of the Union of Mineworkers of their readiness to join the one-day protest. Meanwhile invisible work was going on along government corridors: Rosugol's General Director, Malyshev, was invited to participate in many different meetings. According to information from Rosugleprof, Malyshev was invited to the Kremlin on 6 February by the Prime Minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, who threatened to remove him from his position if he failed to persuade the miners not to strike. Having begun to exert pressure on Rosugol', the government decided not to reach a compromise with the miners, testing their resistance, then, having forced the situation, did not invite the

union to continue with the negotiating process. Chernomyrdin and Chubais regularly called up the Rosugleprof leadership directly for explanations of what was happening and to ask about decisions taken by the union.

The strike was held on 8 February. According to the unions, 189 deep and 28 open-cast mines took part in the strike. (Any disparities in the figures released by Rosugol', the government and Rosugleprof are due to propaganda and to the fact that not all of the mining enterprises on strike were part of Rosugol'.) However, in spite of the impressive statistics, the strike was weakly organised at local level. The regional news programme in Kemerovo, for example, showed how the miners were on strike: as it suited them, with some digging out coal while refusing to load it, others loading it in order to empty the stores while refusing to dig, while others were genuinely on strike. According to one of the trade union presidents in Novokuznetsk, the General Director of Kuznetskugol' determined according to the production needs of the company the form the strike would take at its various enterprises. (The local mass media reported that production had come to a standstill at many of Kuznetskugol's enterprises, but this was not as a result of the strike but rather of preparatory brigades being sent into the mines instead of production brigades.)¹²⁴

That same day, Chubais gave television and radio interviews in which he said that he would not allow money to be diverted from budget organisations to be given to the miners. Further attempts were thus being made to isolate the miners from the

¹²⁴ At a meeting of the RK Presidium on 23 February 1995 Bud'ko also noted that 'Many terkoms have sent telegrams of support and declared that they participated in the strike although they went on loading coal'.

rest of the population and to deprive them of the support of workers in other branches. Moreover, as a result of a perceived rapprochement in some regions between the coal unions and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), when Chubais visited Rostov region he announced that the Communist fraction in the State Duma had voted in favour of a reduction in state subsidies to the miners. This led to the Communist Party issuing a statement in which Chubais was accused of slander and to a more active support of the miners by the communists in all branches of power.

In response to these accusations against the miners, Rosugleprof's leader, Vitalii Bud'ko, called a press conference on 10 February during which Chubais's announcement was deemed to be a cynical lie intended to blur the facts. According to Bud'ko, 'The miners don't need anyone else's money. We want what we've earned!' After the press conference was held, a phase of conflict between the government and the trade union replaced the full frontal confrontation between leaders of opposing structures.

During the press conference Vitalii Bud'ko reaffirmed the decision of the union to prepare for a picket with the subsequent holding of a political strike. The government then began to act. Bud'ko was again invited to 'high cabinet' meetings (including a meeting with presidential adviser, Aleksandr Livshits). Meetings between Bud'ko and Chubais took place on the 17 and 18 February. The miners' problems began to 'get a sympathetic hearing' from the government.

The figure of 10 trillion roubles, which had initially provoked such shock on Chubais's part and been deemed unrealistic and ruinous to the budget was accepted in the corridors of power. Additional sources of finance for the coal industry were

then officially 'found' which provided around 3.5 trillion roubles. Taking into account the 6.3 trillion roubles previously allocated from the state budget, the total amount was more or less the 10 trillion demanded by the miners.

An NPG conference was held in Moscow on 19 February. As an organisation offering an alternative to Rosugleprof, the NPG was a consistent proponent of the market reforms being introduced and had collaborated closely with the World Bank, and its predecessors, in the collection of information about the coal industry and the preparation of their restructuring plans.¹²⁵ The NPG leader, Aleksandr Sergeev, was a member of the Presidential Council, which to a great extent determined his personal support for the reforms being implemented by the government. A statement was adopted which in particular noted

During the February strikes, the Russian Committee of the Independent Union of Workers in the Coal Industry (RK NPRUP) gave notice of the possibility of an all-Russian strike with political demands from 1 March. This is clear populism – the functionaries of the branch union will be the first to reject a political strike. Their problems, which are closely related to the interests of the directors, have already been resolved. The populist slogans thrown out to the labour collectives are now ready to be seized upon by extremists.

¹²⁵ NPG provided logistical and other support for the World Bank Missions on the basis of its earlier collaboration with the 'Coal Project', which was directed by Partners in Economic Reform, an agency backed by the US coal industry and trade unions with funding from the US government. The 'Coal Project' had developed out of links established with the workers' committees in 1990 and 1991, and was finally set up on the basis of a mission to Kuzbass in July and August 1992.

At the end of the statement, the NPG Council of Representatives nevertheless noted that, were Rosugleprof to begin an all-Russian strike from 1 March, the Russian NPG would support the striking miners in their just struggle for the rights of the workers to be upheld.

On 23 February a conference of Rosugleprof's Presidium was held with the territorial committee presidents and the General Directors of almost every coal company taking part through an intercom link.¹²⁶ The Rosugleprof leader presented his report to the meeting concerning what had been done at federal level regarding the miners' demands since notice had been given of the all-Russian strike:

The State Duma had adopted a special 1.5% tax which would secure 5.5 trillion roubles for the budget, 1.3 trillion of which was to be transferred to the coal industry and 3.2 trillion to the agricultural sector.

India had repaid a loan of \$500 million (from the government of the USSR) which would be credited within one month.

At a meeting with Chubais a decision was taken by the Federal Authorities on Insolvency and Bankruptcy together with Rosugol' and both miners' unions to create a committee to investigate the reasons for consumer non-payment. The committee was to be headed by Chubais and had been given one month to resolve the problem.

¹²⁶ Since Rosugleprof does not have the technical capacity to hold a meeting through an intercom link, this meeting was held in a special hall in the Rosugol' building.

The 50x50 regime, which had ended on the 26 December 1994, had been extended into the first half of 1995.¹²⁷

On the issue of settling wage arrears: 600 billion roubles had already been received for February. The FNPR chairman, Shmakov, had organised another meeting between Rosugleprof and Chubais on 18 February. A decision was taken to transfer a further 700 billion roubles to the miners in March.

After long debates at the presidium the participants came to the conclusion that most territorial committees were not prepared to join the strike on 1 March since the voting in the regions showed that only 30% were in favour of the strike, while 100% supported the picket. This was entirely in keeping with the position of the directors' corpus which blamed everything on the Centre. The picket was a political gesture of pressure on the government, which presented absolutely no threat to enterprise directors and did not bring work to a standstill whereas any strike would by necessity entail the danger of a loss of control (albeit temporary) over the people in their enterprises.

By intercom link, Vitalii Bud'ko informed everyone of the decision of the Rosugleprof presidium to move the date of the picket to 15 March to give the government another chance to fulfil its promises.¹²⁸ But no mention was made of

¹²⁷ As a result of the accumulation of debts to the tax and fiscal bodies, any money received by enterprises in debt was automatically seized. This left no funds with which to pay wages or to finance any other activity at enterprises. The 50x50 regime allowed the tax organisations to remove only 50% of funds from enterprises' accounts, with the other 50% staying with the enterprises for their own needs, primarily to pay wages.

¹²⁸ According to the leader of the Rostov terkom, Chubais's visit to the mines greatly influenced his attitude to the miners' problems. As Chubais had a reputation for being a difficult person to convince

the strike, i.e. there was no mention of it happening only after the picket as planned earlier. This failure to mention the strike gave the union leadership room for manoeuvre, were it subsequently unable to organise a strike. A firm stance was taken by the president of the Vorkuta territorial committee, Yurii Vishnevskii, according to whom a decision had already been taken during a joint meeting of the NPG and Rosugleprof in the town of Vorkuta to hold a strike on 1 March and to put forward both economic and political demands. He maintained that the whole town would join the protest, but a check later revealed that only 5 of Vorkuta's 12 mines had shown any level of activity because their miners had not received any wages since November 1994. Rebellion at the other enterprises had been subdued by the payment of December's wage. Following the intercom meeting Yurii Vishnevskii and the trade union presidents from the mines which had received no money met with Malyshev, who promised to resolve the problem of arrears owed to the Vorkuta miners as a matter of urgency.

of anything, but someone who kept his word, the miners decided not to upset the newly-emerging attitude of mutual-understanding with a premature protest, and postponed it to a later date. But there were other significant reasons. Since those regions or individual enterprises which had received their long-awaited wages had refused to join the March 1 strike, it would have been naïve to have counted on a simultaneous protest by all or most of the regions. According to Bud'ko, the protest would be successful if 50% of enterprises were to take part. In this case, we could have been talking about the participation of a maximum of 30% of enterprises, which doomed the strike to failure. The repercussions of an unsuccessful strike could have been lamentable for the unions: on the one hand, a loss of authority amongst the miners, and a weakening of the union's influence on the government on the other. According to Rosugleprof's leadership, holding a strike in order to demonstrate the weakness of the organisation and its lack of unity would have been a mistake.

That same day a meeting was held between Viktor Chernomyrdin and the leaders of the branch unions of Russia. According to Vitalii Bud'ko, this meeting was pointless and conducted in the best tradition of the era of stagnation. When giving their reports, some of the trade union leaders stood sideways, turning to the presidium while one of them turned his back completely on the hall and dedicated his report to 'dear Viktor Stepanovich' (Chernomyrdin). The meeting with Chernomyrdin was nonetheless a political gesture from the government, a gesture which showed that the government wanted dialogue with the trade unions. As it coincided with the miners' postponement of their strike, this must symbolise an attempt by the government to avoid full confrontation with the unions and to remove pressure by means of an appeal to the concept of social partnership which they had appeared to have forgotten.

On 25 February Russian television reported an announcement from the president of the Vorkuta NPG, Aleksandr Marmalyukov, that the strike would take place irrespective of the *crumbs* sent to the miners. On 27 February a joint meeting was held in Vorkuta between the presidents of the NPG and Rosugleprof trade union committees. As all the economic demands of the Vorkuta miners had been accepted by the official structures, with the General Director of Rosugol', Yurii Malyshev, issuing an order on the transfer of funds to the miners of Vorkuta, the joint decision of the two unions rendered void the previous announcement from the NPG president, Aleksandr Marmalyukov. The general feeling of the Vorkuta trade union members was to hold a citywide meeting on 1 March. Tension in the Primor'ye region, meanwhile, did not result in a strike on 1 March. The previous day a government commission arrived in Primor'ye to investigate the reason for non-payment. As all the interested parties were placing great hopes in the results of the

commission's work, the unions decided not to resort to extreme measures and to delay the strike. Using part payments, promises, and the sending of a commission to 'hot spots', the government was thus able to avert the danger of an all-Russian protest.

On 15 March – the day previously earmarked for the beginning of the picket – an extended meeting of the Rosugleprof presidium was held. In accordance with tradition, before any decision was taken on further action, Rosugol's top brass was invited to speak. In this instance, Valerii Zaidenverg and Nikolai Garkavenko were present from Rosugol' as Malyshev was in Washington, having been authorised by Chubais to hold talks with the World Bank on the coal loan.¹²⁹ Garkavenko reported on the amount of money recently transferred, and the amount of arrears the government still owed to the industry. The participants raised the issue of how the money was being distributed. According to Garkavenko, the following procedure was used: money was transferred from the Finance Ministry to the account of Rosugol', which then distributed the funds. The distribution was then confirmed by the president of Rosugleprof, Bud'ko.¹³⁰ Only then did Malyshev's telegram go to the regions. The territorial committee presidents mentioned the lack of information

¹²⁹ As a result of the strike, Rosugol' once again seized the initiative. Whereas all previous negotiations with the World Bank had been held with the 'pro-westerners' Anatolii Chubais, and Economics Ministers Yakov Urinson or Igor Kozhukhovskii, Malyshev's trip to take part in negotiations with the World Bank testified to a change in the balance of power within the government in favour of Rosugol's supporters.

¹³⁰ This provoked a comment from the president of the Rostov terkom, Vladimir Katal'nikov: 'He himself does not take part (in the distribution), he is only shown the file, but what is inside?' This

on how much money was transferred to each region and also that the distribution of state subsidies was not clear to them.¹³¹

During the meeting of the presidium a proposal was put forward by the Deputy General Director of Rosugol', Valerii Zaidenvarg, 'that the conditions laid down for the receipt of the World Bank loan should be agreed with the miners' union'. This was said in response to the fear of the trade union leaders that the loan could be provided with certain one-sided conditions attached by the foreign financial organisations. It was therefore in the interests of the industry's management to involve Rosugleprof in the negotiating process, aware as it was of the trade union's anti-Bank position and therefore counting on the union's support in its confrontation with the World Bank.

Whether the picket would go ahead was postponed till the end of the day, when a meeting was held between Bud'ko and Chubais. Upon returning from the meeting, Bud'ko reported that Chubais more or less agreed with the miners' demands: he had seen the schedule but had deferred signing it, requesting one week to investigate

illustrates the fact that the signing of documents by the Rosugleprof president was a ritual and did not infer any equal participation of the union in the distribution of the funds they managed to receive.

¹³¹ **Katal'nikov:** Does this exist on paper? The regions would like to see it. Artyukhov said they received 90%, while Rostov received 78% of their arrears.

Bukhtiyarov: In 1994 there was a mechanism and schedule of payments. Does the same mechanism remain in force or does it no longer exist. How are funds for capital investment and the social sphere allocated?

Garkavenko: Government resolution N.727 (1993). As a result of new phenomena we prepared new concepts. Losses (and therefore state subsidies) are determined on the basis of each tonne of coal produced. (From tape of session of extended Rosugleprof Presidium held on 15 March 1995).

more fully. According to Bud'ko, this was better than signing a document without considering it carefully and then it not being implemented. On 15 March the presidium of Rosugleprof took the decision not to picket the building of the Russian parliament and the struggle over the payment of the budget subsidy moved back to the mines and regions, with little or no national co-ordination so that each mine and region was competing with the others for limited state funds.

At 9 a.m. on 16 March the presidents of the Vorkuta NPG and Rosugleprof began a joint hunger strike to demand the urgent convening in Vorkuta of the Interdepartmental Commission (MVK) and the resolution of the socio-economic problems facing the Vorkutaugol' association. The direct bombardment of vice-premier Anatolii Chubais with letters from the trade unions and directors of Rostovugol' began simultaneously, highlighting the 'agreement reached during your visit to the Donetsk coal basin'. The fight for the money promised to the coal sector had shifted from the Centre to the regions.

On 22 March a government commission headed by the Economics Minister, Yakov Urinson, arrived in Vorkuta for talks with the unions while on 25 March, at the insistence of the unions, a meeting of the Interdepartmental Commission was held in Vorkuta. As a result of the joint protest action of both miners' unions, with the support of the management of Vorkutaugol' concern,¹³² the outcome of the negotiations was that Vorkutaugol' was relieved of its tax obligations for 1995, a decision was reached whereby Rosugol' would draw up a schedule of payments for

¹³² I participated in this meeting on behalf of the trade unions and it was clear that all the speeches and declarations had been agreed between the regional trade union leaders and the associations' General Directors beforehand.

wage arrears, and also whereby an agreement would be concluded between Rosugol' on the one side and the coal associations of the Pechora basin on the other.¹³³ The Vorkuta trade union committee presidents' hunger strike was thus

¹³³ The Protocol from the meeting of the Government Commission of the Russian Federation with the Pechora coal basin mineworkers' union representatives, Vorkuta, 24 March 1995:

Notes that the main reasons for a sharp increase in social tension in the labour collectives of mining enterprises of the Pechora coal basin are the rise in wage arrears, which have arisen as a result of arrears in the payment of budget funds (subsidies), an over-accumulation of non-realizable coal stocks, arrears in customer payments for coal supplies, including exported coal, and the unjustified payment of wages in many of the region's enterprises during periods of unsatisfactory work, including during strikes.

Acknowledges that the measures laid down in a letter from Y. Urison and adopted by Minfin, Rosugol', the Russian Pension Fund and the Federal Fund of Compulsory Medical Insurance guarantee the settlement of wage arrears to workers of Vorkutaugol', Intaugol' and the Pechorshakhtstroi kombinat for 1994 and January 1995 from state subsidies and earnings from coal which has been sold.

Brings to attention that:

The State tax service has postponed the payment of fines and penalties for late payments by coal industry enterprises to the budget until all their debts from the budget are cleared;

The Russian Ministry of Finance has exempted Vorkutaugol', Intaugol' and the Pechorshakhtstroi kombinat from the payment of taxes to the sum of the penalties levied by the federal budget for the payment of tax on profit as of 1 April 1995, which is based on the late payment of state subsidies.

Rosugol', Vorkutaugol', Intaugol' and the Pechorshakhtstroi kombinat will by 28 March 1995 determine the amount required to settle wage arrears; Vorkutaugol' and Intaugol' by February and the Pechorshakhtstroi kombinat also by February;

By 1 April 1995 Rosugol', Vorkutaugol', Intaugol' and the Pechorshakhtstroi kombinat will jointly calculate the amount of state subsidies receivable, determine the schedule for their arrival and

formulate enterprise sources for April, May and June 1995, taking into account the settlement of accumulated wage arrears. Vorkutaugol', Intaugol' and the Pechorshakhtstroi kombinat to determine measures for 1995 to cut losses, increase the volume of production and sales, and to avoid increases in wage arrears. Rosugol' to conclude agreements with Vorkutaugol', Intaugol' and the Pechorshakhtstroi kombinat for the 2nd quarter of 1995 to provide for:

Rosugol's obligation to pay state subsidies month by month, taking into account the seasonal specifics of production, coal supplies and workers' holidays;

the obligations of Vorkutaugol', Intaugol' and the Pechorshakhtstroi kombinat to implement measures aimed at cutting losses and not permitting an increase in wage arrears;

a system whereby additional funds from state subsidies for subsequent months will only be paid if the measures planned for the previous month and included in the agreement have been implemented.

The Russian Finance Ministry permits Rosugol' to make transfers of state subsidy coal industry funds allocated for the establishment of a centralised reserve fund from the company's budget account to its deposit account.

Vorkutaugol' and the government of the Komi Republic will within one month register the Vorkutaugol' joint stock company according to the directive of the Russian State Property Committee.

Vorkutaugol', Intaugol', Rosugol' and the Government of the Komi Republic together with the Russian Ministry of Finance will determine the level, and undertake the transfer of finance in accordance with resolution No. 716 of 19 June 1994 from the Russian government, in particular the transfer and formal acceptance into the housing fund of the municipal property of repair-construction enterprises and social and cultural subjects which belong to Vorkutaugol', Intaugol' and Vorgashorskaya mine by 25 April 1995.

Vorkutaugol' and the government of the Komi Republic will transfer by 1 April 1995 to the Ministry of Agriculture of the Komi Republic the property of co-operative farms currently on the association's books and will maintain the financing of the farms this year with state help on an agreed basis in accordance with the level planned by Rosugol'.

used to force Rosugol', with the help of the government, to pay Vorkutaugol' and Intaugol' associations the money received by Rosugol' as a result of the all-Russian protest action. It should be noted, however, that the arrears of 90 billion roubles paid to the miners only covered debts for January 1995 while all the other

Vorkutaugol', Vorgashorskaya AO, Intaugol', Zapadnaya mine AO and Pechorshakhtostoi, together with the administrations of the towns of Vorkuta and Inta and the government of the Komi Republic and Rosugol' will by 2 July 1995 complete the development of a Programme for the restructuring of coal industry enterprises in the Pechora coal basin, which will outline the implementation, using various sources of finance, of measures for the closure of acute loss-making mines, and of investment support for mines with prospects and the structural reorganisation of the production and construction complex of the coal basin

The government of the Komi Republic and the Russian Pension Fund, together with enterprise and trade union leaders in the region will prepare proposals on the particularities of guaranteeing pensions for those people who leave the Far Northern region and how to place them on the same footing as others in the (new) localities to be considered by the Russian government on 28 March 1995

Signed by:

First Deputy Economics Minister, Y. Urinson

First Deputy Finance Minister, V. Artyukhov

First Deputy Fuels and Energy Minister, A. Yevtushenko

General Director of Rosugol', Y. Malyshev

President of Rosugelprof in Vorkuta, Y. Vishnevskii

President of the NPG in Vorkuta, A. Marmalyukov

Deputy Governor of the Komi Republic, A. Mokotov

General Director of Vorkutaugol' AO, Y. Lobes

General Director of Intaugol' AO, O. Kukushin

Head of the Pechorshakhstoi kombinat, Y. Poletayev

‘victories’ related to improvements in the economic situation of the coal enterprises in the Pechora basin, i.e. they primarily benefited the directors.

As the spring-summer period in Russia is characterised by the majority of workers being busy on their dachas growing potatoes and vegetables, there is usually no protest action during this time. The leaders of the regional trade union organisations and of Rosugleprof made attempts to hold consultations with political parties on the issue of concluding agreements with them and putting forward candidates for the State Duma elections in December, but no general conclusion was arrived at and Rosugleprof did not take part in the 1995 elections as a single entity.¹³⁴ As summer is short in the Arctic Circle, disturbances once again flared amongst the Vorkuta miners in August. On 8 August a joint meeting was held between the Vorkutaugol’ trade union committee presidents of the Independent Miners Union (NPG) and Rosugleprof with Vorkutaugol’s General Director, Lobes, commercial director, Rybkin, and chairman of the board of directors, Stepanov, in attendance. It was resolved at the meeting to send a letter to the first deputy finance minister, Artyukhov, in which the leaders of both unions requested that Rosugol’ increase the amount of subsidies on each tonne of coal produced, pointed out the lack of a schedule of payments for government funds for the 3rd and 4th quarter, and asked that ‘the situation not be allowed to develop into a social explosion’ and for a Vorkuta delegation to be sent out to the labour collectives. The subsequent strike at Promyshlennaya mine in September achieved a public resonance, being used by

¹³⁴ Vladimir Katal’nikov, president of the Rostov Rosugleprof terkom, stood as an independent and was elected in the Shakhty constituency.

various political forces¹³⁵ and once again helping the Vorkuta trade union to lobby their regional interests in Moscow.¹³⁶

Towards the end of the summer period, things had begun to warm up in Kuzbass, with the miners demanding that debts to them which had accumulated during the summer be paid off. The mass media published notices about preparations for an all-Kuzbass protest. Without waiting for the start of any general protest, the miners (and non-miners) of Mezhdurechensk (26/09/95), Novokuznetsk (28/09/95) and Osinniki (29/09/95) came out into the streets for meetings. The holding of a Kuzbass-wide protest was initially expected, but this was not part of the plan of the directors and branch management, who did everything possible to contain the protest. At the same time, however, they used the threat of an all-Kuzbass strike to push for a review of the question of the lack of finance for the coal industry at the level of the highest legislative organ. The all-Kuzbass protest began on 12 October. On 13 October Rosugol's General Director, Malyshev, spoke at a meeting of the State Duma, after which the Duma put the issue of additional finance for the coal industry during the 4th quarter of 1995 to the vote. 280 people voted in favour, none against. The government then announced the payment of an additional 2 trillion roubles. On the other hand, however, forces were also at work against Rosugol': for

¹³⁵ On 26 September 1995 a press conference was held in the State Duma with the participation of the Vorkuta city strike committee. The Communist Party of the Russian Federation fraction helped to organise it.

¹³⁶ On 2/10/95 a meeting was held between Semenova (president of the Vorkuta NPG), Tukan (chairman of Promyshlennaya mine), Mokhnachuk (vice-president of Rosugleprof) and the heads of Rosugol'. Yurii Malyshev promised to provide 150 flats for miners moving from Promyshlennaya mine and to resolve the wage arrears issue.

example, Mokhnachuk, vice-president of Rosugleprof, spoke of attempts being made by the government to use the miners' discontent to 'deal' with Rosugol' by transferring its production functions to the coal department of the Ministry of Fuel and Energy and the distribution of funds to the coal department of the Economics Ministry.

The government's first reaction to the all-Kuzbass protest was to hold a meeting on 21 October between a delegation headed by Chubais and industrialists from Kemerovo region (trade union representatives were also present but played no role in the proceedings),¹³⁷ and a session of the Inter-Departmental Commission (MVK). As a result of the session a decision was made to prepare a regional programme of coal industry restructuring (with corresponding finance) and to settle wage arrears. The following day at a Rosugleprof plenary session held in Kemerovo, Rosugol's General Director gave a report of his speech to the State Duma and made an appeal to the plenary session's delegates: 'We are counting on the Duma's assistance and on receiving 10 trillion roubles. If you note in the decision of the plenary session that you support the Duma's decision, this will help us'.

One month later, on 30 November, Malyshev gave a report to a session of Rosugleprof's presidium: 'The second and third reading of the law on coal have taken place in the State Duma. The law will be adopted at the third reading and sent for presidential approval. The Duma heard from me for the second time on the issue of additional finance for the coal industry for 1995. Yeltsin issued a personal directive in response to a letter from Bud'ko. The coal industry is the only industry

¹³⁷ The security guards on duty at the regional administration building did not have a list of trade union presidents attending, although there were lists of all the other participants.

to receive 100% of its finance'. As the session was being held during the election campaign for the State Duma, many of those speaking suggested that the miners be called upon to vote against the political movement '*Nash Dom - Rossiya*' (NDR), headed by the Prime Minister, Chernomyrdin, as a sign of protest. After every speech against the NDR, Yuri Malyshev tried to fit in a counter proposal not to oppose it. The final decision of the Rosugleprof president, Bud'ko, not to include the demand to vote against the NDR in the Presidium's resolutions was perceived as a sign of Malyshev's influence over the Presidium's work.

The Presidium's decision not to hold an all-Russian protest was dictated first and foremost by the fear of a repeat performance of the unsuccessful experience of the all-Kuzbass protest, which had ended almost in failure as a result of weak organisation, and which had come up against serious opposition from coal enterprise directors. A second reason for its lack of success was that negotiations for the conclusion of the branch tariff agreement for 1996 were entering their final stages. According to the union leadership, the signing of the OTS had to be forced through and no preparations for strike action could begin until this had been done. Consequently, despite the continued growth of discontent in the regions and the accumulation of wage arrears, the Russian Committee took no action until January 1996.

5.4 *The Russian Miners' Strike of February 1996*

Although the miners had been quite successful in mobilising the threat of a national strike and of political alliance with opposition parties to extract money from the government through 1994-5, the government had been no less successful in undermining the Rosugleprof's bargaining position. On the one hand, the selective

distribution of funds had eroded solidarity between mines and between regions. On the other hand, the government had steadily increased its pressure on Rosugol' to persuade the latter more actively to discourage displays of militancy, holding over it the threat of extinction. While mine directors, the General Directors of the Coal Associations and the leadership of Rosugol' had at least tacitly supported strike action through 1994-5, the Russian coal miners' strike which began on 1 February 1996 was the first truly national miners' strike called by the trade union (rather than a reluctant response to pressure from the regions), and it was the first strike called against the express opposition of management. The strike was widely and dramatically reported by the media, but in fact the strike was called off at 3 a.m. on the morning of February 3, the end of the strike being barely reported even in Russia: all but one journalist had got bored with waiting and had filed reports that the strike was continuing before going off to bed. Technically the strike was suspended until 1 March, but the resumption of the strike was barely discussed at the meeting of the union presidium on 28 February. How could a strike begun with such a bang end so soon with barely a whimper?

The February 1996 strike came at an especially delicate time, in a situation in which the Communist Party was on a roll following its electoral triumph (with 51 per cent of the vote in the Kuzbass coal-mining region), Anatolii Chubais, the last reformer in the government, had just been sacked, and Yeltsin was about to announce his candidacy for the June Presidential election. Everybody was desperate to demonstrate their commitment to the people, and the miners once more presented themselves as representative of the people. The background to this strike, as of all the actions of the past three years, was the economic demands of the miners which focused on the payment of the subsidy due to the industry from the state budget.

The decision to picket the White House from 24–26 January 1996 and to strike from 1 February in the event of the government not meeting its obligations was taken by the presidium of Rosugleprof at its meeting of 11 January. Negotiations with the government were complicated by the sacking of Deputy Prime Minister Anatolii Chubais, with whom the existing agreements had been signed, on January 16. It was only on 23 January that the trade union delegation met with Prime Minister Chernomyrdin, a meeting also attended by NPG leader Aleksandr Sergeev although NPG was not a party to the dispute. The government promised to prepare within two weeks a draft resolution concerning the distribution of an additional 3 trillion roubles for the industry for 1996 and the prolongation of the special arrangement for the coal industry according to which 50 per cent of the money received by enterprises can be used for the enterprises' own needs, primarily the payment of wages, whereas in other industries 80 per cent of receipts are diverted to the payment of tax debts. However, the miners were not prepared to wait for two weeks. The common reaction was that 'the government has been behaving as though this is the first time that they have heard of the problems of the coal industry. What does "we will consider within two weeks" mean? What have you been doing these last four years? We have to strike!'

From 24–26 January around 900 miners participated in the picketing of the government buildings. One of the miners' demands was that Yeltsin should meet them since the government had shown itself unwilling or unable to understand the problems of the industry. On 25 January the President of Rosugleprof, Vitalii Bud'ko, was invited to meet one of Yeltsin's principal assistants, Aleksandr Livshits, the following day. At that meeting Livshits confirmed that 600 billion roubles would be transferred to the miners by the end of the month and that the

President was prepared to guarantee the industry a subsidy of 10 trillion roubles for 1996, the same in money terms as the subsidy for 1995. Bud'ko reported the results of this meeting to the picketing miners. His main point was that all the promises that had been made remained only on paper and that it was necessary for the pickets to return to their regions and to get everyone out on strike. His proposal was met with a roar of approval. After this the miners piled up their placards in the form of a humpback bridge, with its highest point opposite the White House, and set fire to them, and, leaving their helmets by the fence, the miners left.

On the morning of January 31 Yurii Malyshev, General Director of Rosugol', conferred with the directors and trade union presidents of coal-mining enterprises through an intercom link. The majority of trade union presidents confirmed that they would carry out the decision of the presidium of their trade union, which had been endorsed by a meeting of the miners' representatives who had been participating in the White House picket. Yurii Malyshev appealed to them to reverse the decision, or at least to postpone the strike to 10 February to allow Rosugol' time to reach a constructive resolution of the problem. However, Ivan Mokhnachuk, the deputy president of Rosugleprof, announced that the strike was going ahead. Rosugol's representatives then adopted a protocol which they issued to the mass media and the government in which they laid all responsibility for the adverse socio-economic repercussions of the strike squarely on its organisers.¹³⁸

According to the trade union's figures about 87 per cent of the industry's employees joined the all-Russian strike on 1 February. Although this is probably an

¹³⁸ 'On the decision by Rosugleprof to hold an all-Russian miners' strike from 01/02/96'. Protocol of the Rosugol' meeting, 31/01/96

overestimate, the strike nevertheless was undoubtedly the largest in the history of the trade union. In response the State Duma summoned government leaders to account for the state of affairs in the coal industry at a hearing on 2 February, at which the Duma members overwhelmingly supported the miners.

Despite the massive response, the February strike revealed the same weaknesses and inadequacies in trade union organisation as had been shown in previous strikes. Some of the most prosperous mines, especially the open-casts, remained at work, threatening to take the customers of the striking mines. Thus, as soon as the 1996 strike began the Western Siberian open cast coal association, 'Kuzbassrazrezugol', started to supply coal to the Novolipetsk and Cherepovets metallurgical complexes, traditional customers of the northern Vorkuta coalfield whose miners accordingly decided to resume work. As soon as other enterprises began to pay out delayed wages their labour collectives spontaneously abandoned the strike and returned to work. This behaviour simply exposed the remaining miners and their organisation, the trade union leaders having to negotiate with the government against the background of a crumbling strike which was not under their control.

The presidium of the union met in the evening of February 2 to decide what to do next. The mood among the regional representatives was to continue the strike, even when their own miners were already drifting back to work, while the national union leadership favoured terminating the strike before it collapsed. As Bud'ko said to one regional leader, 'How can you vote to continue an all-Russian strike when you cannot even hold on to people in your own enterprise!' The discussion went on long into the night, the presidium voting at three in the morning, by a majority of only one, to call off the strike. The decision was unpopular, particularly with the coal regions such as Rostov which had remained solid.

In spite of the success of the strike, widely publicised by the trade union's leadership, many people within the union saw it as a general failure. The collapse of the strike led to widespread recriminations, but the principal lesson of the strike for many of the leaders of the trade union was that the union still had a long way to go before it could really consider itself to be an effective force, able to represent the interests of its members. The miners could hardly claim to be the vanguard of the working class when they could not even sustain a strike of their own for more than twenty-four hours.

5.5 Conclusions

The negotiating process between the regions and the Centre born of the 1989 strike included representatives of the working class as one of the active parties. The new system of 'social partnership' took the form of the united forces of the directors, local administrations and the workers' committees (and once they disappeared, the unions) to lobby regional interests with the Centre.¹³⁹ At federal level the same attitude of mutual understanding formed between Rosugol', which replaced the

¹³⁹ Valentin Koltunov (development worker, full-time member of the Prokop'evsk workers' committee): 'Management looked on the committee as a battering ram which could be used to open any door in Moscow' (Lopatin, 1998: 129)

Aleksandr Gekov (on the members of the workers' committee): 'From the time of their appearance in our group government ministers' doors began to open as if someone had waved a magic wand'. (Lopatin, 1998: 470)

Valerii Lisov: 'I went to the capital 7 or 8 times. We travelled with the town administrative leaders, or with enterprise management, or were included in a delegation from the Severokuzbassugol' association. We didn't ask for our own sake, we weren't putting forward our personal interests, we came to resolve state problems at state level' (Lopatin, 1998: 171).

Ministry of the Coal Industry, and Rosugleprof, based on common branch interests which were the basis for the emergence of 'social partnership'. *The miners' strikes as a form of protest were thus transformed into an additional mechanism for lobbying branch and regional interests and were shaped by branch management and the regional authorities as a traditional instrument for beating funds from the Centre.*¹⁴⁰ Everything proceeded in this way up to the end of 1996, when the general economic situation had become complicated and delays and the non-payment of wages had become chronic. It had become impossible from now on for the miners to conduct an All-Russian strike, though the question of its organization repeatedly arose at sessions of the presidium of Rosugleprof.

The increased tendency to regionalisation was also reflected in mutual relations inside the trade union; the effort of every regional committee to solve the problem of beating out money for its own company, was based on the idea that the money allocated by the state would not be sufficient for all regions. On the other hand, the interest of the directors in maintaining the trade unions was gone, since they could not use them to beat state subsidies out of the centre any more. The adverse macro-economic situation explained the rather rapid disappointment of the workers in strikes and other protest actions conducted by the trade unions, as the workers did not see any real sense in them for themselves, except to let off steam. Nevertheless,

¹⁴⁰ Aleksandr Smirnov (foreman, mining equipment assembly, assistant to Kemerovo region's representative of the Russian president): 'Let's look at all the strikes since 1991. Who needed them? Rosugol' needed them. Thanks to the strikes, Rosugol' received subsidises from the budget. Tuleev and the communist trade unions needed the strikes.'

Ravil Vakhitov (brigadier driver, president of the Novokuznetsk city workers' committee): 'As soon as the miners kicked up a fuss, money immediately arrived at Rosugol' (Lopatin, 1998: 208).

the subsequent deterioration of socio-economic conditions in coal regions, the many month delays of wages forced them time and again to resort to the tested means of pressure on the Centre. As a rule, these outbursts went under the flag of demands for the implementation of the Branch tariff agreement in regard to the payment of state grants, i.e. were directed exclusively against the government and did not threaten the interests of the directors' corpus.

Large-scale miners' protests did not facilitate a strengthening of the union as a workers' organisation. The success of the miners, despite the weakness of their organisation, has owed a great deal to the support they have received from other workers. However, although the miners have enjoyed widespread support for their demands, they have shown little solidarity with other groups of workers. During the 1989 miners' strike in all the coal-mining regions workers from other industries, from transport and construction, municipal services, health and education came to the miners to offer their support and proposed to strike in solidarity. However, the miners refused all such offers arguing that they could resolve all problems (not only theirs, but those of the whole population) by their own efforts, and that it would be better for other workers to continue working for the needs of the population.¹⁴¹ In 1989 it was indeed the case that the strike was settled on the basis of lists of demands drawn up not only by miners but also by local authorities on behalf of the whole population, but the exclusion of other groups of workers from participation in the movement deprived the latter of the experience of struggle through which their

¹⁴¹ The same was true in Donbass, where in 1989 the miners would not allow non-miners onto the city square where the permanent strike meeting was held. In the 1993 strike in Donbass the situation was very different, with the miners actively encouraging the generalisation of the strike (See Chapter Four above; Borisov, 1996).

leaders could emerge, could develop their organisational and negotiating skills and could build their own organisations. Meanwhile, the employers and political authorities learned fast and were well prepared to nip subsequent attempts to develop independent workers' organisation in the bud and to extract resources from the government, so the impulse to developing independent worker organisation was neutralised.

The miners attempt to 'distance themselves' and to be reserved initially arose from their confidence in their own powers and the desire to act on behalf of the whole population, to defend general interests against the government, irrespective of branch or professional membership. This position changed over time and, although on the surface a definite distance remained between the miners and workers in other economic sectors, the reason for this had changed and was first and foremost the miners' leaders' lack of confidence in being able to keep the strikers out on the squares were they to be paid their wages.¹⁴² There was a fear of losing their vanguard image, of losing their status once and for all. For as long as the miners acted alone, with unorganised and spontaneous protests, this was an internal affair. In the case of joint action with other workers, this would be seen as a public display by the miners of the weakness of their trade union organisation.

One cannot blame the miners alone for the uneven development of the workers' movement, but their 'vanguardism' has certainly played a role in reproducing and

¹⁴² 'We must be careful in our relations with other trade unions. If we put forward economic demands and satisfy them for the miners, they may go back and some 'Hammer and Sickle' will stand alone with nothing and will accuse the miners of treason.' (From a speech to the session of Rosugleprof's Presidium, 23 February 1995)

reinforcing the passivity of other groups of workers. Moreover, despite the dependence of the miners on the support of other workers for their success, we do not know of a single case in which the miners have acted in support of other groups of workers in their turn, beyond sending occasional messages of support. In the coal-mining regions the teachers and health workers were hard hit in 1991 by having to pay prices inflated by the high wages of the miners, and were involved in militant action of their own seeking to achieve pay increases to compensate for inflation. But, far from supporting the workers in the budget sector, NPG and the workers' committees in 1991 and 1992 actively opposed their demands (primarily on political grounds). In regional strikes in September 1995 in Kuzbass there were at least token displays of solidarity between miners and teachers, but in January 1996 there was no co-ordination or even communication between the teachers and the miners who were simultaneously on strike, with the same demand of payment of moneys due from the government (nor was there any communication or co-ordination with the miners of the Ukrainian Donbass, who were on strike at exactly the same time, although a declaration of solidarity was received from the miners of Kazakhstan).

The 'vanguardism' of the miners is an ideological illusion not only in the sense that it gives a misleading impression of their strength and the degree of their organisation, but also because it gives a misleading impression of their independence from other groups of workers. It has only been when their demands have enjoyed widespread social and political support that they have been successful. Although they refused all political slogans and rejected collaboration with any of the nascent democratic political groupings in 1989, the miners' movement enjoyed widespread support as an obviously democratic rising. Through to 1991 the miners'

movement was increasingly politicised as it forged links with the broadly based movement for democratic reform, although it was Yeltsin and the 'democrats' who were the principal beneficiaries, the miners being paid off in May 1991 with handsome wage increases which were soon to be eroded by inflation.

From 1991 to 1993 the miners rapidly became disillusioned with politics and increasingly turned to trade union forms of struggle, with Rosugleprof gradually displacing NPG as the dominant representative of the miners. However, the success of the miners in this period did not so much depend on their trade union strength as, on the one hand, on the support they received from their employers, who had an equal interest in beating the subsidy out of Moscow and, on the other, the political conjunctures in which the miners pressed their case. Thus, the strike of 6 September 1993 coincided with the confrontation between Yeltsin and the Supreme Soviet and it was in the interests of the executive to pay-off the miners to ensure that they did not play an active political role at such a delicate moment. Similarly it took only small-scale local strike action to extract substantial concessions from Gaidar on the eve of the election of December 1993. Relative political stability through 1994 meant that the miners were not able to take effective action and were largely confined to a supporting role in relation to the management of the industry. However, the strike of February 1995 corresponded to a further political polarisation, in this case linked to the start of the Chechen war, and attracted much more political support, the miners securing a massive increase in the budget subsidy to the industry, which had earlier been cut in line with the recommendations of the World Bank. But the Kuzbass strike of 12 October 1995, expected to lead to all Russian action, provoked almost no reaction because it coincided with the jostling for position in the pre-election period, in which the miners had no role to play.

From the point of view of putting pressure on the Centre, the February 1995 strike was a success. The government was forced to sit down with the union at the negotiating table, while the mass media was 100 percent behind the miners. No-one then accused them of 'pulling the blanket over themselves'. Serious anti-government feelings were growing in society as a result of the war in Chechnya, which secured support for the miners' protest since it was directed against the government. There were conflicting political forces within the government: those who wanted to bring order using a firm hand and unleash war in Chechnya, and those who wanted to introduce 'pro-western' policies (Chubais's team). The fight revolved around the distribution of budget resources, and in this regard, the involvement of the miners in the struggle upset the emerging equilibrium in the government and forced the 'pro-marketeers' to wage war on two fronts. This forced them into a narrow position and compelled them to make concessions.

The activity of the directors' corpus, which supported the 1995 and, more circumspectly, the 1996 strikes in the regions and guaranteed impressive numbers of participants in the strikes also brought pressure to bear at federal level and helped to formulate public opinion of a mass and well-organised protest. However, as soon as funds were beaten from the government and began to arrive in the regions, strikes were called off in their enterprises. The unions' appeals for such forms of protest as the picket of the Russian parliament building were also supported and often financed by the directors as these protests were once again directed at the Centre and did not undermine the position of enterprise directors.

In assessing Rosugleprof's activity, it is clear that the trade unions did not have an independent position at federal level. The one-day strikes of September 1993 and March 1994 had been co-ordinated with, if not inspired by, the management of the

industry, while the decision to organise an all-Russian strike in 1995 was taken only after one region had already gone on strike and another had announced its intention to do so. Even after the strike began, the activity of the Russian Committee of the union was to a great extent determined by Rosugol's position.

It is relevant that during both strikes branch management were invited to the union's presidium meetings. The principle of holding pre-strike sessions of the Rosugleprof presidium with contributions from Rosugol's leaders on the situation in the branch and on government activities inevitably directed the union leaders' consciousness through the sector. Following speeches on the situation in the sector and the amount of money that had recently been sent by the government and how much was still owed to the sector, the coal managers would leave while the regional union leaders remained to decide what to do next. The union's actions were driven by a branch approach and the need to defend branch interests. At enterprise level, strikers appealed for help for the directors to pay wages which they could not independently receive from the Centre. In this sense, the union was playing an auxiliary role without having any decisive influence on the workers' level of involvement. In the absence of a trade union, the same sort of strike could have been organised by an enterprise director through the body in charge of production. Having received their wages, the workers peacefully returned to work, considering themselves to have fulfilled their task and ignoring the cries of the terkoms and trade union committees of other enterprises that they were undermining solidarity – which from the outset had, in any case, suited none of them. Thus the 1996 strike, which was opposed by management at federal level, collapsed within hours.

All of the miners' strikes focused on the issue of the non-payment of money from the budget. Not a single all-Russian or regional protest action related to mine

closures was held, despite the fact that the mass liquidation of jobs signified the loss of membership for the union and ultimately to its organisational and financial weakening. As the government restructuring programme envisaged the closure of 141 of Russia's 241 mines,¹⁴³ this was a powerful blow to the union and its membership, which produced no reaction from them. The all-Russian union organisation distanced itself from solid support for the workers of mines being closed, focusing only on the inclusion of social payments for them in the OTS and the TEO (feasibility studies for closure). Those workers who had worked in auxiliary jobs in the coal-producing infrastructure, which was automatically cut or else disappeared after the closure of a mine, were not taken into account at all.

Based on these facts, the conclusion can be drawn of a weak trade union movement on the whole and on the weakness of the protest actions held. The weakness of the trade union protest actions had a number of sources.

First, the lack of any trade union discipline as mines returned to work without any regard to the decisions of the union's executive body or of the meeting of mine representatives. This lack of discipline was encouraged by the fact that the union's constitution, adopted in reaction against the centralism of the Soviet era, leaves every collective free to make its own decision in all matters so that decisions of union executive bodies are not binding on the union's primary groups and the union has no sanction even against strike-breaking. However, underlying this lack of solidarity was the fact that national trade union actions had not been built up on the

¹⁴³ From a speech by Russia's Minister of Fuel and Energy, Yurii Shafranik, to an audience at the State Duma, while talking about labour conflict between the Russian government and Rosugleprof, 2 February 1996.

basis of actions at enterprise and regional levels, but in collaboration with branch management. This was expressed in the demands put forward by the miners: on the one hand, the demands for subsidy payments, which affected only a minority of workers; on the other hand, the attempt to achieve unity by the adoption of populist political demands that had no substantive content.

Second, underlying the lack of solidarity was the fact that many of the more profitable deep and open-cast mines had no interest in the outcome of the dispute since they do not depend on government subsidies. On the other hand, the union's demands did not address the main problem faced by these mines, which was the problem of non-payment by commercial customers. Despite appearances, the government has a responsibility for the latter situation since the problem arises primarily because coal enterprises have no sanction against defaulting customers because the coal industry is forbidden by the government to cut coal supplies to energy plants. Not only did many of these mines not join the strike, some even increased their output in an attempt to expand their markets. This activity not only undermined trade union solidarity but effectively negated the impact of the strike as a whole.

Third, lines of demarcation between employee and employer are still not clearly drawn, particularly in the coal industry which, although nominally privatised, remains in state control. Thus, at all meetings between trade union representatives and mine directors, general directors of the coal association and representatives of Rosugol', the latter constantly stress their common interest with the workers, that they are all in the same boat, that they are a single team negotiating with the government on behalf of the industry as a whole, and all these people remain members of the trade union, as they were in the soviet period. However, when the

chips are down and the workers need real support to extract concessions from the government, management at various levels appears on the other side of the barricades from the workers. Thus, while the directors were very happy to have the support of the trade union in their negotiations with the government, once matters came to a strike in 1996 and the directors themselves came under pressure from the government they used every trick in the book to press union representatives at all levels to call off the strike, putting them under strong personal pressure, spreading disinformation about the extent of the strike, deflating the figures to foster a defeatist spirit among the strikers, and paying out wages in order to undermine the strike.¹⁴⁴

Fourth, the strikes of the end of the 1980s to the middle of the 90s were powerful social lifts both for the regional and branch chiefs, and for the government officials, who used the strikes to strengthen their status. So, as a result of the Donbass strike the representatives of the Donetsk regional elite took up leading posts in the central bodies of authority; the All-Russia miners' strike of February, 1995 helped the Minister of Fuel and Energy and the General Director of Rosugol' to keep their jobs

¹⁴⁴ Viktor Nekrasov, the general director of one of the most powerful coal associations, Kuznetskugol', borrowed money at a high rate of interest in order to pay out wages and so to encourage several mines to return to work. This in turn provoked a chain reaction throughout the region, undermining the strike and the trade union of which Nekrasov is himself a member, but which has no power to sanction members who commit such acts. Similarly, as we have seen, Kuzbassrazrezugol' sold coal to the traditional customers of Vorkutaugol'. Malyshev, the general director of Rosugol', before and during the strike turned all his attention on the union rather than pressing the government to meet the workers' demands, arguing that the union's action was irresponsible and would provoke a crisis in the industry from which it would be difficult to recover.

(though officially they called on the miners to stop the strike, since 'it will finally destroy the coal industry').

In this chapter I have looked at the impact of the changing systems of financing of the coal-mining industry on the forms of strike action co-ordinated by the trade unions, and particularly Rosugleprof, at the national level. However, the national activity of the trade union has been built on, and at times has been directed against, the development of spontaneous strike activity at the enterprise and regional levels. Up to 1996 national actions proved reasonably successful in extracting an increase in the subsidy allocated to the coal-mining industry in the federal budget and, to a somewhat lesser extent, in securing the payment of the promised subsidy. But we have to complement this picture with the view from below, by looking at a series of case studies of strikes in coal-mining enterprises in order to investigate more closely what is the relationship between the activities of the trade union and the initiatives and experiences of its members.

Strikes in Russia:

The case of the coal-mining industry

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6 Conflict in a Coal-Mining Enterprise: A Case Study of Sudzhenskaya Mine

This chapter is based on material obtained as a result of research in which I was assisted by colleagues from the Kemerovo branch of ISITO, Veronika Bizyukova and Konstantin Burnyshev. The research at Sudzhenskaya mine (part of the Severokuzbassugol' concern) was conducted in November 1994. At that time a conflict which had begun in the middle of summer had ended and people had returned to work. Our group managed to observe how processes developed towards the final stage of the conflict and also, through numerous interviews with the representatives of the parties to the conflict, to establish the conflict's chronology from the very beginning. The interest of the strike at Sudzhenskaya mine is threefold. First, it was one of the first strikes in Kuzbass that arose around the non-payment of wages, rather than the failure to increase wages or the payment of wages in kind. Second, it was an extremely militant strike, in which workers blocked the Trans-Siberian Railway, establishing a precedent that would be followed in the 'rail wars'. Third, the strike involved both political organisations and the organs of state security in industrial relations for the first time in post-soviet Russia.

Miners' strikes have become quite normal in Kuzbass. During 1994 there were work stoppages in practically each coal town, in virtually every enterprise. Sometimes they were accompanied by the presentation of economic or political demands. Sometimes work stoppages had a purely spontaneous character. They

were also distinguished by their degree of institutionalisation. Some of the strikes took an organised form, headed by the trade unions or other organisation representing the workers. Others, as in the past, proceeded purely spontaneously.

The conflict in the Sudzhenskaya mine in Anzhero-Sudzhensk had a special significance because for the first time in several years of the existence of the workers' movement it saw the strong politicisation of a local conflict. Moreover the conflict acquired an explosive character, which led to the miners blocking the movement of trains on the neighbouring Trans-Siberian railway. Why did what began as a normal strike with traditional economic demands lead to extreme and illegal actions and the putting forward of political demands? – this question was the basis for undertaking special research, during which we conducted more than fifty interviews with workers, specialists, leaders of enterprises, trade unions and local administration. Apart from Sudzhenskaya mine, the research group also studied the situation in other coal enterprises in the town. Alongside interviews, the researchers collected documentary information on the development of production and employment in these enterprises. The case-study form of research required us to pay special attention to the description of the social context determining the processes in which we were interested, and to describe these processes in detail.

6.1 *General Characteristics of the town of Anzhero-Sudzhensk.*

Anzhero-Sudzhensk is located in the north of Kemerovo region, in the Yaiski administrative district, and is one of the oldest towns in Kuzbass. In 1994 the town had 107,000 inhabitants. As in all the cities of Kuzbass, Anzhero-Sudzhensk is an industrial town. The town is dominated by the coal industry, with nine coal enterprises, including four coal mines and two coal preparation plants, employing

altogether 16,226 people at the beginning of 1994. There are some other large enterprises, such as the joint-stock company Purin (a pharmaceutical chemical factory) and a large glass combine. Anzhero-Sudzhensk is also a large railway centre, located on the trans-Siberian railway. However the industrial nucleus of the city is made of up coal enterprises, both extractive and auxiliary.

Most of the Anzhero-Sudzhensk coal enterprises are part of the structure of the joint-stock company Severokuzbassugol', the former coal concern based in the regional capital, Kemerovo. Two enterprises, the Anzherskaya and Sudzhenskaya GOFs (enrichment plants and washeries), are part of the structure of the joint-stock company Kuzbassugleobogashchenie. The Anzhero-Sudzhensk mines account for 35.6 per cent of the output and 43.6 per cent of the employees of Severokuzbassugol'. The Anzhero-Sudzhensk mines do not particularly stand out from others in terms of their levels of pay. The level of pay in the unsuccessful mines, Anzherskaya and Sudzhenskaya, 116,000 and 117,000 roubles respectively, is similar to that of the similarly unsuccessful mines of Severnaya (Kemerovo) – 114,000 roubles – and Biryulinskaya (Berezovskii) – 101,000 roubles. And in Fizkul'turnik pay, at 156,000 roubles, is not much less than in the Berezovskaya mine, at 172,000 roubles (the highest pay in any of the mines of Severokuzbassugol' in 1993). None of the mines in Anzhero-Sudzhensk have been included in the category of mines recognised as having a long-term future and so eligible for state support for further development. Anzherskaya mine is the one mine in Kuzbass originally slated for closure in the government's restructuring programme, while all the other mines have to prove their viability, without significant new investment, which implies substantial job losses to raise productivity by concentrating production on thick seams and mechanised faces. The

situation is made worse by the fact that there are not even funds to complete existing development projects, including the completion of a new mine, Anzherskaya South.

The coal production of Severokuzbassugol', which covers the oldest mines in the region, is not very large, all the mines together producing only 5.8 million tons of coal in 1993, only 4.6 per cent of the total Kuzbass production.

6.2 *Sudzhenskaya mine as a source of conflict*

Sudzhenskaya mine was established in 1897. The seam which it works is steep, so coal production is still unmechanised. The mine belongs to Rosugol's category of mines without long-term prospects, and is usually considered in the city to be the second candidate for closure, following Anzherskaya.

At the time of the research the mine was the most restless in Anzhero-Sudzhensk. One can cite a number of factors which distinguish Sudzhenskaya from the other mining enterprises in the city which are relevant to this. The people who work in the other mines mostly live in the city, the majority of the workers at Sudzhenskaya live in the mining village of Sudzhenskaya. According to the chairman of the local trade union committee this is a patriarchal district. The Sudzhenskaya miners are much more likely to live in private houses than are miners of other mines. As a result of this work relations are duplicated in close neighbourly relations. One can say that there is a certain amount of communal support for one another. Moreover, living together in a small settlement over several generations, people have established networks of kinship relations with one another. It is not surprising that this spirit of communal living gives rise to regular gossip, so that everyone knows everything about everybody else, and purely domestic problems are transferred into the

enterprise. The relatives of the underground workers often work in the administration, so that everything that goes on in the office soon becomes known to every collective in the mine, and this inevitably has an impact on industrial relations. On the other hand, in the past the mine was frequently the winner of reviews, cultural contests, socialist competition and so on.

The result is that the mine is very lively, which has its positive and its negative side. As in any collective, there are conflicts and problems, but in the past they were all kept within the family because the collective was unified by the need to fulfil the plan, engage in socialist competition and so on. In the middle of the 1980s the mine produced 6,000 tons of coal per day. Now that reviews, socialist competition and all the other possible initiatives have disappeared, the existence of a high level of social tension at this enterprise, in comparison with others, has become evident.

It is also important to note that Sudzhenskaya was conventionally regarded as the ‘forge of the cadres’: many of the leaders of the North Kuzbass Coal Concern came from this mine, as did the deputy director of Rosugol’, formerly Soviet Deputy Minister of Mines, V.E. Zaidenvarg, who worked there from 1975 to 1978. The same could be said of the senior specialists of the other mines in the city, many of whom have passed through the school of Sudzhenskaya.

In 1994 the mine was living through difficult times. Despite its good geological prospects – its coal reserves are sufficient for one hundred years – the mine had been reducing production, and this tendency was accelerating.

Table 6.1: Coal Production and Production Costs, Sudzhenskaya mine, January to October 1994

Month	Production (Thousand tonnes)	Production Cost (Roubles per tonne)
January	24	61,823
February	13.5	76,763
March	24.5	72,965
April	26	54,208
May	21	71,905
June	12	132,871
July	12.8	105,971
August	16.5	99,741
September	4.8	238,404
October	about 1	about 1 million

Table 6.1 shows clearly how the decline in the volume of production leads to an increase in the cost per ton of coal. This combination of falling production and rising costs testifies to the catastrophic situation in which the mine finds itself.

Despite this, Sudzhenskaya maintained its high level of wages which, in the opinion of many experts (especially from other mines and cities) were not supported by real production.

Table 6.2: Average monthly pay by occupation, Sudzhenskaya mine, January to August 1994, in thousand roubles

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Faceworker	338.8	276.6	470.5	343.2	392.2	346.2	389.7	413.9
Development worker	384.6	139.7	462.8	468.4	385.4	447.2	437.9	496.0
Mining machine operator	173.0	123.6	214.8	207.7	235.2	230.0		
Electrician	211.9	126.9	254.5	249.3	309.0	259.6		
Third grade miner	190.2	135.9	236.2	207.7	276.1	253.8		
Electric wagon operator	195.9	139.9	210.8	365.2	350.4	286.3	276.3	279.1
ITR	302.7	233.9	562.2	520.9	567.7	566.4	489.5	430.5
Specialist	298.1	216.9	383.2	438.9	439.2	452.9	321.5	323.5
Office worker	277.4	179.6	233.2	215.9	227.6	137.4	259.0	184.6
Workers	256.6	158.6	307.1	280.5	333.9	326.8	278.6	352.1

Table 6.2 shows that despite the catastrophic decline in production, the pay of most categories of workers continued to grow steadily. Although in some trades earnings fell in particular months, the general tendency to a rise in earnings in every trade is clear.

An inevitable consequence of this situation has been a sharp decline in industrial discipline in the mine. Although pay is delayed by many months, the main reason is not so much the absence of money as the absence of work, and the lack of any certainty as to whether there will be work in the future. Rumours have been circulating freely in the mine and in the town over the past year and a half that the mines will be closed rapidly. This leads workers and specialists to look for jobs in other enterprises. Young specialists refuse to come to work in an enterprise without

a future. The decline in discipline has affected not only the workers but also the management of the mine. According to many of the workers, the mine director and senior managers had virtually stopped going underground since the spring of 1994, and had practically given up trying to control the situation. As a result of interruptions in the delivery of timber and other materials it had become the norm for workers to stop work and come up to the surface early. Delays in the payment of wages, which reached five months at Sudzhenskaya, completely undermined the role of pay as a material incentive to labour. Payment of bonuses for good work and the imposition of fines had equally been devalued as they would also have been eroded by inflation by the time the workers eventually received their pay. According to the mine's norm-setter the only remaining incentive to work is the fear of closure.

The distribution of goods to the workers, which was organised by management, was so small as to be insulting. The long delays in the payment of wages eventually led the workers to declare a strike in the middle of September. However neither the management of the concern Severokuzbassugol', to which the mine belonged, nor that of the highest branch structure Rosugol', paid any serious attention to the strike threat, so that when the strike broke out it assumed a very sharp form and acquired a clearly expressed political complexion.

Production in the mine stopped completely. The situation was made more complicated by the fact that Sudzhenskaya mine does not stockpile coal. Once the coal reaches the surface it goes immediately to the enrichment plant, whence it is loaded directly onto rail wagons. The production stoppage immediately threatened to stop the boiler house, which provides heating for the mine and the settlement. As a result middle and senior managers, under the supervision of the director, had to

work several shifts to produce coal without any workers, something completely unheard of in Kuzbass!

The staffing position also deteriorated rapidly. 928 employees left the mine in the first ten months of the year, almost one third of the total number of employees, of whom 855 (92 per cent) were production personnel. Over half of these people (468) left during August, September and October alone. Of those who left, 15 per cent were transferred to other enterprises and a further 46 per cent left voluntarily. These are the highest figures for severances of any enterprise in the city – even the closed Anzherskaya mine lost fewer people in this period.

It should be noted that the mine continued to recruit for this period, but over the ten months it only took on 186 people.

As a result of this, practically every section was incompletely staffed, and this particularly affected the coal-producing sections. As the best workers have left these sections, when it became necessary to resume production it turned out that there was nobody to do the work. And this was happening against the background of an increasingly difficult employment situation in the city. On the one hand, miners cannot find work, but on the other hand, the mine has vacancies in the production sections which nobody will fill because they have no confidence that the mine has a future – ‘it’s better nowhere than at Sudzhenskaya’.

This was the background to the sharpest conflict in Kuzbass.

6.3 *The Conflict at Sudzhenskaya - Chronology of Events.*

19 July:

The third shift did not go down the mine. They formulated demands which were addressed to the director of the mine.

20 July:

In the morning of July 20th the workers gathered in the 'smooth hall', as they call the hall in which shift meetings are held, a room which is completely run down, without a single chair. There the third shift declared a complete stoppage of work. A labour collective council (effectively a strike committee) was elected and demands were drawn up.

Demands which were put to the director (20 July 1994):

- 1) Payment of wages for April, May and June no later than 18 August 1994.
- 2) Payment of wages according to the collective agreement.
- 3) Payment of holiday pay at the proper time.
- 4) Issue of special clothing by 1 September 1994.
- 5) Correct pay to take account of inflation.
- 6) To sack the chief accountant of the mine [for machinations, V.B.].
- 7) To resolve all these issues with the strike committee
- 8) To clear heaps of wood from the car park near the mine.
- 9) To establish a conciliation commission which must resolve the issues by 3 August 1994.
- 10) To announce a strike for 1 September and express a lack of confidence in the director.

The director decided to establish a conciliation commission.

21 July:

The mine began to work again. A meeting of the labour collective decided to follow the requirement of the law that it was necessary to give at least 42 days notice of a strike. The date of the strike was set as 1st September and it was announced that until that date the mine would be in a pre-strike situation.

22 July:

The conciliation commission worked at the mine. As one of the means of smoothing the conflict it was proposed that 1100 people should be sent on regular vacation, partly paid, or on administrative vacation, without pay. However there were no practical results of the work of the commission.

July to September

Shift meetings took place practically every day, at which workers spoke. The director went to Moscow with the head of the department of labour and wages, but to no avail. Nevertheless the director regularly reassured the workers that there would be money.

In August representatives of the mine telephoned the office of the chief of the oblast administration, Mikhail B. Kislyuk, with the request that he meet representatives of the labour collective. Kislyuk thanked them for the invitation, but through his secretary told them that the meeting would be attended by his deputy, Ponin. The meeting with Ponin was attended by representatives of the STK (Labour Collective Council) of the mine. The STK representatives discussed among themselves the possibility of inviting representatives of the concern Severokuzbassugol' to the meeting, on the grounds that they could help the miners in their negotiations with the regional administration, but they did not come to any decision. However, when they arrived at the offices of the regional administration they found that the chief engineer of Severokuzbassugol', Boris G. Lotsenyuk, was already there. There was no dialogue with the representatives of the striking collective. Pronin merely said, 'I know about all your problems, there is no money. We can extend credit to you at

130 per cent'. The mine director refused to take the credit, as there was no way in which he would be able to repay it.

At the end of August a meeting was held with the chairman of the oblast legislative assembly, Kislyuk's political rival, Aman G. Tuleev. The complaints of the strikers were met with understanding, but everything was limited to purely moral support.

On 1st September the workers resolved to extend the pre-strike situation to 15th September, to give management a chance to find some way to resolve the problem of paying wages to the miners.

15 September:

The mine went on strike. From this moment meetings were held every day: in their section rooms with their ITR, and in shift meetings. The miners came to their section rooms at the beginning of their shift, were checked off, heard the latest news, and went back home. Services essential to keeping the mine intact continued to work. The mine administration tried to secure credit, worked on the problem of money with Shmokhin and Loparev (deputy chiefs of the regional administration), going to Kemerovo every day.

19 September:

The Sudzhenskaya miners for the first time went on an organised basis to the city square, to the Council House. There they had a meeting with the local authorities and with the chief engineer of Severokuzbassugol', Boris Lotsenyuk. At the suggestion of Lotsenyuk the miners at the meeting elected a working commission. The discussion took place behind closed doors, the press was not admitted, and the miners on the square knew nothing of the content or the outcome of the negotiations.

After the first meeting and expression of their demands, more days of fruitless waiting began.

October 4:

An all-mine workers' meeting was held, attended by 1500 people. People were indignant that despite being on strike for 21 days, nobody showed any concern for the fate of the miners. During this whole time nobody from the regional administration, from the company Rosugol', from the Ministry of Fuel and Energy, from the government, or from the regional committee of the trade union had been to the mine. Numerous visits to Kemerovo had likewise led to no practical results.

As before, the miners turned to the city administration with one demand – to help them to arrange a meeting with the head of the regional administration and with representatives of the higher echelons of power of the branch and the government – and decided once again to go to the City Council House.

On October 4th the situation got out of control. The STK was accused of procrastination. The strike committee sent a telegram to the General Director of Rosugol' in Moscow with the demand that he urgently consider the miners' demands to avoid a social explosion. Members of the STK met the chief of the city administration, Skorik, and demanded that Kislyuk or one of his deputies, representatives of Severokuzbassugol' and representatives of the ministry should come to Sudzhenskaya. Skorik answered that he had no power to invite such people. The head of the city administration refused to accept the sheet of paper with the demands of the miners and returned it to the representatives of the STK.

October 5:

On October 5th there was a further meeting at the Council House. Coming out to the people, the deputy chief of the city administration, V.I. Makarkin reported that 'we have sent telegrams to all the authorities, we have communicated with the concern Severokuzbassugol' and have telephoned Moscow'. Makarkin invited the miners to send two delegates to Kemerovo. 'They will just be put under pressure there', was the strikers' answer. This was already not enough for people. Cries rang out, 'how many people can be fed on promises?'; 'this is all words'; 'when will we get our wages?'. Meanwhile, before the miners had arrived at the square, the head of the city administration, Skorik, with whom the striking miners were going to meet, had got into his car and left. Many people regarded this as an insult, an expression of the unwillingness of the authorities to enter into discussions. In this deadlocked situation the cry, 'Well then, let us stop everything! We must block the main line [the trans-Siberian railway line]! Then they will pay attention to us!', was regarded as being completely justified.¹⁴⁵

About 500 people went down the street and blocked the trans-Siberian railway for four and a half hours. Several automobiles from the city Department of Internal Affairs accompanied the column of strikers, not interfering and not impeding them. Groups of OMON special forces were moved up to the blockade. The director of the mine, V.D. Shelkhov, who had been looking for money in Kemerovo, arrived. He was accompanied by representatives of the concern Severokuzbassugol', V.N.

¹⁴⁵ The idea of the closure of the railway by the miners had already been mentioned on the leading television programme Pulse at the time of the February strike as a possible response of the miners in the face of the complete inaction of the authorities. So the idea was already in the air, but thanks to television it had 'taken possession of the masses'. In this sense the role of the mass media is clearly under-estimated.

Usov and A.A. Filimonov, and by the Kuzbass representative of Rosugol', V. Ya. Shakhmatov. They explained their 'plan' to the assembled miners, which the General Director of Rosugol' had proposed to the strikers in a telegram: 200 million roubles would be sent to the miners that same day. If people went back to work, they would receive a further one billion roubles in one week, and one week later they would receive one billion more, with the rest of the money being paid in November, making a total of 4.2 billion roubles. On hearing this proposal the workers lifted the blockade.

October 6:

The meeting resumed in the morning. The labour collective was agitated about rumours that five of the participants in the previous day's meeting had been arrested. Arriving at the meeting, the public prosecutor of the city, N.M. Kravchenko, and the chief of the city Department of Internal Affairs, A.S. Shadrintsev, explained that these people had only been invited to give evidence as witnesses. Although nobody had been arrested, nevertheless a development worker from section 10, Eduard Yakvert, who had not immediately opened the door to the police, had been slapped into handcuffs and practically carried to the car, where he was handcuffed.

The strike continued. People did not trust the promises made to them, and decided only to resume work when the money owed to them had been paid.

October 8:

The meeting of the labour collective expressed its lack of confidence in the mine's lawyer, as a result of whose incompetence a secret ballot had not been held in advance of the strike, so that the strike had been declared illegal.

October 10, Monday:

A meeting of the mine collective took place in the mine's culture palace with the President of the Oblast Legislative Assembly, Aman Tuleev, the General Director of the concern Severokuzbassugol', E.V. Kukharenko, the Kuzbass representative of Rosugol', V. Ya. Shakhmatov, the deputy chief of the regional administration, Shmokhin, and the deputy chief of the city administration, V.I. Makarkin. Tuleev declared his full support for the demands of the Sudzhenskaya miners and for a counter-suit against the administration if they put pressure on the strikers. Kukharenko, speaking directly to the miners, said: 'It is time to put a stop to all these debates and suggestions about the closure of Sudzhenskaya mine. Nobody is going to close it. There are no two ways about it: the mine must and will work'. The strikers asked Tuleev to invite Zhirinovskii, notorious leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, to Anzhero-Sudzhensk.

October 18:

V. Zhirinovskii came to Anzhero-Sudzhensk. In the city culture palace he met with citizens of the town, including representatives of Sudzhenskaya mine. The meeting was clearly a success. Many people recalled, 'he won over the people of Anzhero!' The STK of Sudzhenskaya mine handed Zhirinovskii a letter with a request for the allocation of 3 billion roubles for the mine. The letter was addressed to the deputies of the State Duma belonging to Zhirinovskii's and Zyuganov's parties, the Liberal Democratic and Russian Communist Parties. According to one of the members of the STK, the day after Zhirinovskii's return to Moscow Oleg Soskovets spoke on the radio about the need to provide financial support for Sudzhenskaya.

A member of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) from Anzhero-Sudzhensk, A.A. Pushkarev, a lecturer at the Anzhero branch of Tomsk University, first appeared on the scene at the time of the meeting with Zhirinovskii. During the previous three or four days he had already established close contact with the members of the STK, and helped them to formulate the demands on the basis of which they would participate in the forthcoming all-Russian action of FNPR in Kemerovo. During a trip to Kemerovo he was acknowledged by the members of the STK as their secret leader.

Demands

The labour collective of the Sudzhenskaya mine and the Anzhero-Sudzhensk city organisation of the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia

Considering the catastrophic pace of economic destruction of the Russian state, the ignominious failure of the so-called 'reform', the inability and unwillingness of the state authorities to affect the life of the country, the shameless concealment of the truth about the real situation of the majority of the population of Russia from the mass media, and also the unjustified closure and transfer of state enterprise to shady people, we address to the President of the Russian Federation, B.N. Yeltsin, the government of the Russian Federation, the State Duma of Russia, the regional Legislative Assembly, personally to A.G. Tuleev and V.V. Zhirinovskii, and demand:

-) The resignation of President Yeltsin, the entire structure of the government of the Russian Federation, dissolution of the upper chamber of the Federal Assembly headed by Shumeiko by 1 December 1994 and subsequently, within three months, the re-election of these organs.
-) The authority of central state power should temporarily be invested in a coalition government composed of and under the leadership of the leaders of the largest fractions of the state duma: the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia, the Communists of Russia and the Agrarians.
- . In Kemerovo region: immediate (not later than 1 November 1994) resignation of the chief of administration B.M. Kislyuk and his re-election within six months, with the obligatory inclusion on the list of candidates for this post of the president of the regional Legislative Assembly, A.G. Tuleev.
- . [the newspaper did not print points 4 and 6. Either they left them out, or this was a misprint, V.B.] By January 1994 [sic., obviously it meant January 1995, V.B.] review the principles and course of privatisation of state enterprises in the region.
- . Within two weeks, by 1 November 1994, clearly, through the mass media of Kemerovo region, call the chief of Kemerovo air division and his accomplices to account for the refusal to allow a plane containing a delegation from the State Duma to land at Kemerovo airport on 2 October 1994.
- . By 1 December 1994 to remove from work and bring to criminal account journalists from Kemerovo television (whose names will be given in a statement from the headquarters of the strike movement), the director of the Kuzbass television and radio company, the editor of the newspaper *Komsomolets Kuzbassa* (now called *Kuznetskii Krai*) for crude distortion of the facts and meaning in reporting, information programmes and commentaries on the speech of V.V. Zhirinovskii devoted to the real economic and political state of affairs in Kuzbass. We demand the immediate removal of the strict information dictatorship and dishonesty on television and in the newspapers.
- . We demand that the above named chiefs of administration should organise from 1 November 1994 a daily, public and open discussion on TV of the most acute economic and political problems, with the participation of opposition parties and the wide representation of labour collectives in place of the air time devoted to entertainment, advertisements and Western trash.
- 0 For possible physical acts at the time of the political protest actions of the inhabitants of Kuzbass, we demand the criminal prosecution of representatives of the UVD, police, OMON and other responsible people in the administration.
- 1. The present demands are directed to the Legislative Assembly of Kemerovo region and the leader of the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia fraction of the Russian State Duma for them to make all members of the named organisations familiar with the demands

Extract from minute N1 of the meeting of the headquarters of the Anzhero-Sudzhensk strike movement, 26 October 1994. (*Yuridicheskaya gazeta*, special number for the Kuzbass miners, 44, 1994).

55 workers from the Sudzhenskaya mine participated in the trade union federation FNPR's national day of action in the Kemerovo region. A.A. Pushkarev, the LDPR member from Anzhero-Sudzhensk, read out the demands of the labour collective of Sudzhenskaya mine. Additional, political, demands, for the resignation of the government and the President and so on, had been added to those that had been put forward at the beginning of the strike. The 'Zhirinovskii style' was obvious in the statements and in the terms in which they were expressed.

November 2:

As a result of people's lack of trust in one another the regular re-election of the STK had become the norm, so that by now it had been re-elected four times. The fifth STK tried to call a trade union conference of the mine, but in fact it took the form of a workers' meeting, only attended by about 600 people. The meeting was also attended by Zaidenvarg and Shakhmatov, from Rosugol', and Pronin, from the regional administration. Pushkarev, the representative of the LDPR, also came to the meeting. None of the 'distinguished guests' were elected to the Presidium.

November 3:

38 people went from the mine to picket the session of the regional legislative assembly in support of Tuleev.

November 4:

In the morning about 300 people attended a meeting of the labour collective (which was effectively a shift meeting). The meeting was in favour of abandoning the strike. The majority of the workers were in the mood to return to work: 'There is no point in waiting any longer, we have to work'. However, Pushkarev appeared in the role of leader of the meeting, actively supported by members of the STK, and gave

a very emotional speech in which he claimed that journalists of the local television programme *Pulse* had already reported that Sudzhenskaya mine had resumed work. He called on the miners to repudiate this false information and to continue the strike until 11th November. This proposal was accepted by the participants at the meeting.

November 8:

The concern Severokuzbassugol' appointed as temporary acting director of the mine a pensioner, Vitalii Aleksandrovich Reimarov. Earlier, before working in Severokuzbassugol', Reimarov had been chief engineer at Sudzhenskaya. According to him, the post had been offered to several other people, but all had refused it.

November 10:

The deputy general director of Rosugol', V.E. Zaidenvarg, came to the mine to discuss industrial questions and the demands of the strikers. Zaidenvarg confirmed the support of Rosugol' for the mine, and said that the mine would survive provided that it could produce a minimum of 1,000 tons of coal per day. If it could not achieve this target, then he could give no guarantees. In order to encourage the workers to return to work it was decided to establish a plan for the second half of the month, beginning on 14th November, and to apply bonuses and every possible coefficient to the achievement of this plan.

November 11:

About 600 people attended a meeting of the labour collective at 8 a.m. The new director, Reimarov, and the LDPR representative, Pushkarev, both spoke. Reimarov announced that the money for July and August had already been received by the mine and would be paid out the following day, informed the meeting of

Zaidenvarg's guarantees and promised to do all that was in his power to enable people to begin to earn money, and not to ask for handouts like beggars. He supported the demands of the miners and declared: 'I am with you! But if we are to demand something, we have to supply coal'. He struck a chord with the meeting, and the workers confirmed their agreement to begin work. The director announced that, since a decision to resume work had been taken, from that day strict control of absenteeism, which the collective could do without, would be imposed. Pushkarev then spoke, declaring 'Lads, all dismissals – only through the STK! Do not be afraid of anybody!' He then read out the list of strikers' demands, including the demands for the resignation of the government, local administration leaders and the director of Kemerovo airport, who had not allowed a plane carrying a delegation of deputies of the State Duma from Zhirinovskii's faction to land. The final item on the list of demands stated: 'In the event of the failure to fulfil a single one of these demands, a political strike will be resumed, with the occupation of the enterprise, and strict control by permits on behalf of the STK, labour collective and strike committee.' Despite the persistence of Pushkarev, the director persuaded the miners to return to work. Pushkarev announced that the strike was suspended until November 20th.

November 21:

The workers of the first shift, after receiving their work instructions, went to the general hall. Pushkarev began to make a statement in the presence of about 80–90 people. Other people gradually drifted in, but there were never more than 180–200 people present. Pushkarev announced that a new organisation, the All-Kuzbass Labour Union, had been established, which included collectives of the factory Yurmash, Sudzhenskaya mine and several large enterprises in the Kemerovo region, and informed the meeting that Yurmash had resumed their strike from November

16th as they had not received the promised indexation of their back-pay. Following this he called for a renewal of the strike. However, the question was formulated in the following way: 'Who is for starting work?'. Two people voted in favour. Several workers began to say that there was no sense in stopping work again. After this everybody went back to their sections and the whole mine (apart perhaps for a few members of the STK) began work.

Members of the STK met to discuss what to do. They were joined by a representative of the Veterans' Council of the mine, explaining that the Coordinating Council for elections was preparing an All-Kuzbass action for 12th December, and that it would be best if members of the STK tour the whole region so that the whole thing would be organised. 'If you can arouse South Kuzbass, that would be something! What is the point of experimenting in one mine!' The members of the STK went to see the director, who agreed to pay their travel and subsistence expenses for their trip to various Kuzbass cities.

After this Pushkarev repeated his performance for workers of the second shift, having announced that the STK had adopted the decision to extend the pre-strike situation to 1st December, on which date the new director would present a report on the results for the second half of November, including the output figures and details of wages (the most sensitive issue in the mine).

The members of the STK discussed the question of the need to establish a city strike committee and the organisation of the workers' movement at the regional level. It just so happened that on the same day a meeting of workers' committees and the Kuzbass Independent Miners' Union (NPG) was taking place in Prokop'evsk. At

that meeting V. Sharipov, president of the executive committee of the NPG, was elected president of the Kuzbass Confederation of Labour, in place of V. Golikov.

21 November:

Members of the STK received a document from the concern Severokuzbassugol', which reported the decision to privatise the Sudzhenskaya mine. According to the minutes of a general meeting of the labour collective that had taken place as long ago as 1993, the labour collective had opposed privatisation even then. Now the negative attitude of the labour collective to this procedure had become even stronger.

One could say that the strike had ended. Or had it just been suspended? The sudden influx of money to pay wages, which had been unpaid for the previous eight months, provided only a temporary solution to the problem.

The role of management in the Sudzhenskaya conflict

In the opinion of the majority of the mine's employees the person mainly responsible for the mine finding itself in such a disastrous condition was the mine's director. The particular feature of the situation in which the mine found itself was that in reality all its consumers had settled their accounts, and the mine had received all the money due to it from the government under the branch agreement, but the director had given orders to the norm-setters to pay out more money in wages than was available. The director proceeded from the proposition that it was necessary 'to pay wages at a level worthy of a miner', independent of the level of production, but there was no real money behind his dud cheques. The workers think that full responsibility for this situation lies with the mine administration, since they did everything that was demanded of them and received their wage slips. Since the

mine is still a state enterprise they turned to the official structures with their demand for payment and for an investigation into the incompetence of their management.

The traditional problem 'of the first and second floor' (the relations of boss and subordinate) acquires a new significance in the light of the fact that the structure itself can collapse since the very existence of the mine is subject to doubt. How can the management talk about efficiency, when the worker considers that 'all the managers have taken to the bottle, they are all mixed up in nepotism and corruption, they steal and appropriate capital, they deceive the workers and the state'? The most reviled figures are the former director ('request? He did not request, he simply stole'), the chief of the garage and the chief accountant.

To be fair, we should also report another point of view:

the mine is the forge of personnel for other mines in the city; it works with the heritage of one hundred years of tradition; working night and day to maintain production; it was only due to the efforts of the ITR during the strike that the mine did not collapse; under their leadership reconstruction has practically been completed, which has been due to their efforts.

The ITR (engineering-technical workers) in the mine formally distance themselves from the methods of action of the workers. Those ITR who were originally elected to the STK (strike committee) subsequently left it. Some of them tried to stop the crowd going to the railway. However, the ordinary ITR and some of the managers identify with the demands of the workers, expressing their common interest in self-preservation: if we do not draw attention to our problems, there will be no mine, and no problems of subordinates and managers.

Thus, if the main idea of the 1989 strike was the idea of improving the miners' lives by transforming the system of management and the acquisition of independence by the mines, by 1994 it had been transformed into protest at the deterioration of life and the slow realisation of reforms. And at Sudzhenskaya, the main leitmotiv had become simply the survival of the collective (almost verging on the physical survival of its members).

The position of the mine management, by contrast to the clear and definite position of the workers, was ambiguous. On the one hand, they are also hired workers, who might lose their jobs if the enterprise closes. On the other hand, as executive authority, they come under pressure from above and must carry out a paradoxical policy: to manage in such a way that their subordinates leave. And they had partially succeeded in this: the number of workers in the main specialities had fallen to less than a third of that at the beginning of the year.

The mine managers have their own levers of influence which allow them to contain the discontent of the workers. One of these levers is wages, or, to be more exact, what is called 'painting a cheque'. The calculation of wages is made on the basis of direct orders from the director, and he has the power to differentiate pay in accordance with the loyalty displayed by this or that primary collective. This system does not in fact cost very much money, since modest increases to some categories of worker are levelled by inflation as a result of the long delays in payment.

As can be seen in Table 6.2 above, the managers pay themselves rather more than they pay the ordinary workers. The greatest gap in pay between workers and ITR was at the end of the spring and the beginning of summer 1994, when the ITR

earned considerably more even than face and development workers, since the production of coal had reduced, and then stopped completely.

It is necessary to look more closely at the tactics which the branch management employs. Their general aim is as far as possible to pay nothing and to give nothing. Sudzhenskaya mine is a graphic example: from May to October the workers went unpaid. Of course, this tactic might provoke a social explosion, but the cunning consists in not allowing it to happen in all mines at the same time, on the scale of the branch as a whole, having learned the lesson of 1989. And such micro-explosions as at Sudzhenskaya are extinguished as a matter of routine. These opportunistic half measures of Rosugol' and Severokuzbassugol' do not resolve the problems of the mine, but only gain time. The unwillingness of the coal generals to 'meet the people' is a logical consequence of these tactics.

A further feature of the development of the situation in Sudzhenskaya mine is that to draw attention to the problems of the miners a strike was not enough, the threshold at which the authorities reacted had increased. The miners had to stop the movement of trains on the Trans-Siberian railway, that is in another branch of production not directly related to the coal industry. A 'feedback loop' between the managers and the managed was only established at the level of the State and regional Dumas, through Zhirinovskii and Tuleev.

It was symptomatic that two people appeared on the stage who, at first sight, were mutually exclusive – the leader of the LDPR in the city, who was in fact the leader of the strike and of the subsequent protest actions, and the new acting director of the mine.

The now-dissolved classic soviet triangle, 'administration–party committee–trade union committee' expressed in a visible form the social harmony of interests in production. The absence of mechanisms for resolving conflict at the level of the enterprise, let alone of the section, means that 'the people' have to find new, untraditional, forms of action against management (for example, blocking the Trans-Siberian railway). This is possible both because of the weakness and lack of authority of the trade unions at Sudzhenskaya and the lack of collective responsibility on the part of the administration.

The vacuum was filled, on the one hand, by a radical politician, with a 'party' (LDPR) at his back and, on the other hand, a conservative manager from the old guard, with all the signs of a strong hand. Plus the STK (strike committee), as an institution which performed some of the functions of a trade union.

6.4 *The Role of Trade Unions in Conflict Situations*

The influence of the trade unions on enterprises is practically nil, particularly at the level of the resolution of conflicts between management and workers. In practice the trade union is concerned with the resolution of a limited range of traditional problems of social assistance (giving new year presents to children, providing material assistance and so on), thus carrying out the role of social department of the administration, and fulfilling various functions of social protection laid down by law, for example to agree to the formal redundancy procedures. In fact the trade union did not even have enough money to buy new year presents, and so even in this the enterprise had to help out (at Fizkul'turnik in Anzhero-Sudzhensk, for example, the enterprise covered fifty per cent of these costs).

The trade unions have no perceptible significance in the conclusion of the tariff agreement or in the collective agreement with the workers, whose main response is 'what do I get out of it?', having in mind the opportunity to receive free holidays and other goods. Because none of this has existed at any enterprise for a long time, for the workers the trade union does not exist either. As a result of the virtually complete inactivity of the trade union committee as such, the status of the trade union in the mine is almost completely determined by the role and 'strength' of the president of the trade union committee.

A 'strong' president tends to participate equally with the administration in resolving questions affecting the 'ability to live' of the mine, that is to obtain resources for the mine, to go to Severokuzbassugol' together with the administration to resolve financial problems. He is constantly in touch with the problems of the administration, but not of the productive subdivisions, spending his whole time in the administrative structures of the mine and concern. His obtaining money for the enterprise is welcomed by the workers, but their general attitude to the trade union does not change.

A 'weak' trade union president is occupied in the enterprise with those much reduced social functions which have traditionally been the concern of the trade union. He is not left out of representations at the higher level, but he is only able to do this as part of a group of trade union activists from the city.

Trade union activists in the mine take on a characteristically 'trade union' position only in planned mass actions, or if the director of the mine himself is in favour of a strike. The workers do not have any faith in the disinterested participation of the trade union in strikes.

At the level of the city, trade union presidents of coal enterprises, according to those interviewed, are much closer to one another than to presidents of other enterprises in Severokuzbassugol', or even to members of the regional committee of their union.

At Sudzhenskaya mine the state of trade union affairs was even more dramatic. 'The trade union has completely lost its role. It does not concern itself with labour discipline or with safety precautions.' The last trade union president left the post for a job in the administration in March 1994, after which the deputy served as acting president for four months, returning to his former post through the summer, coinciding with the announcement by the labour collective of a pre-strike situation, and becoming acting president once again in October. Thus, the announcement of a pre-strike situation in the mine, the start of the strike itself, and all the upheavals of the struggle during the strike took place without any kind of influence on the part of the miners' trade union. The elected STK (effectively a strike committee) took on the leadership of the strike itself. As the conflict became more aggravated and politicised the composition of the STK repeatedly changed, and in the final, most resolute, council the leader was a development worker who had left the trade union a year before, not seeing any point in the organisation.

From the beginning of the strike nobody from the regional committee of the trade union came to the enterprise. The president of the initial STK visited the regional committee three times, although this was probably only because the regional committee is in the building of Severokuzbassugol', to which the STK went to attend meetings. Only two members of the STK were members of the trade union committee, but this was purely formal membership, since the trade union body, as in other mines, was inactive.

In the case of Sudzhenskaya one can say that the misfortune of this mine is that it has no effective trade union at all.

6.5 *The Question of Two Trade Unions in the Mine*

In this connection it is not without interest to note that, in contrast to the majority of the other cities of Kuzbass, there is only one trade union in the Anzhero-Sudzhensk mines, the Independent Trade Union of Coal Industry Workers (NPRUP – Rosugleprof). The example of the strike in Sudzhenskaya provokes some reflections. As the members of the STK of the mine said, ‘it is always only the underground workers who strike, service and surface workers continue to work’. The group which was the most active was that which usually forms the base of the NPG. The idea of establishing NPG cells in the Anzhero-Sudzhensk mines had been expressed repeatedly, even on Kemerovo television. The absence of NPG from Anzhero-Sudzhensk was explained by the fact that: ‘Nobody from NPG has ever come here. We do not know what their aims are.’ In circumstances of a worsening economic situation in the coal-producing enterprises of Anzhero-Sudzhensk and the activation of a strike movement, the absence of NPG cells in the city’s mines can only be explained by the low level of activity of the leaders of NPG at regional level.

Given that there was growing social tension in the mines, the establishment of NPG cells in coal-mining enterprises is much to be preferred to the establishment of party cells, whose activity, as is shown by the example of Sudzhenskaya, has a destructive impact on production.

The conclusion drawn from the above might seem paradoxical in a situation in which all the talk among workers within the ranks of the trade unions is of the need

to overcome the divisions within the workers' movement. Nevertheless, there is some foundation for this conclusion. Irrespective of ideological or political differences between particular leaders of Rosugleprof (NPRUP) and NPG in the mines, they have a common basic interest in the stabilisation of the work of the enterprise and the preservation of the mine. This is the threshold that they will not cross, since they understand that however much they fight one another, tomorrow they all have to work together in the same mine. For leaders of political parties, who are included in the strike committee at the time of a strike, there are no such restraints, so that they are able without hesitation to sacrifice the enterprise for 'Great Russia', Justice, or any other political idea, concealing their political ambitions. (This was precisely the behaviour of the LDPR leader A. Pushkarev, by whose efforts the strike at Sudzhenskaya mine was extended, even though amongst themselves people were saying that they were tired of the strike and that it was time to go back to the mine.) The presence of two trade unions can be compared to the existence of a two party system in which, if you don't like one party, you can vote for the other. The situation with the trade unions is the same. The existence of NPG and Rosugleprof in one mine makes it possible to preserve a certain degree of stability, as the initiative passes from one to the other, there is a sort of counterbalance, so that there is no niche that can be filled by party activists coming from outside. This argument is no more than a working hypothesis which demands further investigation of the processes proceeding in other coal-mining enterprises.

In relation to Sudzhenskaya one can say that the misfortune of this mine was that neither trade union had an effective presence. During his last visit to Sudzhenskaya mine, the deputy general director of Rosugol', V. Zaidenvarg, argued that it was essential to hold new elections to the trade union committee as soon as possible,

because at the moment there is nothing to work with, nobody with whom to negotiate. On its side, the administration has an interest in the creation of a body which can express the interests of the workers and which carries some authority with them. The experience of Sudzhenskaya mine shows that where such organisations are not present, a vacuum forms which is filled by parties aspiring to power.

6.6 *The events at Sudzhenskaya from the point of view of workers in other mines in the city*

The situation in Sudzhenskaya mine that arose in the autumn of 1994, and the events that flowed from it, were actively discussed in other mines in the city. In the course of our investigation we asked ordinary miners, section heads and trade union leaders at Sibirskaya and Fizkul'turnik about their attitude to the Sudzhenskaya strike. The Fizkul'turnik Mine Management Company has for many years been considered to be the best mine in the town with a long-established director, who has retained the traditional authoritarian management structures. It has always had the highest output, the highest pay, the highest level of labour discipline. It has one mechanised face, and is mechanising a second, which will put it in a good position to meet the government's productivity targets, although this will imply job losses of 20–30 per cent. In anticipation of this the director ordered a stop to recruitment in the autumn, although the mine at that time still had 100 vacancies. The Sibirskaya Mine Management Company is in a much less favourable situation than Fizkultur'nik. It has always been regarded as a 'sink' enterprise, employing those who could not find a job anywhere else, and things had only got worse, with production down by a third and employment by 20 per cent in only two years,

leading to large losses in revenue and subsidies. These difficulties arose primarily because the mine was in transition, with one pit due for closure, but the future of the new pit due to replace it being uncertain. The labour force was demoralised, with high levels of distrust of management and a high level of labour turnover.

One can say that the attitude to the events of people in various positions, working in various mines, all came down to the same: everybody understood that one cannot live for five months without pay, and so supported the actions of the miners, who found themselves in a disastrous situation. The support for the Sudzhenskaya workers was expressed to varying degrees: from complete and unquestioning support to acknowledgement of the fact of the strike, qualified by an analysis of the circumstances. The workers interviewed all gave their full support to the strike, and most of them regretted the fact that they had not supported it actively. Their regrets were connected with the threat of long delays in the payment of wages, rumours of which were constantly circulating in the town. It had become quite normal for workers to endure the non-payment of wages for a period of three months, but during the fourth month tension begins to rise (and this was the situation in which many workers found themselves at that time), while if wages are delayed by five months the kind of spontaneous actions that developed at Sudzhenskaya become likely. The workers explained the length of their patient resignation by the fact that for the three summer months the workers had been able to survive on their subsidiary economic activities, primarily agricultural. However, the month of September was especially difficult for many because it was the beginning of the school year, which involves a lot of expense, and many spoke of the material difficulties connected with this. The eruption in October was explained by the

despair of people who had lost patience and, perhaps, simply could not support their families any longer.

The section chiefs related to the events unfolding at Sudzhenskaya with understanding, and considered the facts from the point of view of production and of the ordinary miner. The material situation of a section head is little different from that of the workers in his section, with his pay, as a rule, being as delayed as theirs. The section heads experience the same difficulties as their subordinates. They supported the Sudzhenskaya workers, describing the problems faced by the Sudzhenskaya miners very accurately. From the point of view of production they were concerned about the problem of preserving the mine in working order for the duration of the strike.

The trade union chairmen had attended the meetings of the Sudzhenskaya workers and their initial appraisals related to the conduct and procedure of the meetings, and then of the strike. They said that support for the strikers could have taken any form, but it was not sensible to stop the other mines. They offered instead the traditional forms of trade union support. For example, the organisation of delegations to various bodies (including to Moscow) to request that steps be taken to help the mine. The Sudzhenskaya miners did not accept that form of support, so dialogue between the mines broke down.

Different respondents saw the reasons for the events at Sudzhenskaya differently. The trade union leaders, backed up by the section heads, saw the main reason for the disintegration of the mine as being the activities of the former director, and they saw the demonstrative actions of the strikers as a result of the presence of 'outsiders' on the strike committee. The former director of Sudzhenskaya was

simply regarded as being incompetent, and a bad leader. Despite good reserves of coal he had brought the mine to the brink of ruin. When the representative of LDPR appeared on the scene, his speeches alienated the sympathy of workers from other mines for the strikers. The composition of the labour force of Sudzhenskaya had changed considerably over the previous six months, leaving workers with low skill and a bad reputation, which was seen as the reason for the strike.

Awareness of the course of the strike and of the process of disintegration of the mine gave rise to the same response among people in very different positions. At Fizkul'turnik, people repeatedly saw the events at Sudzhenskaya as analogous to their own situation. Respondents perceived the stages through which an operating mine could come to the verge of closure, and they saw clear signs of this same development in their own mine. Such sad analogies presented the employees of this mine with the question of what they would do in the same situation. Practically everyone had posed this question to himself, and came up with one of two answers, either to strike or to have patience. Nobody questioned saw a strike as an organised and legal form of activity. They had in mind much more a spontaneous strike, the results of which they evaluated variously: having the experience of their own strike in February, people already understood that an illegal strike put them at risk of dismissal, and many considered this to be a powerful restraining factor, but it is only possible to wait and to suffer up to a certain point, and people often spoke, half joking half serious, about the *possibility of more serious spontaneous actions at the time of the strike*.

The investigation of attitudes to the Sudzhenskaya strike has shown once more that there are no really united forces in the mines, and that there are no peaceful mechanisms for resolving conflict in the mines. Emotionally the mood is to strike,

as in the case of Sudzhenskaya, but there is no real organisation which could lead this process.

6.7 *Politicisation of the Conflict*

During the one-day strike on 19–20th July the labour collective formulated a number of demands which were addressed to the administration of the mine, the concern Severokuzbassugol' and Rosugol'. Apart from the demand for the sacking of the chief accountant and the expression of lack of confidence in the director of the mine, all the other demands concerned purely economic questions. During the subsequent period, when the mine was in a pre-strike situation until 15th September, and thereafter was on strike, the miners' representatives went from office to office in search of 'protection and justice', building up increasing rage against those in power, who would not pay the attention due to the miners' problems.

For a period of two months prior to the strike, and for the first 21 days of the strike itself, representatives of the labour collective turned to various authorities, using legal methods and official channels for the expression of their discontent. The lack of any reaction on the part of the authorities and branch management led to growing depression in the labour collective and pushed it into taking an extreme step with a single purpose, to draw the attention of leaders with the power to resolve their problems.

One fact is very indicative. During one of the meetings near the Council House the chief engineer of Severokuzbassugol' proposed that the strikers elect a working group to conduct negotiations. When the group was elected, the delegates were invited into one of the offices, and the press was excluded. The fact that nobody

was able to find out what was happening in the negotiations meant that, as far as the labour collective was concerned, nothing had changed. However minor this fact might seem, it was indicative of the style of relationships between managers and their subordinates.

It is typical that the administration uses the procedure of election and discussions with activists delegated by the labour collective not to resolve the problems, but to put pressure on the delegates, to intimidate them, to promise them goods or threaten particular individuals to win them round (this was not particularly the case at the meeting just referred to, but is nevertheless typical). As a result people refuse to participate in such activities, even though in principle they should be effective bodies, in favour of putting pressure on the administration through the mass action of the crowd as a more effective and safer method of interaction with the authorities for the workers. (This was the reaction to the offer by the deputy chief of the city administration to select two delegates to be sent to Kemerovo. 'There they will sort them out!' was almost a chorus from the workers). Thus representatives of the power structures have themselves done everything that they could to destroy even those few bodies through which conflict could be resolved and urged the workers on to mass outbursts, which are not in a position to put forward constructive proposals, or to enter into negotiations which might lead to a compromise, being resolved only by one hundred per cent concession to the workers, or by the use of force by the army or OMON.

The blockade of the Trans-Siberian railway by the Sudzhenskaya miners, although it attracted the attention of the whole country and made possible at least a temporary resolution of the problem of the five-month delay in payment of wages, nevertheless showed the miners once more that they had to oppose the whole of the

enormous state machine. The first reaction to the actions of the miners came from the city prosecutor and the city Department of Internal Affairs. The evening after the blockade five of the most active participants, one in handcuffs, were taken by the police to the city department 'in search of evidence'. Although they were released some hours later, the episode further agitated the whole labour collective. Criminal proceedings were instituted over the blockade of the railway. The city prosecutor and chief of the city Department of Internal Affairs spoke at the labour collective meeting the following morning. The state retaliatory machine once more tried to find 'the initiators and ring-leaders' and, without even trying to investigate the situation that had provoked people into acts of desperation, once more sought to resolve the problem on the level of the punishment of individuals.

The only support for the miners came from the opposition, in the form of Tuleev and Zhirinovskii. The former promised to act with a counter suit to instigate criminal proceedings against those who had provoked people into breaking the law, if the city law enforcement authorities did not close the proceedings against the Sudzhenskaya activists. The latter promised to solve the problem of the payment of money to the miners through the State Duma. As a result of these interventions, political demands became an inextricable part of the demands of the miners from the moment of the election of a new STK. At the meeting with Tuleev they declared: 'Aman Gumirovich, pay is not the main issue for us. We will go with you to the end and are ready for self-sacrifice'. The strike committee and the labour collective became instruments of political struggle.

All those we spoke to at the Sudzhenskaya mine recognised the positive impact of the blocking of the railway: 'the Trans-Siberian railway attracted the attention of the whole country'. Both workers and ITR fully supported the decision to close the

railway as the only possible way of drawing attention to the needs of the collective. At the same time representatives of the senior management of the mine understood that the mine at a particular time found itself at the heart of a political struggle and so it was necessary to use that moment to get everything that they could out of the government and Rosugol', since the situation could not persist for long.

The view was also put forward that 'today they are taking their revenge on the miners for 1989', since those same bureaucrats who determine the fate of the mines were previously in the obkom of the CPSU and in the Coal Ministry.

The level of politicisation of the conflict can be clearly seen if we compare the demands on which the Sudzhenskaya miners declared their pre-strike situation with the demands that they put forward at the end of the strike. The list of demands presented to the director on 20th July concerned the payment of money due for wages and holiday pay, the provision of special clothing, the sacking of the chief accountant for suspected machinations, and a declaration of lack of confidence in the director. The demands put forward jointly by the Sudzhenskaya labour collective and the Liberal Democratic Party on 26th October dealt with the question of the resignation of the President and the whole government of Russia and the resignation of the chief of the oblast administration, that is to say purely political questions.

The intervention of the Liberal Democratic Party in Sudzhenskaya mine proved to be only the first step in the renewed politicisation of industrial conflict in the coal-mining industry, as various political parties followed the LDPR's lead and sought to establish links with striking miners, and to form their own miners' organisations, with a view to the 1995 elections. Thus, according to A. Pushkarev, the LDPR co-

ordinator in Anzhero-Sudzhensk, in December by-elections to the regional Legislative Assembly were expected in eight constituencies, and ‘our candidates have already been put forward. We have to take power’. The LDPR was looking for support among workers in striking collectives and in collectives where discontent with the policies of the government was ripening.

6.8 *Institutionalisation of industrial conflict*

Despite the nominal privatisation of the coal mines, the fate of the enterprise still depends on the state, so that practically any industrial conflict takes on a political colouring. Conflict is politicised and the resolution of industrial, managerial and economic problems comes up against existing political structures.

In such a situation we have to consider the forms of institutionalisation of industrial conflict. The issue is, how will interests be represented?

The labour collective having allowed problems to accumulate for a long time, ‘stewing in their own juice’, uses established channels of expression of discontent – they do not work. They use a strike as the extreme measure – it does not work. Then they are ready to resort to desperate acts.

And then somebody comes from outside, the representative of a party. He offers a new channel of expression and direction of the seething discontent of the workers – the party channel, which takes over the delegated authority of the labour collective and uses it: tactically to put pressure on the power structures in the interests of the workers, strategically to force the ruling groups from power.

The example of Sudzhenskaya mine shows the use of this channel to transmit a letter containing the demands of the labour collective to Zhirinovskii and Zyuganov.

This channel was effective, since Soskovets, the Vice-Premier of the Russian Government, immediately spoke on Russian radio calling for financial support for the mine.

Thus for a certain period there is a consensus between workers and party. On the one hand, using political levers, the party leaders extract money for the mine and help the labour collective (for a time) resolve its financial problems. On the other hand, the party acquires authority and influence in the political competition.

One can conclude that in the absence of effective legal or trade union channels for transmitting complaints and resolving industrial conflicts, the party becomes a new channel of management of popular unrest and the institutionalisation of industrial conflict begins to take on a party form.

Official channels do not fulfil this function. We can cite two examples:

First, members of the STK of Sudzhenskaya mine handed a list of demands to the head of the city administration, Skorik, and demanded that he organise a meeting with the chief of the regional administration and the leaders of Rosugol', a perfectly legal request, which did not violate any legal norms. The head of the city replied that, first, he did not have the authority to invite higher level leaders (establishing the first barrier for the strikers) and, second, he refused even to accept the list of demands from the members of the STK. In this way he blocked the legal channels for the expression of discontent, and the workers began to look for more roundabout, including illegal, means to make themselves heard. Basically they simply demanded that the authorities competent to take the necessary decisions should sit at the negotiating table with them as equal partners. In other cases elected organs (for example, a working group or initiative group drawn from the strikers to

conduct negotiations with the authorities) were used by the authorities not to resolve the conflict, but for 'sorting out the individual ring-leaders'.

The second example: having used the channel of Skorik, and having failed to negotiate with the chief engineer of the concern Severokuzbassugol' and other bureaucrats, the workers decided to send a letter with their request for help to Zhirinovskii. That is to say, they used a roundabout, party political, channel to put pressure on Rosugol' not from below, but from above, through the State Duma, the government and other structures. At the same time there is nothing new in all of this: it is simply one more case of the influence on production processes of 'the party line', but now in the conditions of a multi-party system. What happened, from the point of view of the labour collective, was lobbying for their interests through party channels. In present circumstances it would appear to be impossible to exert such pressure through the trade unions, since it is only parties and not trade unions who can put forward candidates for deputy.

6.9 *Future Prospects*

The atmosphere in Anzhero-Sudzhensk was one of impending catastrophe. Everybody, regardless of their status or qualifications, talked about the death of the city, about the impending end of everything, that that is what it will come to. In such conditions people develop a 'catastrophic', 'crisis' consciousness, in which they can see no way out and try to solve everything with brute physical force. Even in the 1930s the Anzhero mines were not anticipated to have a long life, so that the 'crisis' consciousness of the population of the city as a whole has fairly deep historical roots. One of the indirect indicators of this crisis situation is the fact that the death-rate is already twice as high as the birth-rate. Since everybody finds

themselves just waiting, they are unable to force themselves to undertake something constructive, to get themselves under control and start to look for positive solutions.

Statements about the need to establish order and execute the mafia and state bureaucrats are as widespread among junior mine managers as they are among workers. Many of them admit that they personally, or those close to them, would commit robberies and theft (including from their own senior managers, trains on the Trans-Siberian railway, and so on.). Here are just two extracts from interviews with mine employees from the town:

But it is a matter of psychology – I cannot sell, but I can steal. Not from private individuals, but from the state – from what is left of it.

Where is there to go in the city for those who have been dismissed?

Where to go? To thief, steal ...

From whom – from equally poor people, only from other mines?

Why? we can rob the trains, the Transiberian goes through here.

It should be emphasised that these statements were made by junior managers.

Among political leaders the strongest sympathy was for Zhirinovskii and General Lebed. A Pinochet figure had appeared as the prototype of a future Russian leader in the consciousness of workers and middle managers in all the mines around the city, from the half-collapsed Sudzhenskaya to the presently safe Fizkul'turnik.

On the basis of what people said to us, one can predict a high probability that they would be forced into illegal actions as they came face-to-face with the reality of unemployment, with no prospect of finding an acceptable alternative job. The rise of criminality, which threatens to grow from the actions of discrete mafia groups into a mass phenomenon, will imply levels of expenditure on the law-enforcement

agencies that will dwarf the present subsidies to the coal-mining industry. Mass unemployment in present conditions implies mass criminality and the transformation of small mining towns into leading criminal-producing regions. Since the state gives the workers no opportunity to determine their own fate, the miners end up in despair, and simply to secure their most basic survival, are forced to break the law.

The absence of constructive solutions on the part of the branch and local authorities leads the employees of the enterprises to take destructive actions, one of which was closing the Trans-Siberian railway. People spoke about the possibility of blocking or even of blowing up the oil pipeline that passes near the city if further problems arose. It is to be expected that explosions of social indignation in the city should be accompanied by explosions of dynamite. According to the editor of the miners' newspaper '*V boi za ugol*', two young people had recently blown themselves up while trying to blow up a smart private residence, which had been built in the settlement by the Anzhero coal concentration plant. The charge did not go off properly and the two young men were killed. When all the mines have explosive-drilling sections, access to explosives is no particular problem if the miners find themselves driven into a corner.

6.10 Conclusions

It is important to note that the Sudzhenskaya strike took place at around the high point of effective trade union action at the national level, following the one-day strikes of September 1993 and March 1994 and shortly before the very effective strike of February 1995, yet neither trade union played any significant role in the strike. The trade union committee of the enterprise was defunct. In the struggle the

Sudzhenskaya workers were not supported by labour collectives of other coal enterprises of the city. In spite of the fact that the miners took part in the national FNPR day of action, neither the regional trade union council nor the leadership of the branch trade union provided any support. The chairman of the regional committee of the miners' union did not once come to the mine, and he was not involved in the conflict in any way. This testifies to the absence of solidarity and weak coordination between trade union committees inside one territorial association, let alone at the regional or all-Russian level. There seems to be a complete disjunction between the problems and struggles of the workers at the level of the mine and the battles being waged by the trade unions at national level. The inactivity of the trade union committee resulted in the choice of the STK, carrying out the role of a strike committee, confirming the hypothesis that alternative bodies of workers' self-management arise when existing bodies do not work effectively. The absence of effective industrial relations channels through which to articulate and resolve their grievances led the workers to take more desperate and potentially forcible action. The failure of the workers to achieve any expressions of solidarity on a wider trade union basis led them eventually to turn to authoritarian political figures and political forces in the hope that they would resolve their problems. But the involvement of the security forces shows that there are limits to the means which the state will allow workers to adopt in pursuit of their aims.

The strike at the mine began spontaneously, which is characteristic of Russian enterprises. The high level of worker self-organisation during the first phase of the conflict, which led to the creation of a Labour Collective Council, which played a role in the activities of the strike committee, and also their endeavours to follow the demands of the law and to obtain their aims using the rights provided for by law

was unusual. This is what facilitated their return to their jobs after the spontaneous strike action.

The STK formulated demands addressed to the director. The director created a Conciliation Commission. The activity of both parties was conducted within the framework of the Law on the Resolution of Collective Labour Disputes. Subsequent events, which went outside the framework of the law, showed that the channels for putting forward complaints and for the resolution of conflict do not work. Effective labour relations institutions did not emerge in the course of the conflict. There are established legal procedures, but going through them does not lead to the satisfaction of the workers' demands. None of the participants in the conflict turned to the court. Though it is clear that the problem of payments would not be resolved, since any judicial decision would be referred back to the enterprise, the fact that the workers completely ignored the court as a mechanism for the resolution of conflicts says something about their level of legal literacy and the accepted practice of resolving conflicts by methods of force. During the strike there was the addition of political demands, and also the demand for the resignation of the director. It is a feature of this, and perhaps of the majority of Russian conflicts, that, having begun as a labour dispute, it developed into a political conflict.

The politicisation of the conflict appeared to be a factor facilitating its rapid resolution. The entry of the LDPR representative as an outsider was the first example of the participation of a political force in strikes at a coal enterprise really influencing the course of the conflict. However, this influence appeared to be short-term, and after the end of the strike the representative of the political organisation left the game, because he was not included in the labour process.

Since Sudzhenskaya mine was scheduled for closure, management was not worried about a strike. In some respects it even facilitates the resolution of financial problems for the branch leadership: it is not necessary to pay for the time that the mine is not working, while the voluntary departure of a large number of workers saves having to pay redundancy compensation. At the same time as the demand for the preservation of the enterprise was put forward during the strike, rumours persistently circulated about its preparation for closure. After the barbarous closure of Cherkasovskaya mine (Prokop'evskugol') in July, 1994 the miners began to take the threat of closure more seriously. Subsequent events in Kuzbass have shown that quite often strikes have pushed the management of the branch to adopt a decision to close a mine. In due course the result was that the workers of 'unpromising' mines were afraid to strike, and the strike became a 'privilege' of more prosperous enterprises.

Though the delays in wages reached three months, the chiefs of the branch did not anticipate any intervention to quench the flames of social discontent. The example of Sudzhenskaya is also interesting in that it was one of the first strikes in the country connected with the non-payment of wages. Prior to this most actions had been undertaken for other economic reasons, of which the low level of wages and payment of a part of wages in kind were the main ones.

The decision to block the railway arose after several months of ineffectual opposition. During the strike the readiness of the miners to take more active steps ripened. *The strike was the organisational factor rallying the workers for more radical protest actions which went beyond the frameworks laid down by the labour legislation.* The Sudzhenskaya strike differs from all previous conflicts in its radicalism. Besides, it was the first serious case in which the directorate came up

against the fact that traditional methods of management in new conditions create impasses (the payment of obviously unreal wages, for the payment of which the enterprise will not have money), with which they are not able to cope.

The sacking of the director was the traditional Soviet method of resolving labour conflict. The individual who, by virtue of his status position, became the source of irritation of the workers in the course of the confrontation was eliminated. This individual might be the worker activist who initiated the conflict. In the case of Sudzhenskaya this was exemplified by the arrest of the initiators of the workers' action, who, however, were released after questioning, as a result of the fear of the authorities that if the workers' leaders were detained for long there could be a further explosion of protest. If 'the violators of order' from among the workers cannot be removed as a result of their support from the labour collective, the chief is removed from his post as being 'unable to cope with his duties'. The system which reproduces the conflict and pushes together the people engaged in the labour process remains unchanged.

The more active intervention of law-enforcement bodies at a late stage of the conflict is interesting. The 'forces of law and order' in the form of the police and the OMON (special forces which have been created in the democratic era) were always present in the background whenever any action went beyond the boundaries of the enterprise. The threat of the application of force by the official authorities always existed; fears were especially strong during the 1989 strike, when the 'Soviet syndrome' was still very strong and rumours increasingly circulated among the strikers about 'army divisions being moved up' and 'special detachments for dispersal'. However, the authorities never went beyond threats to their application. The STK leaders were not arrested during the protest action, but at home,

demonstrating the continuity of the use by the forces of law and order of the practice of Stalinist times, when they took 'enemies of the people' at night, instilling fear in their neighbours. Though physical force was also used during the detention of the worker activists, in the main the law-enforcement bodies did not go beyond the framework of the law. In subsequent chapters we shall return to the question of the role of power structures in the development of labour conflicts, here the significant fact is that for the first time since the proclamation of *perestroika* and *glasnost* these structures had begun really to intervene in labour conflict.

7 Labour Conflicts in Kuzbass – Four Cases from Spring-Summer 1997

Following the collapse of the 1996 strike, and a similarly abortive national strike in December 1996, Rosugleprof was unable to achieve any co-ordinated industrial action at the national level and confined itself to symbolic demonstrations and lobbying in the corridors of government and the Duma, although FNPR continued to organise its symbolic days of action. Meanwhile, social tension began to increase notably in Russian coal regions in the spring of 1997. The Kuzbass coal basin in particular provides a large amount of information on local strikes. Dissatisfaction with the course of reforms conducted by the government and the consequences of the restructuring of the Russian coal industry was expressed at city protest meetings throughout the region, at which the voices of the communists and their supporters were increasingly heard. The 1996 presidential elections demonstrated that there were significantly fewer supporters of Boris Yeltsin amongst the miners than perceived by the Kremlin itself; Kuzbass provided one of the lowest percentages of votes 'for' Yeltsin. This provided a pretext for accusations against the miners that they had an 'arrangement' with the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), and for the press to begin to refer increasingly to 'Red Kuzbass'.¹⁴⁶

The aim of the research interest was, against this background, by means of looking at various cases in Kuzbass to collect information on the processes occurring, and

¹⁴⁶ This chapter is based on research conducted with colleagues from the Kemerovo and Samara branches of ISITO, Petr Bizyukov, Konstantin Burnyshev and Irina Kozina.

the prevalent mood amongst the workers, and to try to provide an objective assessment of the state of the workers' movement.

Four enterprises were selected in which to conduct case studies: Yagunovskaya mine (part of the Severokuzbassugol' Joint Stock Company in the town of Kemerovo), Fizkul'turnik mine management company (also part of the Severokuzbassugol' Joint Stock Company, but located in Anzhero-Sudzhensk), Tsentral'naya mine (Prokop'evskugol' Joint Stock Company, Prokop'evsk) and Biryulinskaya mine (Severokuzbassugol' Joint Stock Company in the town of Berezovskii). These four enterprises were selected on the basis of an analysis of the local press, which indicated that conflict was evidently overt and sustained, and that the workers were undertaking (or were declaring their readiness to begin) more radical activities to force the employers to meet their demands.

The research began in the middle of April 1997. Wage debts had continued to accumulate and by March, 1997 had reached a total of 50 trillion roubles, of which budget sector workers were owed 9 trillion. An All-Russian day of action was called by the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) for March 27 under the slogan 'Wages! Employment! Legality!'. On the eve of the action the government 'found' 4 trillion roubles, which was urgently sent to the regions to pay off wage debts. This to some extent undermined the spirit of unity, and not all those who had planned to take part in the action actually joined it. Nevertheless, the Day of United Collective Action had a wide resonance in Russia and abroad. The data on the number of participants issued by different sources varied strongly. The trade unions claimed 20 million participants, 5 million of whom struck for the day. The Ministry of Internal Affairs reported 1.8 million participants, while Goskomstat claimed, on the basis of enterprises' statistical reporting, that only 412.6 thousand

were on strike (*ASTI Bulletin*, 13-14, April 1997, p. 1). This was the first time that the alternative trade-union associations, the All-Russian Confederation of labour (VKT) and the Confederation of Labour of Russia (KTR) had participated in a joint action with FNPR. Despite growing discontent with the course of the government and universal demands for the resignation of the president and a change of government, the FNPR organisers of the action only put forward economic demands concerning the payment of wage debts and a change of the course of reforms.¹⁴⁷ Because the level of organisation and degree of discipline varied considerably between different branch and regional trade union organisations, FNPR decided not to define a uniform form of expression of the protest, and declared that each organisation should express its protest in the form most convenient to it. Therefore some workers came out on strike, others held meetings at their enterprises, while elsewhere they participated in city-wide meetings. It is important to note that our research began three weeks after the end of the All-Russia action, which had created a particular social context and allowed us to see what kind of impact actions organised by federal trade-union bodies had at local level.

In the spring of 1997 the Russian government had been talking of the beginning of stabilisation and even a rise in production. According to information from the regions, however, at the same time, having not received their wages for as much as nine months, people had reached the point of despair. A few days prior to the

¹⁴⁷ FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov argued that for FNPR to come out with political demands it was necessary that more than half the regional organisations should take such a decision at their meetings. Only 39 out of 89 regions decided to demand the resignation of the President and a change of government at their meetings on 27 March (information from Deputy President of FNPR, Aleksei Surikov at the meeting of the FNPR Executive Committee, May 1997).

beginning of the research, central television showed an interview with the Minister of Economics, Yakov Urinson, who labelled the processes occurring in the coal industry as the most progressive in the country. It was therefore also interesting from the point of view of the research to see why miners continued to strike in spite of the improvements and stabilisation announced by the government.

In addition to offering a traditional chronology of the conflicts, which facilitates the task of analysis, this chapter also presents significant quotations from interviews with those participating in protest action (particularly at Tsentral'naya mine). This helps to reconstruct the atmosphere of events, to illustrate the social context, and to explain the actions of workers within the framework of the given context.

7.1 *Fizkul'turnik Mine Management Enterprise*

Unlike the strike in Anzhero-Sudzhensk considered in the previous chapter, in this case the strike involved workers of the entire city. The condition for such a large-scale strike was the FNPR day of action, which raised the expectations of workers without providing any channels through which they could resolve the problem of non-payment of their wages. But it also followed an earlier initiative in which representatives of the workers had been organised to lobby by the city administration and the workers' demands were filtered by the local administration and the mine directors. As in the previous case, the workers' frustration spilled over into the blocking of the Trans-Siberian Railway which led to a transfer of funds which covered only a part of the wages due, but the security forces prevented an escalation of the conflict and the workers accepted what they could get.

The enterprise struck on 4 April 1997, following an announcement from the director that wages for July 1996 (!) would be paid no earlier than 20 April. Only a few days

earlier he had assured the workers that they would be paid by 15 April at the latest. Taking him at his word, the workers had refrained from striking, despite a visit to the mine from representatives of Sudzhenskaya and Sibirskaya mines, which had stopped work following the all-Russian protest action of 27 March organised by the FNPR.

The reason for the strike was conventional – many months of accumulated wage arrears. Protests were also provoked by various events: a) an extension of wage periods, that is, thwarted expectations; b) the arrival of the eve of the FNPR's all-Russian protest action; c) a visit to the enterprise by activists from other mines in the town which had ceased work following the all-Russian trade union action.

The trade-union committee (the only trade union at the mine was Rosugleprofsoyuz) did not play any appreciable role in the organisation of the strike. A mine strike committee of twelve men – one from each section – was elected without the participation of the trade union. Meetings were organised spontaneously before the beginning of each shift. Traditionally workers all go to work together in mine buses. As the majority of the mine's workers live in the neighbourhood, the whole mine immediately finds out about anything that has happened in one section. The buses bring the people 20-30 minutes before the beginning of the *naryad*, when they gather in their sections and are assigned their tasks for the shift. They usually spend the time before the *naryad* talking in the corridor or standing around in groups in front of the administration building. It was at this particular time, during their conversations, that the decision to call a general meeting and begin a strike ripened. 'The trade union chairman initially wanted to smooth the conflict, but then he understood that there was nowhere to go and he

joined the strike committee' (Conversation with one of the members of the strike committee, 20.04.97).

A united town workers' committee was created through the joint efforts of the workers of the three striking mines, together with health workers, workers in medical insurance, and those in the glass factory, who had not received their wages for three and a half years! The workers' committee co-ordinated protest activity outside the framework of individual enterprises. Correspondingly, thanks to the activity of the workers' committee, industrial conflicts assumed a public resonance: they went outside the enterprises in the form of radical politicised actions (pickets of administration buildings, railroads etc.)

On 9 April, miners from the three mines gathered together on the town square near the building of the local administration. The strikers' demands were that wage debts should be paid up to February 1997. After the receipt of a first tranche of 20 billion roubles, part of the money had been transferred to the Pension Fund (members of the city strike committee referred to tax privileges: according to them, less than the 28% of the wage bill laid down by the law was transferred to the Pension Fund). To cover the wage debts of the city up to February the strikers had to beat 206 billion roubles out of the Centre, including taxes.

There were around 800 people at the meeting. Following appearances by the organisers of the protest action and all those wanting to speak, a discussion began on what further action should be taken. Suggestions from the crowd included: 'Storm the town administration', and 'Block the railroad!' All proposals were put to a vote. The first was rejected by the majority, while the second was voted for almost unanimously (only 5 people raised their hands 'against'). As one of the participants

in the blockade humorously remarked: 'The statue of Lenin on the square by the city council house is pointing particularly towards the railway. So we were sent by Lenin'.

Once the decision was taken, the meeting's participants headed off in the direction of the railroad, one kilometre away from the square. The guardians of the peace present on the square did not hinder the movement of the crowd.¹⁴⁸

The railroad was blocked for 17 hours and re-opened only after the miners had been subjected to many hours of 'persuasion' on the part of representatives of the regional Department for Internal Affairs (UVD), and following the signing of a schedule for the payment of wages by the general director of the coal company and the head of the city administration. In comparison with the first railroad blockade in 1994, when a train was held up for 4 hours, the 1997 blockade lasted for 17 hours before the administration reacted. This suggests that the level of sensitivity of the official structures to workers' protest action had declined.

The participants in the city action of April 9 explain the decisions of the people to block the railway thus: 'During the congress of coal industry workers, which took place in Kemerovo on March 22, the Anzhero-Sudzhensk representatives gave to Chubais a plan for the socio-economic development of the city. He promised to consider it and to give us an answer by April 10. But by April 10 there had not been any answer, instead we were informed that everything had been transferred to the Interdepartmental Commission on Social and Economic Issues in Coal Regions

¹⁴⁸ The miners' opinion of the local police was that 'Our local young lads won't interfere'. Here it was in everybody's interests that the money should be paid, since some of the wages money was usually paid as taxes into the budget.

(MVK), which was to be held on April 18 in Moscow under the presidency of Chubais. But the people were already on the limit and could not wait.' From these words it is clear that the city authorities used the picket established by the Anzhero-Sudzhensk miners during the miners congress in Kemerovo, to lobby for the financing of the city's socio-economic plan, having passed it to the First Vice-Premier of the Russian government. It was abundantly clear that the people resorted to the blockade not because of the transfer to the session of the MVK, but because the local authorities and the directors had linked the repayment of unpaid wages in the heads of the workers with the financing of the city socio-economic development programme.

Following the end of the protest, it was widely publicised in the local press that arrears to the miners had been paid off up to and including December. As it transpired, however, of the 9 months of wage arrears owed, only 2 months were settled – for July and August of 1996. Understandably, this did not satisfy the workers and the strike continued. Disillusioned with trying to find justice in their country, the workers sent a letter to the European Parliament, the International Labour Organisation and to the European Commission on Human Rights. The letter sent by the associated workers' committee of Anzhero-Sudzhensk ended with the words, 'We appeal to you in the last instance with a request to protect us. Please help.'

Around the same time, the meeting of the MVK was held in Moscow on 18 April, chaired by Anatolii Chubais. It was proposed that the Commission make a decision on Anzhero-Sudzhensk, one which would satisfy all of the townspeople. As a result, the striking workers did not take dynamic action. The expected miracle, however, did not happen. A decision was taken during the meeting on financing a

development programme in the town of Anzhero-Sudzhensk, but there was no extra money for the payment of wages. The town authorities were thus able to use the miners' protest to lobby their own interests and to become the main recipients of cash injections to the region.

When the miners had still not received the expected money 4 days after the meeting of the MVK, on 23 April the united town workers' committee held yet another city meeting. Representatives of the coal company read out a schedule for paying off wage arrears, with which those present at the meeting did not agree. 'We're fed up to the back teeth of these schedules. We're sick to death of them' – they declared and decided to block the railroad for a second time. A column set out for the Transsib. On the approach to the railroad, however, they were met by three cordons of riot police, policemen and military cadets. Fortunately, there was no clash, and having confronted each other for several hours, the participants in the protest action decided to accept the earlier proposed wage arrears' repayment schedule to pay off wage debts, and all went home.

Observation of the meetings of the striking workers with the mine directors provides plenty of evidence to confirm that the directors also manipulated the workers, shifting the emphasis of the demands put forward by them from wages to the resolution of the directors' problems. Thus, in the mass media, it was said that the government did not owe anything to the miners. The subsidy per tonne of extracted coal in the Anzhero-Sudzhensk mines amounted altogether to 10,000 roubles.¹⁴⁹ The government had paid this sum, but it was not enough to pay off the wage debts.

¹⁴⁹ When the price of coal was 230,000 roubles a tonne.

The situation at Fizkul'turnik looked like this: 'The mine employs more than 2,000 people, they produce about 50,000 tonnes of coal a month. For delivery to the concentrate factory the mine pays the railroad 30,000 roubles for each tonne and 30,000 for each tonne of concentrate. We sell the coal through Uglesbyt for 230,000, but we get only 15% of that in 'live' money. In order to get something for wages we have to turn to intermediaries and sell to them at 150,000, but that is for 'live' money. Now, after the liquidation of the Kemerovo Railways, the Novosibirsk Railways demand 50% pre-payment for carriage in live money' (interview with section chief of Fizkul'turnik, 20.04.97). The meeting of the Fizkul'turnik strikers with the General Director of the Severokuzbassugol' association showed that the strike was financially profitable for the mine directors and coal associations since they did not have to pay the workers for the days of the strike. 'We asked him if it was true that the more we work the more the mine's debts accumulate. Every tonne is more loss? He answered: "Yes"' (interview with Anatolii, member of Fizkul'turnik strike committee, 20.04.97).

This situation meant that there was no legal basis for the demands of the miners to the government to pay the wage debts. Nevertheless, the directors used the tense social and political situation and constantly 'instructed' the workers. Thus, on 20.04.97 at a meeting of the second shift of Fizkul'turnik, which was held by the director (similar meetings were held with all shifts), he revealed to those present that 'according to [the TV programme] Mayak, Chubais has met with the miners. Anzhero-Sudzhensk had presented a document showing that the town needed 206 billion roubles ... The acting mayor of the city, Stepantsov, the president of the trade union committee and director of Sudzhenskaya mine and Kukharenko went to Moscow from us. From Moscow there will be an investigation of all the mines of

Severokuzbassugol'. 15.3 billion roubles should have been transferred to the mine to pay of all its debts, but so far only around 2 billion has been given. *It is wrong to demand wages. Wages is an unintelligible thing. We have to demand support, subsidies, because when it goes to the Ministry of Finance they do not understand why it is necessary to pay for wages'* (field notes, my emphasis).

7.2 Yagunovskaya mine

The mine stopped work on 27 March, joining the all-Russian protest action organised by the FNPR. '*We wanted to "sit down" on 3 March*', reported members of the mine strike committee, '*but then we moved the start to the same day as the general protest action*', but the workers did not return to work. In order to provide a basis for unity in the mine, which had two trade unions, a strike committee was established to lead the strike. When the workers' demands were rebuffed they adopted a new form of 'labour terrorism', taking the general director of the coal association hostage in his office, but it was when they threatened to block the railway (which was already being blocked at Anzhero) that they received promises of payment, guaranteed by the security forces who were anxious to avoid civil disorder, although they remained on strike until the money was received. However, the receipt of the money opened a new implicit conflict, since money was owed not only for the miners' wages but also in local taxes and contributions to the Pension Fund, from which local authority workers and pensioners should be paid. It is indicative of the extent of the erosion of the workers' solidarity that they secured exemption from tax payments, taking their wages and leaving other workers and pensioners unpaid.

The situation at the mine was as follows. Accumulated wage arrears had reached 9 months, and the last wage received by the workers had been for June 1996. The mine director had been changed every two or three years. The then director, V. Baranov, had taken up his post in the autumn of 1995, after which, according to one of the workers, only one mechanised face was still working and development work had ceased. In the past the mine had employed more than 1,000 people, but at the time of the strike only 534 people remained. No TEO (technical-economic basis) for the closure of the mine had been worked out although everyone had known for a long time that Rosugol' planned to close it. All this facilitated the creation of a mood of uncertainty and encouraged many people to move to other enterprises without waiting for the benefits they might get in the event of closure.

When nothing definite with regard to wages was determined after the protest of 27 March, the miners decided to continue to strike. The participation of the labour collective in the Collective Action Day organised by the FNPR had no effect on the enterprise's situation. Not one of their demands were satisfied. Between the 1 and 14 April the mine's workers conducted a picket on the square in front of the Kemerovo Regional Administration building, permission for which was given by the authorities. During the picket, meetings were continually taking place with the representatives of the regional authorities responsible for the coal sector and with the Kuzbass representatives of the national coal company, Rosugol'.¹⁵⁰ There was

¹⁵⁰ In my view, the representatives of state and branch structures became more accessible for meetings than had been the case, for example, two or three years earlier. However, in my view, this boldness and greater openness is basically explained by the fact that in making promises the chiefs bear practically no responsibility for their words. Indirect evidence (and, maybe also direct) for this hypothesis is the fact that the representatives of state structures invariably refuse to record the results

no outcome to the meetings – *‘we just kept in touch with each other’*. Since the main wave of protest activity took place on 27 March, the regional authorities were already not afraid of drawing the attention of the Centre to a single demonstration of one of the mines and did nothing to resolve the problem which had been addressed to them. Evidently one can say that the attention of the authorities is drawn to strikes at enterprises prior to large scale actions, but not subsequent to them.

It should be noted that neither of the two trade union committees which existed at the mine took on the leadership of the protest action. At first there was an initiative group which in time transformed itself into a strike committee which had 9 members (the presidents of the NPG and NPRUP trade union committees, and the former trade union president, the remainder being workers). The strike committee at this mine represented itself as constantly emerging from initiative groups as a reflection of the mood of the labour collective to strike (*‘We also kicked up a fuss before the new year’*). The strike committee was renewed because, in the general opinion, *‘the previous one worked badly’*. The strike committee was created,

of meetings with representatives of labour collectives. They say *‘OK, what’s the problem! You think we will let you down? We trust you, you trust us!’*

All warnings from the State Prosecutor were given in oral form, except for the final one in which the action was declared illegal. The significance of all this is that after meetings with the representatives of official structures no documents remain in the hands of the workers, and the labour collectives are compelled to trust the word of their representatives. In situations in which the administration regularly deceives the workers, the representatives of the strike committee not only have nothing with which to turn to the court in search of the truth, but also there is nothing to justify themselves before collectives which trusted them. This leads to frequent accusations against elected representatives of deceit and treachery and that they have done deals with management.

according to the president of the Rosugleprof trade union committee, because this was required by the law on the resolution of collective labour disputes. However, the previous trade union president put forward a slightly different view: 'We have two trade unions in the mine, and there is no unity between them. So a strike committee was created on the initiative of the labour collective.' In some cases NPG came out against strikes organised by Rosugleprof. It is noteworthy that the strike committee kept very accurate records of all its meetings. It was obvious that the members of the strike committee (above all the presidents of both trade unions) were afraid of persecution and tried to protect themselves by competently drawing up documents in which all responsibility for the action was transferred from the strike committee to the labour collective as a whole.¹⁵¹

Members of the strike committee repeatedly visited the general director of the Severokuzbassugol' Joint Stock Company, Evgenii Kukhareenko. According to members of the strike committee, 'Azimov, a representative of Rosugol' was present and he promised to pay off the debts, but we were duped'. The members of the strike committee were shown a schedule of payments signed by the first deputy of the President of Rosugol', Salamatin, which proposed financial payments on 10 and 15 April.

When no money arrived on 10 April, and the miners began to look into why not, it appeared that the 'schedule was a fake: it was unclear where it had appeared from,

¹⁵¹ One confirmation is this extract from the appeal of the strikers: 'the action will take place on April 15, 1997 from 10 o'clock in the morning. We do not bear the responsibility for the consequences of the protest action. On behalf of the labour collective of Yagunovskaya mine signed by the members of the strike committee. 11.04.97.'

and by whom it was signed'. In response to the 'schedule' being faxed to Rosugol', Salamatina replied in a telephone call that, 'he was seeing the document for the first time and had not signed anything of the kind'. The General Director of Severokuzbassugol', Evgenii Kukharevko, said to the miners: 'I owe you nothing, I am the one who has been cheated'.

Perturbed by such an attitude, the Yagunovskaya miners held a general meeting of the labour collective, at which the decision was taken, following the example of miners in Anzhero-Sudzhensk, to block the railroad on 15 April from 10 o'clock in the morning. 'Well, that's just the limit! No-one is listening!': thus the rank and file miners explained their actions in response to management's deceit in using a fake payment schedule.¹⁵² Notification of their decision was sent to the head of the Kemerovo regional administration, Mikhail Kislyuk, and the president of Rosugol', Yuri Malyshev.¹⁵³ Thus, the representatives of Rosugol', instead of undertaking

¹⁵² The explosion of indignation of the workers was also promoted by the distorted information distributed by the mass media about the course of the action. So, speaking about the local television programme 'Pulse' reporting on the course of the action on April 14, the miners said: 'they reported that the mine had called off the strike, but we only had a meeting'. The next day, the TV representatives who visited the mine explained that they received reports about the strikes from the UVD, and in the report it was stated that the strike had ended at Yagunovskaya and that an action had begun at Severnaya mine.

¹⁵³ During the picketing in Kemerovo the miners in Anzhero-Sudzhensk had blocked the Trans-Siberian Railway, and the big chiefs arrived in the city, including Yuri Malyshev. During this visit the chairman of the Yagunovskaya trade union committee, Vladimir Levitskii met with Malyshev in Anzhero-Sudzhensk and he promised to pay the mine 6 billion roubles. Malyshev did not give any written confirmation of his promise: 'We trust you, you should trust us too, we do not withdraw our words'. 'They drove us in circles and we decided to break it off'. On the square while everyone was

attempts to overcome the conflict, simply waved the workers away, having shown the most devil-may-care attitude.

On April 10, after it became clear that the money was not coming, the strikers went to the association, where they announced that they had taken hostage the general director of Severokuzbassugol' and had telephoned the Kemerovo region representative of Rosugol', Shakhmatov, demanding that he should come urgently to the association to find out the reasons for the failure to make the payment. Shakhmatov pleaded that he had just returned from Anzhero-Sudzhensk, where he had spent many hours with the strikers blocking the Transsib; he had a high temperature and so on (It is interesting, that during an interview with representatives of the united workers' committee of Anzhero-Sudzhensk they declared, that nobody from Rosugol' was negotiating with them and that Shakhmatov had not signed a protocol with them, i.e. again Rosugol' was engaged in deception). After it was discovered, in the course of a conversation between E. Kukharensko and Rosugol', that Salamatov had not signed any schedule, the 'invaders' decided to free Kukharensko, since it was not clear who was guilty of failing to transfer the money. The 'labour terrorism' which was beginning to gather momentum was not taken seriously by either side of the conflict, treated partly with humour as a joke (which is also clear in the strikers' stories about the 'capture' of Kukharensko and his reaction to his capture, and his subsequent offer to the miners to take him as a voluntary hostage). So, it was partly with self-irony that the Yagunovskii miners told about how they had declared to Shakhmatov that they had taken the General

standing around the idea was born: 'once Anzherka lay down on the rails, and they gave them 23 billion roubles, we must do it too'.

Director of the Association, Kukharenko, hostage and that all the same Shakhmatov had not come.

The radicalisation of the workers' activity in the form of the fairly farcical attempt to take the general director of the coal association hostage and also in the form of threats to block the railroad was a reaction to the deceitful activities of coal industry management. As in the description provided in the previous chapter of the conflict at Sudzhenskaya mine, **the radicalisation of the workers' protest action occurred during the strike, after they had used existing institutions of social dialogue.**

On 15 April, that is on the day of the planned blockade of the railroad, representatives of the local authorities and law enforcement agencies arrived at the mine to dissuade the strikers from participating in the protest action. Large numbers of policemen had been at the railroad since early morning. Moreover, the number 12 bus, which travelled between mining settlements, was cancelled so that angry pensioners could not come to the railroad to support the miners. 'Three public prosecutors arrived; from the factory district, the city and transport prosecutors' offices. They notified us of the illegal nature of closing the railroad'. The miners' argument – 'How can it be illegal to go onto the railroad, but legal not to pay wages for 9 months? – was convincing enough even for the public prosecutors. It is interesting to note that one of the miners' arguments in support of closing the railroad was given with reference to the words of the Russian president in May 1991 when he met the Novokuznetsk miners after he had done a deal with Gorbachev and called on them to end their strike: 'Yeltsin said that if the miners were offended, he'd lie down on the rails! So why can't we?'

As a result of lengthy discussions, members of the strike committee and the general director of the Severokuzbassugol' Joint Stock Company agreed on and signed a new schedule, which envisaged payments on 17 and 22 April. The city, district and transport public prosecutors added their signatures to the document to testify to the authenticity of those of the general director and mine director, and thus became guarantors of payments to the miners. The labour collective then decided to wait until 17 April, but to go to the railroad if the first instalment of money had not reached the mine by that date.

The signing of the debt repayment schedule by the joint stock company's general director and the mine director was no more than a formality aimed at reducing social tension and forcing the miners to return to work. Insofar as the financial resources required to pay off wage arrears should have come from Rosugol', whether the schedule was met depended on its management, and not on the general director of the coal association or the mine director. Bringing in representatives of the law enforcement agencies as signatories to the repayment schedule, even in the capacity of witnesses, illustrates two points: firstly, workers had no confidence in coal industry management and were turning for support to the local bodies of the prosecutor general's office and the FSB (Federal Security Service, former KGB) (which participated in those circumstances in the role of notaries, confirming the authenticity of the signatures of the branch leadership); secondly, this served for the prosecutor's office as justification on the part of the strike committee of their radical action should the employers disregard the agreed schedule.

The loss of confidence is also illustrated by the fact that people did not return to work following the signing of the agreement, but continued to strike until they received their money. There was also the psychological aspect, previously

mentioned in the chapter on the strike in Donbass, whereby it is easier for workers to continue a strike that has already begun than to start at the beginning again.

On the morning of 17 April, it was discovered that no-one knew how to receive the money offered. The Severokuzbassugol' company did not want to take the payment itself, since the mine's bank account had been frozen. Payments due to the Pension Fund amounted to 28%. If the issue of paying wages to specific people through the court was taken into account, then, according to decisions already handed down, 959 million roubles were payable as a result of legal action.

An agreement was reached on the payment of 4.6 billion roubles, which was the amount of wages due, according to the calculations of the enterprise's accounts department. However, 'as it turned out', this amount was the total net salaries that people were demanding, which did not take taxes into account. If all mandatory payments of taxes were made from the first instalment of money, there would only be enough to cover one month's wage arrears. This announcement resulted in an explosion of anger and swearing amongst the miners. Some shouted that if any more figures were given, they'd take them out onto the square, while others offered in fury to give all the money to the Pension Fund, while they went to the railroad.

As a result, the strike committee declared that they had to count solely on the decision of the city administration. The strike committee members proposed that the money be accepted through the mine's account, and that the local authorities be urged to agree that the money received would not be subject to tax. Following protracted negotiations, an agreement was reached between the mine representatives and representatives of the Pension Fund of Kemerovo Region on a symbolic (1% instead of 28%) deduction for the pension fund and the subtraction of individual tax

from the wages. This signified an end to the myth that when the miners were acting on behalf of the whole community because when they received their money, public sector workers and pensioners, amongst others, also benefited. In this case, the pensioners received no money and, as research at other mines revealed, this case was not unique. There is a new system of labour relations, whereby everyone acts in isolation. Consequently, the basis for potential united action by the workers in various sectors and state organisations is destroyed. The following day the miners returned to work. Through the authorities' diligence, and by the very active participation of the law enforcement agencies, the conflict was defused and localised until wage arrears increased further. As declared at the meeting by one of the representatives of the strike committee; 'We should take our hats off to the prosecutors because, without them, we would never have seen this money'. The involvement of the law enforcement agencies in the conflict prevented one infringement of the law (the blocking of the railroad) by means of the organisations' infringement of a second law (illegal agreement with the local authorities not to pay taxes upon payment of wages).

The example of the conflict at Yagunovskaya mine uncovered the participation of the UVD and FSB in resolving labour conflicts as a new theme for post-Soviet Russia. As is well known, the 'non-dialogue form of resolving labour disagreements and conflicts' prevailed during the Stalin regime, when people were usually just shot. The last time this openly occurred was in 1962 in Novocherkassk during the suppression of spontaneous disturbances amongst workers. What was new in the case above was that the security services and the law enforcement agencies, the guardians of public order, were compelled (as a consequence of being afraid of a reprimand from their bosses) to defend the interests of the workers and to

participate in negotiations on their side. They were almost putting right the mistakes of industry management. The participation of the law enforcement agencies and the FSB lent particular weight and significance to the industrial conflict and took it into the realm of affairs of 'state importance'. At the same time, the law-enforcement agencies were actively drawn into the conflict since it threatened to develop into acts of civil disobedience and public disorder. For them it was traditional work for the prevention of offences, without paying attention to the specificity of labour relations (from here there is also a sharp step from persuasion to the application of force – if the offender does not submit to persuasion, pacify him by force).

The active participation of the local authorities in settling the conflict at Yagunovskaya mine is explained by the social context, which is unfavourable for them, and the alignment of forces in the struggle for power. Exactly two weeks prior to this, miners in the town of Anzhero-Suzhensk had blocked the Trans-Siberian railroad. This had attracted the attention of the federal authorities, who expressed their dissatisfaction with the activity of the regional and local administrations. In conditions of a cooling-off in relations between the Kemerovo and central authorities, and also taking into account the stereotyping of the mass media of Kuzbass as the 'red region', the new display of conflict could be used by the Kuzbass governor's opponents and led to a reshuffling of personnel in the regions.

7.3 *Tsentrāl'naya mine*

The strike at Tsentrāl'naya mine is interesting because the central issue was not one of wages but became the issue of the closure of the mine; because the strike was initiated not by underground miners but by female auxiliary workers; and because

the strike was met with brutal repression as the strikers were isolated from their fellow workers in the mine.

Tsentral'naya mine had come out on strike on 3 December 1996 following an appeal by the Presidium of Rosugleprof to all coal enterprises to participate in the All-Russian Miners' Strike. However, following the end of this protest, the strike continued at the mine, since the workers had not received any of their wages due for the previous six months. The prolongation of the strike at the mine after the end of the All-Russian protest did not concur with the interests of the director and the branch's top management, who resolved their problems during negotiations with the government. The actions of the 'wilful' strikers met with a severe rebuke from the directors' corpus, which was expressed in the decision to speed up the closure of the mine. The strike was only called off at the end of January 1997 following the mine director's return from Moscow with news of the mine's closure, although until then the mine had not been included in the closure plans.¹⁵⁴ 'That was some strike! And they could carry it on further', the director of the mine declared. After that the strikers set off for the association, demanding that it pay off the wage debt, but the technical director of the association told them that they would not receive any more money. This became the reason for the next rebellion, which was expressed in the

¹⁵⁴ The procedure for closing a mine involves the prior preparation of a feasibility report (TEO) which shows the impossibility of the enterprise continuing to work (as a result of the exhaustion of resources, difficult geological conditions, the inexpediency of financial investments etc.). The feasibility report should be coordinated with the trade union committee of the mine, then a decision on the liquidation of the enterprise is adopted by the MVK which, in turn, allows the inclusion of the mine in the plan of mine closures and to begin financing closure. In the case of Tsentral'naya this whole procedure was crudely violated by Rosugol'.

blocking of the tram lines in Prokop'evsk. From the association they immediately telephoned the General Director of Rosugol' and part of the debt was paid to the workers within one week.

The money that came was partially exempted from tax. According to the members of the mine protection committee they only paid the Pension Fund, while the management 'had an agreement' concerning the other taxes. However, 'guys with automatic rifles' from the tax police came to the mine. But there were a lot of people near the cash department, and they left without anything.

The enterprise director¹⁵⁵ issued orders for the transfer of workers in whole shops to other mines. The directors of other mining enterprises agreed to take workers only if equipment was simultaneously transferred, which leads to comparisons with the transfer of serfs with the land on which they worked. Some time after the transfer of workers, redundancies were implemented in many of the mines which had hired new workers for various reasons.¹⁵⁶ Obviously, the first to go were those who had arrived last, and this principle of 'last-in, first-out' was closely adhered to. From the

¹⁵⁵ The line of closing the mine was carried out only by the mine director, and after his dismissal, by the acting directors. All other employees, including all chiefs of services and divisions, did not share his belief in the necessity of its closing. So, according to the chief marksheider (surveyor) of the mine: 'on 1.01.97 we had a reserve of 7.7 million tonnes and 4.1 million tonnes of coke. Prepared reserves amount to 310,000 tonnes, open 800,000. At the 1996 level of production the reserves would suffice for 13 years of work' (21.04.97). The personnel manager was threatened with dismissal by the director because she refused to dismiss workers, considering it illegal.

¹⁵⁶ 'The situation is this: they transfer a section to Zimnika mine, but there there is an order to reduce employment by 165 people. A whole section threatened with dismissal' (interview with Tat'yana Andreevna, employee of Prokop'evsk district committee of Rosugleprof, 21.04.97).

1st January to the 15th April the number of employees of the mine was reduced from 2094 to 1118 as a result of transfers, 'voluntary' severance and forcing older people onto 'well-earned pensions'. Those employees who remained had practically no hope of finding work in the town in the event of the closure of their mine. This left the workers in a very vulnerable position.

At Tsentral'naya mine, meanwhile, the equipment was being dismantled; the director declared that the enterprise would cease work on 1 April 1997, although this event was delayed until a feasibility study for closure was adopted on 1 June.

Tsentral'naya mine did not appear on the daily list of striking coal-mining enterprises produced by Rosugol'. The situation developed paradoxically: the mine was not working, but it was not included on the list of striking mines as Rosugol' had simply deleted it from output plans, and therefore from the list of working enterprises. No feasibility study for the mine's closure had been drawn up, no decree had been issued on closing the mine, but as far as Rosugol' was concerned, the mine had ceased to exist. There was no such mine!

On 31 March – the eve of the announced closure of the mine – shop No. 1 met its targets and refused to come back to the surface. The director went underground and suggested that the miners go to the cash office to receive their wages. One shop was paid for February, but all the others remained as before – nine months without wages. This led to a split in the collective, with the director's action providing an excellent example of the policy of 'divide and rule'. At the same time, the director himself was sacked from his position two days later by the Board of Directors for failing to control the situation in the enterprise and allowing a second unauthorised action in the previous six months. An acting director of the mine was nominated.

A meeting of the labour collective took place on 2 April. As the acting mine director had clearly announced the mine's closure, the thought was expressed that 'by using the spring floods, management could simply flood the mine without taking any responsibility for it since the drainage is working normally'. At a meeting of the labour collective a trade union committee was elected (the old one had lost all confidence after the strike had been lost and had virtually ceased to exist), but the management of the enterprise declared its election illegal. The employees of the enterprise did not very strongly contest the position of the acting director in this regard since their faith in getting support from the trade union at that time was finally exhausted.

In response to management's action at the enterprise, a Mine Salvation Committee was set up to try to take control of work on maintaining the mine in a fit state to work, and to prevent the theft of equipment and materials, which was being carried out on a massive scale.¹⁵⁷ Following this, the content of the strike changed. From a protest that demanded the payment of wage arrears, it turned into a protest to preserve the mine.

The initiative was grasped by the mine's female workers, whose chances of finding alternative employment if the mine closed were almost non-existent. 'If the men can do nothing, we have no other option!': five women from the salvation committee

¹⁵⁷ 'Everybody is indignant that the equipment and the materials are taken away from the mine, are given away on the basis of notes from the director and order forms which are completely unofficial papers without a seal, which can hardly serve as authorised financial documents. Two compressors, a combine, a gutter cleaner have already been taken out, 70 complete sets of metal props etc.' 'All are released on the basis of an ordinary slip from the directors, without any documents' (interview with members of the Tsentral'naya mine salvation committee, 21.04.97).

decided to go underground to attract the public's attention, while their descent prevented the mine from being flooded.

The conflict at Tsentral'naya mine raised another set of issues – the strike activity of workers in core and auxiliary shops. In the overwhelming majority of cases strikes are initiated by workers from face and development shops. The mysterious 'right' to strike was consolidated behind them. The Tsentral'naya case was unique in that the underground protest was instigated by female workers from the auxiliary shops. In this respect, a gender aspect is notable in terms of the greater activity of women at the stage of the conflict when the issue had become one of preserving the mine. This is more than likely explained by the fact that when a mine closes in a coal-mining town, women have little chance of finding alternative work. While male workers in the core shops can transfer to other mines in whole brigades, women always end up outside the factory gates.

Since in accordance with health and safety regulations the women had no right to go underground alone, the chairman of the Mine Salvation Committee, a mine foreman, briefed the women on health and safety procedures and undertook to accompany them into the mine.

The course of events that followed at times resembled a war film: sections of interviews conducted with some of those who participated in the underground protest, including those taken to the local hospital, are presented below.

From interview with A., a participant in the underground protest:

Nothing was decided at the meeting of the labour collective; then we women decided for the men to defend the mine. The Mine Salvation Committee was already in existence.

Andrei Sukhomyatov – the foreman in the ventilation and technical safety shop was with

us. He sort of defended us. He was also the chairman of the committee. We sat in the dispatcher's 60 metres below ground. Our main demand was that the mine not be closed.

The assistant to the boss of the ventilation shop arrived. He handed Andrei a '*portyanka*' [paper used by the miners to wrap their feet instead of socks] on which we were warned of statutes 206 and 207 of the Criminal Code. He promised that they were 'coming' for us.

The mine rescue brigade arrived. The director threatened that they had been called out at our expense. There were ten of them. But they joked with us: 'Come on girls, we'll carry you out'. They didn't allow us to walk about. They spent their 24-hour shift with us and then they left.

On the second day, the telephone operators began to refuse to connect us by telephone. We were called by the daughter of one of the women with us, the husband of another woman. They tried to get us to come back above ground.

According to the participants in the action, the general Director of Rosugol', Malyshev, telephoned them and proposed to pay the women who were underground their wages and to find them new jobs. They refused and continued to insist on the preservation of the mine. After the management had used its traditional resource – having tried to 'buy' the workers, they refused to continue the dialogue.

There was a suspicion that they could cut off the pumps, so we kept going to check the water level. It was gradually rising.

Andrei and two women had gone to check the water level. There were three of us left. This was already the third day. Several people arrived, headed by Shamkhurdin and Sobolev from the (coal) association. We asked who they were, to which they responded that we had no right to be in the mine and had to leave. When we refused they swore and they grabbed us (two big men to each woman) and led us out. I warned them against

bruising me, so they led me out in an orderly fashion. Only someone was walking behind me and tried to hit me on the head, but slipped and swore from the disappointment. They yanked the first woman in such a way that she cried out. Then one of them said to stop her or he'd kill her. Her head was banged against the side of the wagon.

Back on the surface, there were lots of policemen and OMON (riot police). We were put in the UAZ [type of ambulance] with three people in camouflage fatigues.

When we arrived at the medical centre, Shamkhurdin demanded that we sign a piece of paper saying we had no complaints, but we refused to sign. Sobolev was introduced to the nurse by the doctor and began to ask on what basis she made her diagnosis. Then we were taken to the accident and emergency hospital.

The following day when I arrived at work, I was told by the boss that I was sacked. I asked him on what basis? There was no legal basis. Now we go to the mine every day only to register, as the enterprise isn't working.

We took our complaints to the procurator's office. An invitation arrived for me to visit the Zenkov Regional Department of Internal Affairs (ROVD). But I didn't go. I didn't know what the police have to do with all of this.

It affected Andrei a lot. He became much worse. He doesn't speak correctly and his head is a bit wrong. He got the worst of it. When they threw him into the car with us, he was bleeding. One of the security guards threatened to bugger him. Who knows where they're from? Colloquially they're known as '*blatnye*'. They said, 'What would we do without you? They promised to pay us very well, thank you'.

From an interview with Petr Nikolaevich, underground worker (conducted in hospital):

When these events took place, I was on duty in the third shaft. I'm a member of the Mine Salvation Committee. I was chosen by my shop. We were sent on duty in the shaft by the

Salvation Committee. I overheard a discussion between someone from the mine administration and the association. They were discussing how to get into the mine. They decided to go in through the third shaft, using any excuse – for example, to conduct negotiations with those occupying the mine. But there were no such negotiations and I decided not to let them down. I was called by the mechanic. I refused to let anyone down without the agreement of the Mine Salvation Committee.

I had changed into my dirty clothes and arrived at the shaft at about 5 o'clock yesterday. Then those from the association approached in three cars. In one there were riot police with machine guns, in another – policemen, and in the third – people from the association and their teams, security guards whatever.

They approached me and I refused to let them down into the mine. A lieutenant in uniform ordered that I talk to them in his car. I said that I was disabled and already a pensioner. But four robust men – two for my arms and two for my legs – grabbed me and pulled and pulled. I immediately felt my back go. Then I sat for two hours in their car, although they could have let me call an ambulance, or have called one themselves. I heard how they spoke by radio with Sobolev. He told them to take me away. They drove me to the accident and emergency hospital. Now, they said, we'll ask some questions. The policeman went in front of me and spoke to the doctor. He was completely alone at that time. The doctor examined me and said there was no injury.

We were lucky at the mine medical centre. Arykov (a deputy) and some others were there. We all went back to the hospital by car. The doctor said that he had to take an X-ray. I've been here since the 6th. At first I couldn't get up at all. Today I went to Komestra (the insurance company) myself.

From interview with Andrei Sukhomyatov, foreman in the ventilation and safety equipment shop at Tsentral'naya mine, chairman of the Mine Salvation Committee (conducted in hospital)

When we went down the mine we immediately called the “*Narodovlastie*” (People’s Power) bloc and the editor of the “*Ves’ Prokop’evsk*” (All Prokop’evsk) newspaper. We called the mine director who asked what our demands were. We wrote them out and sent them with the head of ventilation. From memory (I’ve got them somewhere on paper), they were:

First: The resumption of activity at the mine.

Second: The transfer of the open cast shop back to the mine. This shop was somehow transferred on 20 March to Mine No. 5-6, without a shareholders’ meeting, without anything at all.

Third demand: To stop all prosecutions of members of the Mine Salvation Committee and all workers at the mine.

Fourth: to stop handing over non-ferrous metals from the mine and to close the reception point in the town.

And fifth and finally: to pay off all wage arrears.¹⁵⁸

There were policemen posted all around the mine. When the Mine Salvation Committee caught those who were stealing (removing) something from the mine red-handed, the police would say that this was nothing to do with them. Their main task was to prevent anyone from going down into the mine.

We would periodically go to the drains to check the water level. It was slowly rising. Drainage on the first shift was already not working, which meant that the pumps had been cut off. So, there we were, sitting by the drainage system. And there was a young

¹⁵⁸ It is well known that apart from the copper cable from the mines, there is no scrap non-ferrous metal anywhere else in the town. The workers therefore demanded that the overt plundering of the mine be stopped. In general terms, is there any other country in the world where workers, not having been paid for nine months, would put their demand to be paid only in fifth place?

bloke on duty. He was about 20. He says, 'I'll show you the way'. There were two ways out of there. He accompanied us and returned by a steep ladder. And then he disappeared.

We were heading straight down a slope – there was a light near our room. We went into it and there were four men sitting there. The deputy director and three others. I knew one of them, who used to work at the mine. The others said they had come to try to coax us to leave the mine. But, perhaps they would also join us. They seemed to be joking. Then I saw that three spare lamps were lying there and three safety apparatuses were hanging on the wall. So I asked where the women were, and whether we could go look for them. One of them went out and had a look and said there was no-one there. 'They'll be here in a minute.' Then I saw the helmet of one of the women who remained. 'Can I go to the toilet?' I asked. 'No, sit down'. The women also asked. Their lamps were taken from them and they had to be accompanied. They did their business by lamp-light so that they couldn't run off. I also went with a guard.

The telephone rang and we could hear them talking. Who? Zakharov (or some other familiar surname). By the way, they are all – Ivanovs or Petrovs. And this Zakharov reports that THEY'RE HERE. Then there was another call and about 10 minutes later three of them appear. One of them was Sobolev – I knew him from when he was head of physics at the technical college, the second was Shamkhurdin, and I didn't know the third. There was a bit of excitement and then the blows began. My helmet flew off. The women tried to cover me, so they got it too. I don't remember anymore. When I came to, I was being pulled by the hair by this third bloke towards the shaft – with about 50 metres still to go. He saw that I had regained consciousness. I started to walk slowly by myself.

I wasn't hit any more in the lift-cage, they only kept an eye on me so that I didn't jump out. As if. And this third bloke said, 'I'll bugger you: you won't be the first I've had'.

When we got up top – there were machine guns everywhere, every ten metres. Even in the vestibule between two doors in a little hollow.

Our three (women) and another three were sitting in the UAZ. We were taken to the sick room and then to the accident and emergency hospital. We had been beaten ‘skilfully’, it was hardly noticeable. They are maniacs. When they beat, first they knock off the light [helmet light, V.B.]. Without light in the mine, what can be done?

(Andrei then talked about how long it took to check him out, how they lost the charts, and then didn’t hospitalise him. The final diagnosis was that he had concussion and an average cranial-cerebral trauma.)

Opposition between the labour collective and the mine and association management continued. The prosecutor’s office acted for the employers, while the Mine Salvation Committee started to gather statements to present to the prosecutor’s office in relation to the mass unlawful sacking of workers at the mine. Attempts were made by the workers to appeal to the law enforcement agencies, the prosecutor’s office, and the courts. Despite the mine and association management’s anarchy, people were still trying to settle the issue by lawful means. At the initiative of the chairman of the regional legislative assembly, Aman Tuleev, the prosecutor’s office opened a criminal enquiry on the beatings, but no case ever came to court. As political demands were not put forward during the protest, the conflict could not be used by opposing political forces and did not obtain wide publicity in society.

The case of Tsentral’naya saw the first real use of force by the administration against those participating in a labour conflict in post Soviet Russia. We can say that this was some kind of turning point in labour relations, a turn from apparently outwardly democratic methods of resolving problems towards repression, as was characteristic of the Soviet period. The example of the Tsentral’naya strike shows

us what the relation between the employees and the directors is like, how the confrontation between them develops in circumstances in which a strike is not sanctioned or is not even silently supported by the director. Each side uses the full arsenal of means at its disposal.

The establishment of a Mine Salvation Committee was an attempt by the workers to create a foundation on which to unite the whole labour collective against the mine director and coal industry management. However, the committee not only was not able to get solidary support from workers of other enterprises, but even to organise the labour collective of its own mine. Only six people out of the entire collective participated in the underground action. After its suppression nobody came to their defence, the attack of the administration on the rights of the workers did not call forth a counter-reaction on the part of the labour collective.

Management's actions were aimed at undermining any basis for solidarity and introducing divisions in the workers' ranks. To do so, methods used included threatening the workers with criminal liability, and pressurising the family members of workers on strike to try to influence those participating in the conflict. Division in the labour collective was also provoked by the payment of full wages to one shop, while maintaining 9-month arrears for all others. The directorate in this conflict used all the powers of the administrative system, including the forces of the OMON and security forces in their struggle against the intractable workers. This is an indicator of how the management of an enterprise really reacts when the situation gets out of its control and what it will do in order to restore this control. The preservation by the director of a neutral position or purely verbal accusations against the trade union in the course of an all-Russian action may, thus, be taken as evidence that the director has not lost any real control over his enterprise.

7.4 *Biryulinskaya mine*¹⁵⁹

Biryulinskaya mine is one in which labour discipline has collapsed and the best workers have left, mainly as a result of years of incompetent management, so that it is impossible for workers to achieve the production targets required to earn their wages and they turn to more desperate measures instead. In this case the reasons for non-payment are specific to the mine, and often to the particular shop or section, so that it is difficult for the workers to expect to be able to attract solidarity beyond the mine, but divisions are also endemic within the mine, and exacerbated by management. A small group of workers, who had launched a hunger strike following FNPR's day of action, had had their wages paid by the local administration out of the city budget, amid fears that the action would escalate following the example of Anzhero-Sudzhensk. The mine director then sued the leader of the hunger strike, a long-term antagonist of the administration, for libel for accusing the director of drunkenness. The director won the case, but his antagonist responded by resuming his hunger strike. This personalised antagonism was overlain by grievances related to the non-payment of wages and a further dispute which arose as a result of management according privileges to an elite production shop, so that a trickle of workers kept joining the hunger strike for various reasons. The mine administration and the trade union kept the hunger strikers under pressure, but the strike was eventually settled, with the support of the regional

¹⁵⁹ The research on which this section is based was conducted in July 1997, in conjunction with Petr Bizyukov from the Kemerovo, and Irina Kozina from the Samara branches of ISITO. The research was conducted against the social background of the all-Kuzbass protest action, organised by the trade unions of Kemerovo region to coincide with the anniversary of the first miners' strike (11 July 1989).

administration, on the eve of the All-Kuzbass action on the anniversary of the 1989 strike, when the hunger strikers were paid all their wage arrears, other workers receiving a portion of the wages due from the previous year. Although the first hunger strike attracted sympathy amongst the other workers, the second strike did not enjoy support since others could not see why one small group should be paid and not they.

The interesting feature of this strike is that it represented a coalescence of an accumulation of personal and social antagonisms and tensions which fused in a diffuse and personalised conflict between the enterprise director and a small group of individuals. Despite the personalisation of the dispute, it attracted concern in the town and in the region lest it spilled over into wider civil disobedience, and the authorities stepped in to resolve the dispute by paying off the main protagonists. Whereas in 1989 it was necessary to pay-off all the coal-mining regions to bring the strike to an end, by 1997 it was sufficient to pay-off the small group which had launched the strike, a step which both ended the strike and isolated the strikers. The hunger strike in this case was only the tip of an iceberg of more silent protest, expressed in high levels of absenteeism, a lack of labour discipline and endemic theft in the mine which all serves to reduce productivity and so the prospects of the mine paying workers their wages. Again the fragmentation of the workers, the emotionalism of the strike and the resort to extreme measures on both sides arises from the failure of the trade union to develop effective means of representing the interests of its members at the workplace.

The hunger strike is testimony to the growing desperation of workers, to their fragmentation, to the ineffectiveness of the trade union, and to the lesson that strikes can only accelerate the closure of the mine. Moreover, in conditions in which only

the most resolute collective action is likely to secure payment for the whole of the labour collective, a hunger strike has proved an effective means of securing payment for the small group of its participants.

7.4.1 The social and economic situation of the mine

Biryulinskaya is a 'dying' enterprise, and management has already prepared the necessary documents for its closure three times. They are, however, disregarded, as their number has yet to come up and there is simply no money for the technical liquidation of the enterprise and all the attendant payments to be made in relation to redundancies. The crisis situation was also provoked by the fact that the mine's equipment is worn out, but the administration does not have the resources to replace it with new equipment. The wage situation at the mine was typical of most of Kuzbass' enterprises – complete confusion as a result of part payments being made some months, full payments in other months, and no payment at all during other months. All this creates confusion, and the workers themselves are sometimes baffled when it comes to answering how much money, and for which months they are owed.¹⁶⁰ The consequence of such a state of affairs is an eventual loss of motivation to work on the part of the enterprise's workers. Consequently, of the planned 120,000 tonnes of coal expected to be produced during the first half of 1997, only 25,000 tonnes were excavated. There were various reasons for such a spectacular non-fulfilment of planned output, including poor geological conditions in the new seam to which the mine had transferred, the spring floods, and the almost

¹⁶⁰ When the research was conducted, more precisely on 15/07/97, wages between August and November 1996 had not been paid, December 1996 – paid, January – February 1997 – not paid, March 1997 – an advance was paid, April 1997 – 70% of wages paid, May-June 1997 – not paid.

continual failure of equipment. In our opinion, one of the reasons given by a representative of the mine's planning department is the most pertinent: evaluating the work and level of productivity of the miners, she had the following to say; 'They are now on a boycott, they aren't working'. The years that have passed since the first miners' strike have formed the attitude amongst the workers that wages can be 'won', rather than earned. The incomplete calculation of wage payments, and the payment by directors of unearned money have generated in the workers' milieu dependent moods, which often result in strike activity, particularly in conditions where enterprise management tries to transfer to a system of payment for specific work. This is usually accompanied by a rather sharp fall in wage levels, which leads the collective into pre-strike mode, and most likely to a spontaneous halt in production. The phrase 'There is such work – to go on strike' has become an aphorism, quite adequately reflecting the mood of many workers. At the same time it should be noted that the basis of the unwillingness to go to work, when the management promises to pay for a concrete job, lies in the lack of trust in the administration of the enterprise, which has already on many occasions cheated the workers and failed to pay them for work that they have already done.

As a result of such circumstances, passions had run high, leading to such explosions as the bringing of court cases on the non-payment of wages, a collective walk-out with a demonstrative gap in labour relations for a month, and the creation at the mine of a salvation committee. As a result of long wage delays, 10 shop representatives went to Anzhero-Sudzhensk in April 1997 to meet with the first deputy of Rosugol's general director, Valery Zaidenvarg, (who was there in connection with the labour conflict and the blockade of the Trans-Siberian Railroad as a result of months of accumulated wage arrears). Having wasted the whole day in

vain, they returned angry, which only aggravated social tension at the mine. Following unsuccessful attempts to obtain justice from the coal 'generals', the salvation committee ceased to exist.

Representatives from various levels of the management apparatus were united in their belief that under the new circumstances of a sharp fall in coal extraction and a rise in the price of coal, it was impossible to fulfil the obligations consolidated in the coal industry tariff agreement, particularly with regard to maintaining the previous number of workers. To guarantee previous wage levels to miners, it was necessary in such conditions either to increase productivity or to use various forms of protest action 'to squeeze out' already earned and calculated financial resources from mine directors, local administrations and the government. Owing to the severe wear and tear of mine equipment, an increase in levels of production and productivity was hardly feasible in the near future. Judging by the level of strike activity, the miners had chosen the second variant. The mine director added to the picture:

120 days off each year, and 56 days of holiday, besides which many seek loop-holes to go off sick. Some only manage 80 days at work each year, and you see for yourself just how they work.¹⁶¹ 25,000 tonnes of coal has been produced since the beginning of the year, costing 734,000 roubles. The mine has 469 regressive payment recipients, who take 35% of the wage fund. There is nowhere near enough money (From interview with director, 15/07/97).

¹⁶¹ During our visit underground, we came across a group of workers dozing on specially adapted boards. In justifying themselves, they began to assure us that they had 'just sat down for a smoke'. When the general director asked them to show their hands, it was obvious from their cleanliness and 'untouched by labour' appearance that the 'cigarette break' had lasted a long time.

The general picture develops as follows: everyone speaks unanimously of a sharp decline in labour discipline; the mine director criticises his deputies and chief specialists, the shop chiefs, while those on whom the light shines in turn swear at the workers who have become lazy, and who 'will not put in any effort at work', and with nostalgia recall the disciplinary regulations of the pre-perestroika Russian coal industry.¹⁶² At the same time the technical basis of coal production is such that if the safety regulations were followed work would be stopped repeatedly by the labour inspectorate. Thus the mine only continues to work because the management insists that the workers violate the safety regulations.

The non-payment of wages over many months provided a stimulus for high labour turnover, which washed away specialists and skilled workers. The permanent contingent of workers came to comprise the 'idlers' and undisciplined workers. According to the brigadier of Shop No.5, which had 73 members, only 39 of them came to work. Between five and six workers would go underground each shift, compared to the norm of nine to eleven. In an attempt to improve the personnel situation, the director invited a whole shop to transfer from Pervomaiskaya mine:

They talked and talked, either the long-wall was being prepared, or the sections were blocked, or something else was wrong, and so they left. Only 5 remained. The rest went

¹⁶² Of those questioned by us during the research, only the trade union chairperson had quite an optimistic view of the enterprise's prospects, which he supported in the following way: 'In general the situation in the mine is not bad. We produce valuable coking coal'.

back to Pervomaiskaya, or went to trade in the market. The following week the section was blocked and there was almost no-one around to clear the blockage.¹⁶³

In such a critical situation, the mine director made an attempt somehow to stimulate the workers and take the enterprise to the level of planned targets. The workers of production Shop No.5, the only one producing coal, decided themselves to transfer to a day-rate system of pay, and began to receive hot rations when they went underground. If the shop reached planned targets, payment by results was also guaranteed for a month to everyone else. According to the agreement with Shop No.5, the work of several auxiliary employees – welders and machine operators – was also paid in this way. The director asked the shop chief to explain the situation at shop planning meetings, particularly to Shop No.4 and the RGB (Mine-work repairs) shop, and proposed that all those wishing to do so be sent on normal or administrative leave, ‘to down tools somewhere’, to give the enterprise an opportunity to get up off its knees since, in his words, it was absolutely impossible to feed the 750 people working at the mine on then existing levels of production.

The trade union committee representative was actively involved in the work to explain to the workers that this was the best solution given the circumstances:

We (me and the director) spoke to the men: we have to organise a 2.5 million tonne ‘marshchrut’ [several types of coal for a specific customer – V.B.] urgently. I told the men that we’d see whether the coal would be sold or not. There are heaps of stocks which haven’t been sold. As soon as they disappear, that means the coal has gone, and then it’s straight to the director – when will the money arrive?

¹⁶³ To understand the situation, it is worth pointing out that the workers of Pervomaiskaya were invited to work in production Shop No. 5, the privileged ‘position’ of which also became one of the reasons for the workers’ protests in the mine’s other services and subdivisions.

When production began, they started to pay every day. So as to increase interest. Production increased immediately, to 500 tonnes a day. Payment was organised by results obtained over a 24-hour period. A wage scale has now been developed for a monthly output of between 8,000 and 25,000 tonnes. It is divided into three levels, each of which has its own rate. The measuring [of extracted coal. V.B.] is done and then cash payments are made according to the norms and plans for the following day. This system was required because there is little money at the mine. I don't know exactly, but we can't accumulate money and distribute it as we used to. So we have to use such a system of payment. And then provide the rations. They get a bit of sausage and bread, and sometimes white hare (From interview with chief of Shop No. 5, 12/07/97).

The shop workers were paid on a daily basis during the second half of June.

The result of such an experiment was positive. In June 1997 the mine produced 4,100 tonnes of coal, of which 3,200 was produced during the second half of the month (interview with chief of Shop No. 5, 15/07/97).

So, according to the shop chief, there was a sharp increase in productivity. The positive economic effect, however, as is often the case when management decisions are taken without consideration of possible repercussions, did not surmount the adverse social effects, which were quick to appear. As one of the mine's managers said,

They worked for a week like this, and then they stopped and another reaction was obtained.

7.4.2 Chronology of the conflict

The hunger strike at Berezovskii's Biryulinskaya mine, in which 16 people in total took part, lasted for 20 days. The main reason for the hunger strike was, as repeatedly reported in the press, months of accumulated wage arrears. However, a

more detailed understanding of the situation allows for other, not immediately discernible facts to be uncovered. It was discovered, for example, that this was the second protest at the enterprise in a three-month period. Two months prior to the events detailed above taking place, three people had held a hunger strike to demand that wage arrears be settled (the demand was of an individual nature). The initiators of the second hunger strike were the same people who participated in the first, and the roots of the second conflict lay in the fact that the first was not successful.

The first hunger strike was declared at the mine on **27 March 1997** – the day of united collective action organised by the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR). The chief initiator and obvious leader was a worker from the assembly shop, Aleksandr S. Since social tension following the FNPR action was rising throughout Kuzbass, mine salvation committees were being created in the mines, for example in Prokop'evsk. The representatives of these committees, with the tacit agreement of the directors, went to Anzhero-Sudzhensk for negotiation with the leaders of Rosugol' who had gone there. Two weeks into the strike, the money demanded by the three hunger strikers (31 million roubles) was paid out of the town's budget, and **10 April** the hunger strike was stopped. This coincided with the negotiations of Rosugol' with the participants in the blockade of the railroad, to which representatives of the mines also went because it was quite possible that the city administration was afraid that the protest action would extend beyond the mine and become more radical. In doing this, the town mayor demanded from the mine management and the mine collective a promise that similar excesses, in the form of strikes and hunger strikes, would not be repeated. The workers gave their assurances. The town mayor also gave his word. However, such a 'satisfactory' means of resolving the conflict by paying money from the town budget was badly

received by other miners, and in many respects this determined the mineworkers' attitude to the subsequent protest action and to its leader:

He simply acted dishonourably. In the first place, by taking the money from the budget workers. That's the teachers' and doctors' money and a real man wouldn't have done that. In the second place, he broke his promise to the mayor. He said that he didn't give a damn about that, that his (the mayor's) affairs weren't his problem and that he didn't care where the money came from (From discussion with mineworkers, 12/07/97).

Most likely of all, this payment caused envy towards the 'lucky ones' on the part of all the labour collective which had not received any money, and their condemnation of the behaviour of the hunger strikers is explained only by this personal offence.

It should be noted that S. had been involved in a conflict with the mine management for a long time. As became clear from talking with the mine's workers, he had been an informal activist from the time of the 1989 strike, was a close friend of Vyacheslav Golikov,¹⁶⁴ and, according to the profkom (trade union committee) chairman, was unique amongst the first wave strikers *'who appeared, in not finding a better life, some left for commerce, some to work in politics, but he remained at the mine'*. At the initiative of S., the two previous directors had been sacked. His activity and aggressiveness in defending his rights was thus clear. The reaction of the director, which S. had provoked through perseverance, was also understandable in this context. Apparently, as is often the case, the conflict between them, which had been planted on the soil of labour relations, had become personal. A reason for the further intensification of the conflict had appeared 28 April when the

¹⁶⁴ The first chairman of the Kuzbass Council of Worker Committees, created following the 1989 miners' strike.

representatives of the administration and those participating in the first hunger strike had met in the director's office to discuss just how legal the protest was. When S. called the director a drunkard in the presence of witnesses, the latter exploded and vowed to see the matter through to the end, to prove that he was in the right. He acted in a civilised manner. At first he saw the mine's doctor, and then, when opponents expressed their distrust of this 'in the pocket doctor's assistant', as repeatedly stated by the mine workers, he went to the town doctor to 'have analyses conducted in the presence of witnesses and attesting witnesses'.¹⁶⁵ Having obtained medical confirmation of his sobriety, the director referred the matter to the court, claiming damages for moral losses to the tune of 30 million roubles.

The court sat on **18 June**. It found in favour of the director, but ordered S. to pay only 3 million roubles in damages, which was not a great deal of money for the claimant. The director said with watery eyes that the important thing was that he had won. Having received the court's decision, S. returned to the mine and began his second hunger strike to express his lack of confidence in the town mayor, the town prosecutor and also the town public health services, which represented the hospital where he had recovered from his first hunger strike, for not having returned him to his former physical state.

He was joined on **19 June** by a second worker – also a participant in the previous hunger strike. He joined out of solidarity, out of principle: '*The first time I went on hunger strike purely for wages ...*'

¹⁶⁵ It is difficult to imagine how analyses could be conducted in the presence of witnesses! But we cannot change the words of the song, so the workers' comments are left unchanged.

A further two workers joined the hunger strike on **20 June**. One of them was involved in the conflict with the director (and had appeared in court as a witness for S.) He took part in the hunger strike, *'for wages and against the director'*. According to him, the director had threatened to get even not only with his direct protagonist, S., but also with the other workers (5 of them) who had spoken against him in court. He was particularly angered not by the threats, he said, but by the director's hypocrisy in court: *'I said that he drank, but he said he was teetotal'*.

Another worker had a slightly different version of how the hunger strike began on that day. In that version, at the same time as events mentioned, another, in our opinion more serious plot evolves. According to those involved in the hunger strike, a few days before the events described took place, Shop No.5 had warned management that they intended to strike: *'I can't make anyone get on the 'geska' (hydraulic prop) as people are falling down from hunger'*. On the day the hunger strike began, but completely unrelated to this fact, the following events occurred at the mine: the second (back) shift refused to go underground and a strike started spontaneously. In response to this, the director invited the workers of the Shop No. 5's third shift to visit him and disclosed the new working conditions, which, as already mentioned, meant wages according to final results – 'every 24-hour period' and the provision of 'rations'.¹⁶⁶

Rations began to be given on 19 June to the third shift. In conditions where the mine's remaining workers had not received their full wages for 11 months, the daily payment of cash to only one production shop led to a huge explosion of social

¹⁶⁶ The ration included 200 grams of cooked sausage and a quarter loaf of bread. Total cost of rations – 7,000 roubles to be deducted from wages.

antagonism. The repercussions of this management decision were as strong the following day. The fourth worker to join the hunger strike was in fact from Shop No.5, which had been elevated to a privileged position. As he explained:

On 19 June I worked the first shift and when we came out we were warned that the second shift had 'sat down'. We got washed and went home. On 20 June I went to work the first shift. The shop chief conducted the planning meeting at the mine, but we were already on strike. He said that the strike had ended. Every shift was to get the rations. They handed out the cash at once.¹⁶⁷ This humiliated me. What? I go down the mine for sausage?! And the men around me told me to come and join them, so I asked if they were on hunger strike or what? I went to the medical room, registered and lay down.

Between **23 and 24 June** a further three people joined the hunger strike. Their main reason for joining was a desperate lack of money what was a result of non-payment of wages. The family of one lived only on his mother-in-law's pension, while another had three small children: *'The youngest has already lost all his teeth through a lack of vitamins'*.

Events began to develop on **25 June**. Miners from Shop No.4 held a brigadiers' meeting, at which certain general demands were elaborated. No-one could remember exactly what they were, apart from that *'there was something about wages and something about management'*. The main cause of the action comes down to anger at the breach of justice: *'Shop No.5 is being paid, why can't they find money for us? Shop No.5 is receiving rations, but what about us, are we not people too?'* It is worth remembering that the workers of Shop No.5 had been transferred from Pervomaiskaya mine in September 1996 and, despite the fact that *'half of them*

¹⁶⁷ According to the economist, workers were earning between 80,000 and 180,000 roubles a day.

are our workers now', they were still perceived as 'strangers'. Moreover, 'while everyone was paid or not paid equally up till February, then the differences began'.

According to Gennady K., a development worker in Shop No.4:

The whole shop wanted to lay down tools. We went to the director, who sent for the shop chief. He asked how many people were needed to bail out the water. He said about 8 (it is against the law to refuse to do such work) and the rest were to be laid off without pay. Then the swearing began, I didn't wait to hear it, I just got up and went to the medical room, registered and lay down.

The other participants went home first to notify their families before returning. A further 7 workers from Shop No.4 joined the hunger strike.

The last participant joined the hunger strike on **27 June**. Although he was a worker from Shop No.5, he joined on principle:

I had another 10 days till the end of my holiday. I came to the mine to get some money. (All workers were paid 70% of April 1997's wage that day). I had found out that they were giving out rations. Why could I get it but others don't? I went home for the portable heater. It's difficult to act alone, but easier together. The management's policy is to make the shops fight between themselves. Like they feed animals to make them work...

The further increase in the number of participants was brought to a halt by the payment to the whole mine of part of their pay on 27th June, and on the following day more than half of the workers in Shop No.5 (which, according to the administration, 'significantly increased productivity' under the new payment conditions) did not go to work. The reason was also quite usual – they were all drunk. Against this background, the limp war between the hunger strikers and the administration and profkom continued, either the mattresses were refused, or the

cable of the television set brought from someone's home was cut: *'This is not a cinema!'* The verbal insults were, apparently, offensive, daily and mutual.

A few words about the conditions in which the hunger strike took place: the extent to which the event was perceived by those around as routine and uninteresting is quite staggering. The hunger strike took place in one of the buildings of the administrative complexes (ABK). Only boiled water was drunk. Those around either acted as if, or really paid no attention to those on hunger strike. The stories told by those involved in the hunger strike are awful:

I came off the fourth shift at 2 a.m. and registered for the strike... The medic only arrived on the 6th day of the hunger strike, while mattresses arrived on the 12th day from the town health department. The director refused to give us the mattresses, saying, 'Let them sleep on chairs'.

On **10 July** all those involved in the hunger strike were paid all their wage arrears and taken to hospital: all the mine's workers were paid their wages for June-July of the previous year (1996). The growing tension was removed on the eve of the regional action, so that the expression of their discontent by the workers of the mine entered 'a civilised channel'.

On **11 July** the hunger strike was called to an end, and under the auspices of the profkom leadership, Biryulinskaya workers organised to go to Kemerovo in three buses (provided by the enterprise management) to participate in the all-Kuzbass protest action.

7.4.3 The activity of the official structures

For a deeper understanding of the conflict, it is perhaps better to distinguish immediately between the various characters involved. The enterprise director and

the general director represent the coal industry structures; the mayor and the deputy director of the administration responsible for coal industry issues represent the local authorities. It is interesting to note that the attitude of the latter to the conflict and their level of participation in resolving the matter varied significantly. Whereas during the first hunger strike the town mayor met personally with the strikers and facilitated the end of the open conflict by paying funds out of the local budget, in anticipation of the subsequent payment of this debt by the enterprise director, he resolutely refused during the second strike to be involved in the conflict at the mine. The wives of the hunger strikers who came to meet with the mayor were told not to come to the administration, that the town owed the mine nothing, and that the mine in fact owed the town 3 billion roubles.

At the same time, a much greater level of activity in bringing an end to the second conflict was exhibited by the general director of the Severokuzbassugol' AO (Joint Stock Company) and the deputy head of the regional authorities responsible for coal industry affairs. They personally visited the mine to find out about the conflict. The deputy head of the regional authorities responsible for coal industry affairs visited the mine twice for an hour or two to talk with the hunger strikers, informing them of the situation in the region and listening to what they had to say. Finally, on 10 July, the hunger strikers were paid their money for all the previous months, while the whole mine received their wages for June-July 1996. It is possible that the high level of activity exhibited by the representatives of the regional administration is explained by the fact that from mid-June (i.e. the eve of the hunger strike), the appointment of Aman Tuleev to the post of governor was already public knowledge: he had acted in the defence of the miners at all meetings and public events. Most likely of all, the attempt by the representative of the regional

authorities to bring the conflict to an end was connected with the appointment of the new governor and the approaching anniversary of the first miners' strike, a date which is traditionally marked by an increase in political activity of the region's population (particularly dangerous given the prolonged wage arrears problem).

For its part, the enterprise administration did everything possible to isolate those involved in the hunger strike and to see that they were not supported by the labour collective. The way in which those involved in the hunger strike were characterised by the representatives of the administration did not correspond to reality. The words of the director gave the impression that conscientious and qualified workers supported the administration, while those '*who have hardly ever worked*' were taking part in the hunger strike. When the mine director and general director of the Severokuzbassugol' company talked with us, they also asserted that the hunger strikers were on the whole 'the drifters' and trouble makers, the unskilled workers who worked at the mine '*a week short of a year*'. Our analysis of personnel department data showed that most of the hunger strikers were grade 5 (the highest grade) face workers, and that many had worked at the mine for more than 5 years. Additionally, those who initiated the protest had 'given their native enterprise' more than 10 years.

Insofar as the mine director perceived the start of the second hunger strike as a development of the personal ambitions of S., who managed to incite another few people from other shops, relations between the parties immediately took the form of irreconcilable and complete confrontation. This was exhibited on the part of the director by him completely ignoring both the demands of the hunger strikers and attempting not to notice that anything serious was happening at all. Opportunities for dialogue were lost in the fog of personal insults. The director's refusal to

provide mattresses to the hunger strikers and his malicious declaration that *'this is not a sanatorium!'* were characteristic of the level of mutual relations. It can be stated that the personification of parties involved in the conflict made a solution impossible at enterprise level without the involvement of outsiders.

7.4.4 The response of the trade union committee and the labour collective

The activity of the profkom was examined only with reference to the actions of its chairman; no meeting of the members of the trade union committee was held to discuss attitudes to the protest action. The chairman's attitude to the first and second strikes varied significantly. During the first strike he supported its participants, and met with the mine director for this reason to demand that the hunger strikers' demands were met. *'I kicked up a stink immediately, starting to call everyone, involving the prosecutor's office, and demanding all relevant material. Then the mayor paid us a visit...'* (interview with the trade union committee chairman. 15.07.97). The mine's workers maintained the same position. According to the profkom chair, many of them came to him and asked him to do something as *'the people were shrinking in front of their eyes'*.

The second hunger strike, which was started by the very same people, was perceived by the profkom chair as a development of personal insult and ambitions, a desire once again to 'spite' the director. He considered all the actions of the protest's instigator through the prism of his long-standing personal conflict with the director and believed that this time it was S. who was in the wrong. For this reason, the chairman, on behalf of the profkom, completely supported the director and his position was completely indistinguishable from that of the enterprise's

administration. This assessment did not change when new people became involved in the hunger strike. All of them, according to the chairman, 'were worked on' by S., who appeared at the planning meetings before each shift to talk to the workers and to try to persuade them to become involved in the protest.

Emphasising the fact that the participants in the first strike had received all the money owed to them at the expense of the collective, the profkom chairman held shift meetings at all shops and in all the mine's services to discuss the issue of the attitude of the labour collective to the demands of the hunger strikers. For their part, the hunger strikers tried to organise a trade union meeting to conduct negotiations with the trade union leader. Only one person not participating in the hunger strike came to the meeting, however, and their venture was not crowned with success. As previously mentioned, during the first strike the town mayor provided money to the hunger strikers from the town budget in return for their promise to refrain from similar action in the future. The second hunger strike was perceived by many miners as a breach of 'a gentleman's word'. As the profkom chair commented on this matter, 'this should be answered in the market place'. For this reason the participants' actions were initially badly received by the collective. It is clear from the protocols of the labour collective's meeting on the hunger strike and the hunger strikers' demands that their wages be paid that the workers adopted the same stance on isolation as taken by the administration. The protocol of the 09/09/97 from the meeting of the collective of the main shaft states the following: *'It is decided that we resolutely disagree that the wage arrears of the hunger strikers should be paid at the expense of our wages. Everyone should receive the money they have earned'*. From the boiler house: *'It is decided that the request to render assistance to the*

hunger strikers be turned down since we are also not in the best position, we also have families who want to eat, just like the hunger strikers. '

In this way the enterprise administration and the profkom created a mood of anti-solidarity amongst the enterprise's workers, highlighting that if the hunger strikers demanded to be paid their wages, this would be at the expense of the rest of the workers. Having similarly organised pressure on the general director, the mine administration and profkom were able to ensure that money for the hunger strikers was provided from funds controlled by the general director of the Severokuzbassugol' concern and not from the enterprise's budget. From the events described it is obvious that their activity was co-ordinated, traditionally directed at beating money out of higher bodies.

7.4.5 The repercussions of the hunger strike

These events were evaluated in different ways by the participants and those involved. Jointly participating in the protest rallied the hunger strikers. This became a leitmotiv in discussions with journalists, which provoked the hunger strikers to reflect on their experience: *'We are all like brothers now'; 'A person is not a slave, yet we didn't receive our money for a year and stayed quiet'; 'In '89 we made a mistake by pulling a blanket over ourselves, but now we've had the last laugh'*. At the same time, in the eyes of the rest of the labour collective the hunger strikers remained those who were trying to obtain their money at the expense of the others. This led to a split in the labour collective, and probably to the temporary isolation of those who took part in the hunger strike. Whatever the case, the fact that one of the initiators of the protest was sacked for a breach of labour discipline bothered no-one. Usually, this cannot fail to attract attention, such as in cases where the

administration punishes the person who expresses the interests of the labour collective, which as a rule provokes the mobilisation of the whole collective. Insofar as the main issue was the non-payment of wages, and in their protest action the hunger strikers were demanding that only they themselves be paid, they found themselves isolated, and future struggles with the administration for their rights took place with the complete disinterest of the labour collective.¹⁶⁸

Doctors rendered no assistance to the hunger strikers. In their own words, they were counting upon the participants of the first hunger strike, with whom they had ‘worked’, to explain everything to the novices.

The miners started the hunger strike without seeking the agreement of the doctors, or even that of their own shop. They didn’t take their own situation into account at all, particularly whether they had any chronic illnesses. They started the hunger strike unprepared, since they didn’t know they had to maintain their fluid levels, or the rules of personal hygiene during a prolonged fast. They knew neither how to begin or end a hunger strike. This has to be done gradually, but one of the hunger strikers, for example, ate a pot of soup before he began to fast, and even now [at the end of the hunger strike – V.B.] they constantly ignore the diet regime (interview with the head of the therapy department of the Berezovskii clinical hospital, 12/07/97).

¹⁶⁸ L., a worker, received all money owed to him following the first strike and participated in the second only for the sake of S., supporting all of his demands. Since all money had already been paid to him, the mine administration announced that his non-appearance at work would be seen as ‘*progul*’ (failure to turn up for work); the following day he was reprimanded, then seriously reprimanded, and then sacked according to Article 33. During our visit to the mine he was visiting the profkom for some paper or other and informed us that he was taking the mine to court for unfair dismissal.

Moreover, as a result of the town hospital's difficult financial position and serious lack of medicines, the doctors were unable to return the hunger strikers to their 'former physical form', as requested. *'Some of the hunger strikers, who saw the hunger strike through to the end, were given special protein drugs. They are very expensive and were given only to the first and most difficult cases. When the larger group arrived, there was no more medicine available'*. This led to doctors being accused of corruption by the hunger strikers. Although the medics tried to avoid making an assessment of the hunger strikers' actions during the interview, when speaking of their own feelings,¹⁶⁹ it was clear that using expensive medicines and rendering assistance to the hunger strikers had dealt a serious blow to the hospital's budget, leaving the hospital unable to accept 'genuinely' sick people.¹⁷⁰ It is impossible to leave the human factor out of this account, since at the hospital itself wages had not been paid for October and December 1996, while only January's wages had by then been paid. Under such circumstances, accusations of corruption against the medical staff were found offensive and turned the hospital workers against the hunger strikers. Nevertheless, the doctors were unanimous in asserting

¹⁶⁹ The main consequence of a prolonged fast is the intensification of chronic illnesses. People now eat badly, which with the unfavourable ecological conditions makes the hunger strikers vulnerable to illnesses. All the hunger strikers have disturbed their metabolic rates, and show effects of hypoencephalopathia (disturbance of the metabolism of brain cells). The consequences of this are an inadequate assessment of how they feel, and there is even the possibility of psychological derangement.

¹⁷⁰ The cost of hospitalising a single patient for a 3-week period is 2.5 million roubles. The cost of initial and mandatory medical services (medicine, equipment, diagnoses) is around 200,500 roubles. According to the medics' rough estimates, the cost of treating the hunger strikers would be around 15 million roubles.

that with the existing diets, the ecological situation in Kuzbass, and the miners' existing occupational illnesses, participation in the hunger strike would inevitably be reflected in the appearance of chronic illnesses, which would in turn affect the miners' ability to work.

7.4.6 Some fragments to supplement the general picture of events

Theft and the low level of labour discipline are two inter-related problems, which are significant not only at this mine, but for all coal industry enterprises. Around the time of our visit to the mine, the mine had produced no coal for two weeks. A mistake by a coal-producing machine operator (MGVM) had resulted in a machine breaking down. As explained by the mine director during an underground visit, after every 20 metres the sections should be moved the width of the cut coal seam and the hydraulic props should 'hold back the mountain' to prevent a cave-in. *'But this machine operator did the whole length of the drift at once – 200 metres – and the whole lot caved in.'* The overwhelming gravity of the mountain had made itself known. Many sections were choked up, and there were huge clumps of coal everywhere, which could at any time fall down the gradient, 1.5 m of wide steel sheets in many places were twisted like serpents. Although we went underground with the first shift, which as a rule has the most people, and which traditionally is the repair shift, there were only 7 people: they were not there to work but, having divided into groups, sat despondently around the particularly hopeless blockage. No-one was speaking, but their appearances all expressed the same thought: *'Bloody hell! Something has to be done!'* The same mood was expressed on the faces of the mine director and the general director of the Severokuzbassugol' concern. It was obvious that nothing could be done there with bare hands. The

general director promised the mine director to send help in the form of people and technical equipment during the next few days. From their conversation it was clear that this was far from the first such case and that they hoped 'to clear up this mess' within a week.

During the visit underground, certain broken motors, dumped near the conveyor belt caught our attention. 'Everyone is on the rob', commented the general director. There are several places in every mining town where metal can be sold. And although it is completely obvious that once such metal is removed from the mine there is nowhere else but there to take it, these places thrive and prosper. In one place which buys copper and aluminium, they pay 'real money', which in conditions of the non-payment of wages stimulates the active collection of metal amongst the workers. In other places, finished products are paid for copper, in the miners' universal equivalent, provided in half and one litre bottles. Vandalism in relation to equipment which contains non-ferrous metals, including the barbarous cutting of copper cables, reduces the technical base of coal enterprises to a catastrophic situation. Rumours already circulate like legends of detailed facts on how during a shift change, for fifteen minutes, while the cage was waiting underground for the workers coming off their shift, 300 metres of copper cable was removed. The cage's ascent was paralysed. The same methods were used to remove the cable from the ventilation and telephone communications, anything that contains non-ferrous metals. *'A lot of damage is caused by the metal chaos. Cables are stolen, as is lots of equipment, and instruments are damaged'* (interview with the trade union committee chairman, 15/07/97). Theft has reached fantastic proportions. According to the general director, during the first half of 1997, 6 billion roubles worth of cable was removed from the coal company's enterprises by

thieves. Moreover, this is not the largest coal association among the 30 or so that exist in Russia. Underground (not to mention surface) work is conducted on the basis of half-destroyed, half-stolen technical equipment, which is in breach of all health and safety norms. Explosions, funerals and the heroic resurrection of the ruined coal production follows, which demands new victims. It's a vicious circle.

It is easy to judge and condemn. But, if we go beyond the estimated category, it is easy to understand the actions of the mineworkers. Workers perceive their jobs as their main source of income. When, having worked month after month, they do not receive the wages they have earned, workers initially begin superficial expropriation (which has always existed: the taking home of gloves, boots, instruments, anything that can be used at home), before transferring to the next level, the development of which we have already discussed. So the workers take into account the eternal 'social' payments and everything that is connected with living people, according to the residual principle and the traditional technocratic approach of the industry management. The essence of such an approach is encompassed in the fact that, whatever the difficulties, and in spite of them, Rosugol' and the enterprises which comprise it will always have the resources to repair broken equipment. They may not be able to find money for wages, but they can for spare parts and for clearing up after accidents. This has formed a motive of self-justification for the thieves. In conditions of the non-payment of wages, and taking into account the rising levels of theft, stolen cable and equipment is already beginning to present itself as one of the types of indirect natural payment by the mine administration for its workers' labour.

Like the previously described conflicts, the first hunger strike at Biryulinskaya mine was instigated within the framework of the all-Russian trade union protest, which

confirms our conjecture vis-à-vis its role as a detonator of prolonged local protest action. The main reason for conflict is traditionally the non-payment of wages, and the hunger strike was preceded by many spontaneous work stoppages at the mine.

In the example under consideration we came up against the situation whereby, within the apparent framework of one labour conflict and one protest action, different reasons emerged which had attracted the workers to participate in the hunger strike. Motives for participation in the conflict are far from always to be found in the material sphere. The participants of the first hunger strike received all of the arrears and holiday pay owed to them: the main aim of the initiator was to prove that he was in the right. Others supported him out of solidarity, but their hunger strike was also a means of defending themselves from management attack. The reason new people became involved in the hunger strike (apart from those involved in the first strike) was the breach of the usual hierarchy within the workers' milieu. In conditions of a sharp limitation on material possibilities and general degradation, people react particularly painfully to the administration's actions that differentiate the workers' position. The prevailing principle is one of, 'If it's bad, it has to be bad for everyone'. Any breach of this principle, any attempt to breach the usual and traditional hierarchy, even if it is done 'for the sake of the whole collective' or 'for the survival of the enterprise', produces a response from the part of the deprived groups of workers in the labour collective, and also from some of those belonging to those 'for whom the great favour is being done', but for whom it is important that the moral values of the former system of labour relations (equality, collectivism, solidarity, mutual assistance etc.) are represented.

The protest action did not completely involve a single section. The strike of the second shift was quickly 'extinguished' by bringing in strikebreakers from the third

shift, having sent the discontented on unpaid leave. The absence of an organisation really representing the interests of the workers resulted in the absence of solidarity and manipulation of disunited workers on the part of the directors, with the support of the president of the trade union committee.

In our example they did not pay money to everybody, but everybody continued to work, while individual people from different brigades spontaneously joined the hunger-strike. This was an act of desperate and openly expressed protest, whereas the majority expressed this protest in the form of a decline in the productivity of their labour. To say that they worked, is simply an abuse of language. Production of 25 thousand tonnes of coal against a plan of 125 thousand tonnes is silent sabotage.

It is, by and large, impossible to say that the workers acted together for the sake of any definite purpose. The basis for each of their actions lay in a whole mass of personal insults and emotions aroused not only by this specific situation, but also by their indignation at the authorities, having no money, the breakdown in miners' brotherhood, and the general confusion in the mine and in the country as a whole. The participants themselves were almost unable to clearly formulate the reason for their desperate actions:

I went on hunger strike because I didn't agree with the court's decision... I was also angered by the actions of the medical workers, who signed me out of the sanatorium and sent me back to work absolutely unwell, so that my head still spins and I'm generally indisposed to this day. I'm angry at the failure to bring criminal proceedings concerning the death threats made to Comrade S. by the director. I am against the breakdown in production and the director breaking up the labour collective. I demand the rest of my wages (From L.'s declaration, 20/06/97).

Unlike the hunger strikes and other forms of protest widespread during the early and mid 1990s, when the participants in protest action put forward demands on behalf of, or in defence of, the labour collective and their enterprises (for this reason they received the covert support of enterprise mine directors, as they were directed at the higher echelons), this hunger strike – this protest – was only of concern to its participants. They acted in an individual capacity and fought only for their own interests. This confirms the conjecture about the trend towards an atomisation (individualisation) of protest action by the representatives of waged labour.

We are thus concerned with social obstruction, presenting itself as a layer of several conflicts one on top of the other. For the enterprise's director, the most obvious and painful cause was the personal conflict with the participants of the first hunger strike. Thus, all forms of relations between the parties were determined by the personal incompatibility and mutual insults of the previous unresolved conflict, which formed the background against which the attitudes of both sides were forged during the second hunger strike. In this respect, it is logical to speak of a hierarchy of reasons and the domination of one of the sub-conflicts within the framework of the complicated (multi-causal) conflict.

This and similar conflicts cannot be resolved by means of one action, insofar as there are several causes, and correspondingly, this would lead to the departure of only some of the participants from the conflict – those whose demands were satisfied by the decision taken. As a rule, such actions are perceived by those who continue to participate in a protest as the deliberate division of the workers (which it usually is).

During the conflict, the employers used the usual tactic of introducing division into the labour collective and isolating those directly participating in the conflict from the other workers. A lack of financial resources in the enterprise's bank accounts and the accumulated wage arrears enabled management to manipulate the workers' judgement and to turn the whole collective against those participating in the conflict, by declaring that in paying money to the hunger strikers the remaining workers would receive nothing.

Rejecting traditional strikes and using a form of protest such as a hunger strike emphasises management's decreased sensitivity to the 'usual' forms of protest. The aim of the hunger strike, as a more demonstrative protest, is to attract public attention and organise public pressure on the authorities and employers. Hunger strikes are the most widespread form of protest amongst prisoners, used when there are almost no other possibilities. That the miners have turned to hunger strikes is an expression in this sense of their complete hopelessness and despair. They have an individual or group nature and testify to the absence of a strong workers' organisation.

The protest action did not assume a mass character. Most of the labour collective workers not only refused to support those participating in the hunger strike, but actually spoke out against them. There are apparently many arguments for this. What appears most relevant to us is firstly, most workers doubt that it is possible to 'beat' out of the director a significant sum of money for the whole collective (hence the individual demonstrative actions), and secondly, workers reject strikes at enterprise level as a means of solving the problem. The participation (or non-participation) of the profkom in the organisation of a protest does not, therefore, play a decisive role. As a rule, in such cases where the strike is led by the trade

union, at least the moral support of the whole miners' union, and wider publicity of the protest in the mass media is inferred. Besides, the workers are afraid of strikes at their enterprises, since, in their opinion, it can result in closure of the mine and loss of jobs.

Such a prolonged conflict was finally settled through the participation of the regional administration and the Severokuzbassugol' AO: money was provided the day before the all-Kuzbass protest took place. As management structures were afraid of the radicalisation of forms of protest during the all-Kuzbass protest, they were interested in settling the conflict at the mine. However, if they paid money only to the hunger strikers, this could generate a chain reaction and push the whole collective or some part of it towards protest. To maintain peace and equilibrium, a small payment was made to all workers.

7.5 Conclusion

I have described above four strikes which were instigated on the day of, or immediately following, all-Russian protest action. This larger action motivated collectives to protest in their own right and conflicts continued for some time after other enterprises had already returned to work. In three of the four cases, the workers suffered defeat. In the fourth case, we can speak of success, which is again connected with the radicalisation of the actions of the strikers threatened with a breach of the political balance of forces.

The authorities are afraid of the participation in widespread protests of enterprise collectives, at which conflict assumes an open form. Their participation in town meetings always leads to the radicalisation of demands prepared by the organisers: **'Inflamed' by a prolonged strike at their enterprise and by not finding a way to**

solve their problems, they are prepared for more decisive action and may bring with them the other participants of town and regional meetings. In this respect, particular danger is presented by protracted conflicts, when people have already reached 'boiling point' and participation in the meeting provides an outlet for their collective rage, which finds expression in actions not envisaged by the organisers of the protest and present, from the point of view of the authorities, a threat to public order. In such a way, we can say that the strike fulfils a role in the process, organising the workers and preparing them for more decisive action.

Taking such logic into account, it would have been more effective for trade union leaders at enterprises, where passions are always simmering, to instigate strikes some time before the all-Russian protest (when there was an opportunity for an operative and positive reaction from the authorities), than to join together with everyone and then to prolong local action in conditions where the worst is already behind the authorities so that they are less responsive to pressure.

The example of Biryulinskaya mine confirms the hypothesis that an end to conflict does not mean that the reasons behind it have been eradicated. The roots of the second conflict at the mine lay in the fact that the previous conflict had not been resolved. In this way, the end of a strike, hunger strike, or any other protest action can be seen as the transformation of a conflict from an open to a latent form. This explains the permanent explosions of wildcat strikes. Latent conflict keeps the workers constantly ready for action – all they need is a reason.

Instead of general demands, some of the participants initially wrote individual declarations. Additional demands were subsequently added to these, on the basis of which a general list was later drawn up. Since there were no political demands on

the list, the conflict did not transcend the boundaries of the enterprise, in spite of the rather wide publicity given to its course in the mass media in Kemerovo region.

Emotional fog prevents us from seeing the system of labour relations, which is obscured by tense personal relations. The personification by the workers of the employers' responsibility for the worsening of their situation, and collective personal insults prevent the two sides from seeing constructive moments in each others' position and proposals. The words of the opposing side are rejected straight off. As a result, personal accusations, including offences, take the place of dialogue, following which the true reasons behind the conflict are forgotten. As a result, the instigators of the conflict are frequently sacked on the one hand, with a demand that the director is sacked being made on the other. The principle of 'not giving up ground to the enemy' cultivated for many years by the Soviet authorities in patriotic education, sets those participating in the conflict to fight until victory, which is perceived as the total suppression or destruction of the other party. At the same time, the institutionalisation of labour conflict presupposes the attainment of a consensus on preserving the life of both sides, which is the basic proposition of the effective functioning of an existing system. If the fulfilment of one of the party's demands destroys the basic existence of the other party, the foundations of labour relations are undermined. Not being in a position to change the system as a whole, the parties try to change the situation by concentrating all their efforts on the struggle against specific people (the employers, representatives of local and federal authorities, worker-activists and so on).

The role played by the trade union (in this case the trade union committee in the person of its president) in these conflicts is interesting. At Yagunovskaya neither of the trade unions took on itself the leadership of the strike. The trade union

committee presidents joined the strike committee after the strike had begun. At Fizkul'turnik the trade union did not play any role in the organisation of the action. The workers created a strike committee which was joined (under pressure from the labour collective) by the trade union president, 'having understood that there was nowhere else to go'. In both of these cases, despite the fact of many months delay in the payment of wages, the demand to pay wages appeared only fourth or fifth in the list of demands (after the demands to save the mine and to close down the non-ferrous metal traders in the town, to whom the cable stolen from the mine was being sold). As in the 1989 strike this suggests the creative 'generalisation' of the workers' demands by the trade union leaders in collaboration with the directors, as a result of which the directors' interests took first place. At Tsentral'naya the old trade union committee received a vote of no confidence and the new one was not recognised by the management of the enterprise and for this 'respectable' reason was not able to get down to work. The Mine Salvation Committee was created by an initiative group which did not include any members of the trade union committee. The specific feature of the situation at Biryulinskaya was that the trade union together with the administration came out against the participants in the action directed against the director but, with the support of the enterprise director, participated in the All-Kuzbass action. All these cases, without a single exception, are evidence of a crisis in the trade union movement and that the expression and defence of workers' interests by the trade unions is purely formal and is not confirmed in action.

The directors are ready to support protest actions in those circumstances in which the demands of the participants are directed against somebody beyond the limits of the enterprise, do not threaten the power of the director or his control over the

enterprise and do not disturb the production process. In the course of actions inside the enterprise, in which demands are addressed to the director, the workers do not in practice receive any real support either from their trade union committee or from higher trade union bodies.

The position of the trade unions, either continuing to support the directors or standing aside and doing nothing against them, only increases the despair of the workers which is expressed in the appearance of a phenomenon defined as 'labour terrorism' – a forced desperate form of protest by workers in the context of long-drawn-out and deadlocked labour conflict. Having appeared originally in the form of blocking railroads with the objective of obtaining money from the budget, in time it began to take other forms: in particular, the taking of hostages from amongst the representatives of local authorities or enterprise directors to increase pressure on those on whom decision-making is dependent.¹⁷¹ The consequent threat to public order leads to the more active intervention of the security forces in the disputes.

¹⁷¹ In the middle of January, for example, the female workers of the central enrichment factory in Anzhero-Sudzhensk took the enterprise director hostage, demanding that wage arrears be paid off. On 26 January, by means of organised action by the workers of the Kuznetskaya mine (an independent enterprise in Kuzbass with some foreign capital), the entire Board of Directors were held in the director's office for six days. The miners released the general director only having received assurances from the law enforcement agencies to put him in handcuffs, take him into custody and instigate a criminal case against him in relation to the enterprise's destruction.

In the conditions of legal mayhem that reign in society, unrestricted use of force to resolve problems becomes an integral part of public consciousness,¹⁷² which perceives severe (unlawful) forms of protest as acceptable in order to put pressure on the coal sector and local authorities. There is an increasingly strong tendency towards the formation in the public mind of a civil war consciousness, the main principle of which is that 'the end justifies the means'. From this point, the transition is inevitable from strikes as a form of protest to more serious forms of opposition, such as seizing industrial and administrative premises, blocking railroads and other lines of communication etc.

The fact that the strikes in all cases were connected to wider trade union protest action is worthy of note. Yagunovskaya and Fizkul'turnik went on strike during (and immediately after) the FNPR protest action, while Tsentral'naya went on strike on the day of the general miners' strike. The first hunger strike at Biryulinskaya began on 27 March, the day of the FNPR action, and the second was immediately 'snuffed out', having paid money on the eve of the All-Kuzbass action on 11 July. The policy of the leadership of Rosugleprof was not to allow a strike to begin before the announcement of the All-Kuzbass action. This was to allow social tension in the region to build up and thereby to exert influence on the government. Moreover, among the workers who delayed their action until the beginning of the wider action, a certain expectation built up, which was not satisfied. When, following the All-Russian action, they declared that their demands had not been satisfied and they expected support from nobody, their organised action quickly

¹⁷² (About the bosses) 'They have a brutal attitude to people' 'In a bandit country it is necessary to use bandit methods!': these expressions characterise the general psychological mood among

turned into a spontaneous strike. At this stage the directors, as a rule, begin to 'extinguish' the strike because it cannot be used to beat additional resources out of higher bodies. Thus, consideration of these examples allows us to conclude that All-Russian protest actions play the role of detonators of local strikes.¹⁷³

As with the cases at Yagunovskaya and Tsentral'naya mines, the forces of law and order were actively involved in the conflict. In the words of one of the members of the city workers' committee, 'the workers of the law enforcement organs support us, so long as they are not stamped on from above. The Deputy Head of the oblast OVD (Regional Department of Internal Affairs) came to the railroad. The "generals" arrived and talked about freeing the railroad, and they said "if [the arrangements V.B.] don't suit you, we will be the first to go on the road"' (interview, 20.04.97). According to the members of the city workers' committee, representatives of the FSB (former KGB) participated in all their meetings. When labour conflicts go beyond the limits of a single enterprise, they cease to be simply a matter of the relation between the worker and the employer and are fraught with the possibility of the occurrence of acts of civil disobedience and violations of social order. This is a question which falls within the jurisdiction of the FSB and other law-enforcement bodies, so their representatives participate fairly actively at the stage at which the contending parties may reach an agreement. Where the law-

workers.

¹⁷³ Thus, in the words of a worker at Fizkul'turnik: 'Bud'ko [President of Rosugleprof, V.B.] several times announced the cancellation of an All-Russian strike the weekend before the announced day. He explained this by the fact that negotiations with the government had begun and our questions were being considered. After this we went on strike on the Monday and the strike was declared to be spontaneous' (20.04.97)

enforcement agencies were unsuccessful in ending or somehow damping down conflict as a result of their participation in negotiations, special groups were used against the workers to show their willingness to use any type of force against the strikers in case of subordination. The use of the law-enforcement organs in Tsentralnaya mine to suppress the action shows that the repressive structures do not delve deeply into the essence of labour relations, considering actions only as violations of social order, hooliganism or the like, regulated by the civil or criminal codes. The politicisation of labour conflicts and the threat of their transformation into acts of civil disobedience underlies the tendency immediately to introduce new forces (the law-enforcement organs and repressive structures) into the system of industrial relations, without any understanding of the specific features of this system. Again, the result is that labour disputes are not resolved but only suppressed, with the risk that they will re-appear later with even greater force.

8 Labour conflict in the Rostov coal basin, February 1999

In previous chapters I have looked at strikes in more or less unsuccessful mines, in which strikes and more militant action have sometimes secured the payment of wages owed, but have increasingly risked provoking the closure of the mine. As the situation has got more difficult, workers of unsuccessful mines have been less and less willing to take the risk of undertaking any kind of action. In this chapter I will look at recent strikes in two successful mines, one of which is fully privatised and so outside the system of state subsidies. These cases are especially interesting because they took place at the same time as intense lobbying, so we can see the interaction of the two processes: the branch powers use the threat and reality of disorder as an implicit weapon backing their demands, but at the same time management and the unions are both doing their best to repress the strikers.¹⁷⁴

Obukhovskaya mine was potentially very prosperous and had originally been privatised to the labour collective, leaving the coal association and isolating itself from the other mines, but a controlling interest of shares had been acquired by a private owner, who sought systematically to divide the collective and drive down wages. Regular small spontaneous strikes were settled by paying off the strikers, at the expense of the rest of the workers, and requiring the strikers to resign. The trade union president headed off several strike initiatives in the run-up to regional

¹⁷⁴ This chapter is based on research conducted in Rostov region by myself and colleagues from ISITO, Petr Bizyukov, Ol'ga Vinokurova, and Anton Leppik.

negotiations, but when nothing was forthcoming three main shops agreed to an underground strike, although in the event only 19 miners participated, and work went on around them, leaving the strikers isolated. Eventually, as in the past, the miners agreed to end the strike in exchange for the payment of wages due, but had to resign their jobs.

Oktyabr'skaya-Yuzhnaya is a modern mine with good prospects, but it has high labour turnover and little sense of collectivism. The strike in question broke out after the miners' hopes of a successful outcome of the miners' congress were disappointed. Both trade unions are organised in the mine, but the strike, which started spontaneously, was headed by NPG, the main demand being the payment of enormous wage arrears. Management in this case contrived to turn the strike into a lock-out, laying off the entire labour force without pay, which lasted until the workers decided to return to work after two weeks.

Deterioration in the payment of wages had led to conflicts becoming almost universal at coal enterprises, where they would erupt spontaneously and end unexpectedly, without bringing any results for the workers. The crisis which exploded in Russia in August 1998 further complicated the position of the coal enterprises in the Rostov coal basin. Owing to the depletion of the main deposits, low-power steeply-sloped seams had to be developed, the cost of coal production was high, and the dependence of the coal enterprises on the volume of state subsidies, and their timely distribution, was higher than in the other main coal regions.

During the research visit, strikes took place in two mines, where case studies were conducted. As one of the mines was independent, i.e. it was not part of the coal

association, what was interesting from the point of view of the research was to investigate to what extent a change of ownership influenced the forms of labour relations and the methods used to settle labour conflicts between the workers and management, and whether there were differences in the role of the trade unions in the two cases. By contrast to the strikes reviewed in previous chapters, which took place basically in dying and closing mines, in this chapter I will describe a strike in prosperous mines. One can note as a specific feature of the miners' strike movement in Russia that nowadays strikes more often take place in prosperous coal-mining enterprises. At the same time, strikes in mines with poor prospects in the period 1994–8 often led to their closure. The lesson which the workers drew from this was that workers of prosperous mines, who were not afraid that their strike would destroy their jobs, began to participate more often in strikes. It may be that this shift in the emphasis of protest action from weak to prosperous enterprises can be considered to be a new feature which appeared in the strike movement in Russia at the end of the 1990s.

During the time of our research, an emergency meeting of the Miners of the Russian Donbass was held in the town of Shakhty. Attending this meeting, as well as observing the discussions and obtaining documents from the Rosugleprof terkom, provided a fuller picture of the social context in which labour relations were developing at these coal enterprises in Rostov region. The coincidence in time of the strikes at the two enterprises with the meeting of the miners of the Russian Donbass, which had an openly lobbying character, makes it possible to consider whether there is a connection between these events and what role the trade union plays in this.

8.1 *Social context of coal restructuring in the Rostov region*

The adoption of the state budget for 1999, which provided for the payment of only 5.85 billion roubles to support the coal industry, signified a cut in real payments, with the government introducing the concept of ‘bad’ and ‘good’ subsidies. Good subsidies included those directed at mine closures, while bad included social payments and payments as part of the branch tariff agreement. As the new budget left no hope that wage debts would be settled, social tension once more began to increase in coal industry enterprises.

An emergency congress of miners, which was held on 1 February in Moscow, and in which Primakov, the prime minister, had taken part, had not instilled hope that the situation in the coal industry would improve. Delegates to the Congress noted that a year earlier President Yel'tsin had promised to increase state subsidies from 6 to 10 trillion roubles, but that this promise had not been kept. Primakov's promise was also not validated by instructions on the source of additional finance for the industry. Moreover, the payment of state subsidies in January, and planned payments for February were to come out of the annual figure of 5.85 billion roubles.

It was against this background that the presidium of the territorial committee of Rosugleprof, meeting in Shakhty, adopted a decision on more serious action from the miners and on a possible march by them to the capital city ‘using the Romanian example’. As the march would take place along the main highway linking the Southern Caucasus with Central Russia, it would mean a complete blockade of the largest road artery in this part of Russia. The decision was sent to the official structures, primarily aimed at drawing attention to the problems facing the Rostov coal basin and to influence the adoption by management of decisions on coal issues.

Invitations were simultaneously sent to all the main regional structures to participate in an emergency meeting of coal activists in the Russian Donbass.

The Rostov territorial committee is the largest in Russia's coal industry. Prior to the beginning of restructuring, it had 26 coal enterprises (compared to between 10 and 12 in most others). As a result of restructuring within the Rostovugol' AO, it now has 14 enterprises. This high number is accompanied by a higher level of organisation (compared to others) during protests held by the terkom (workers also participated in city protests and were involved in their implementation). The radicalisation of the position of the terkom's chairperson, which was expressed in his calling for an audit commission to be sent to the region from the State Duma, and an investigation to be made by the federal prosecutor's office, led to the beginning of court proceedings against the general director of Rostovugol' AO, Leonid Zhigunov, who was forced to quit his job. From 1993, the Rostov territorial organisation had repeatedly acted as the initiator of local and Russian protest actions. Under the leadership of Vladimir Katal'nikov the terkom had organised 19 independent actions, many of which began in the Rostov region before becoming national protests. The election of Katal'nikov as a deputy to the State Duma secured for him a high level of independence from coal management at local level. Consequently, all his announcements and warnings on the beginning of protest action were perceived very seriously by the management of coal enterprises and the local authorities. The emergency session of the Miners of the Russian Donbass was therefore attended not only by trade union representatives and labour collectives from the coal enterprises, but also mine directors and coal company general directors, the coal minister for Rostov region, the city prosecutor, and the Rostov governor. A 'coal' session was planned by the government for 18 February (i.e.

three days after the special assembly in Donbass), headed by the Prime Minister Evgenii Primakov. Enterprise management, representatives from the local authorities and trade union leaders therefore saw the emergency meeting in Rostov region as an opportunity for them to formulate a joint position for the Rostov coal basin. The organisation of such a wide coal forum under the auspices of State Duma deputy, Vladimir Katal'nikov, and with the participation of the Governor (both of whom were participants in the 'coal' session in Moscow) was a very well organised event for the active lobbying of regional interests in Moscow.

8.2 *Rostov region's emergency assembly of workers in the coal industry of the Russian Donbass*

8.2.1 The participants and their positions.

The emergency assembly took place on 15 February in the town of Shakhty. While it took place under the aegis and at the initiative of the Rostov terkom of Rosugleprof, the assembly was much wider in nature. It included representatives from all coal companies and enterprises, even those with no official relationship with Rostovugol'. Not only the trade union representatives, but also the directors attended from Gukhovougol', Shakhtugol', from mine construction companies, and mining machine-building companies. The fact that top brass were in attendance says a lot about the significant competence of the assembly. For the sake of comparison, for such a meeting to be held in Kuzbass would require the initiative to come from the governor, and even then, the directors of many companies and large enterprises would ignore it. It goes without saying that the authority of the Rostov terkom was to a great extent determined by the authority of its chairperson, Katal'nikov. There

are no such political figures amongst the miners in Kuzbass, as a result of which this role in Kuzbass can only be played by the governor.

The high status of the assembly was also emphasised by significant representation of the local authorities - town mayors, ministers from the region's government, and even the governor of Rostov region, who, according to the participants, had never visited the town of Shakhty and was meeting the miners for the first time since he had come to power in the region.

The extremely tense situation in the region also influenced the participation of such high ranking officials in the meeting: several mines were already in pre-strike mode, while rumours abounded about a march 'either to Moscow or to Rostov city'. All parties were given an opportunity to express their position, but not given equal time to do so. Most time was given to representatives from management, as a result of which almost half the time at the tribune was taken up by directors from various enterprises. About 30% of the time was taken up by representatives from the local authorities, while the remainder went to the workers and trade union leaders. On the whole, it was an intense meeting, with speakers being heckled from the hall, particularly during the second half, which from time to time developed into shouting matches with the participants. The strongest attacks from the hall were directed at the region's governor.

On the whole, the assembly looked like an original form of interaction of labour relations between the participants. This was not a negotiating process, but an attempt to inform each other of their positions and to try to find points of contact. A formal occasion for rapprochement was necessary to define the region's position for talks at the level of the regional government.

8.2.2 The directors' position

The role of management is still very important. It was not coincidental that during the first half of the meeting, when the coal enterprise and company directors were speaking, there were no interruptions from the hall. It was only when the governor began to speak that shouts began in the hall. The audience also took issue with the trade union leaders when they spoke. However, towards the end of the meeting, when the general director of Rostovugol' was given the floor, the hall was once again quiet.

The concept behind what was said by all the directors can be summarised as follows: 'We are doing everything we can, but we don't have enough money!' The lack of subsidies, non-payment by the electricity companies, difficulties with buying equipment, etc. all lay outside their zone of influence, as a result of which they were powerless. They talked about so-called unpopular decisions, which were related to the spending of money received not on wages, but on the purchase of necessary equipment.

A characteristic aspect of what the directors said was the lack of information about the extent to which the measures they proposed were rational. Their full development and necessity, and above all their technical and industrial nature was completely taken for granted. It was never noted that the measures were deemed adequate not only by management themselves, but by someone else, too, for example, independent experts or simply agreed upon by the collective or the trade unions. On the whole, the directors' statements were oppressive and monotonous listings of their intentions, the appropriateness of which was not obvious to those listening, particularly the workers. As far as the workers are concerned, all these

plans are developed by specialists under the control of the directors, and they are unable to offer anything to contradict management's interests. The lack of any proof of validity means that an assessment of all plans is made on the basis of confidence or non-confidence in the conscientiousness and competency of the management team. But this does not exist! The workers' main reaction was, therefore, the silent mistrust of what was being told to them from the tribune.

It is worth noting that the directors provided no other explanation for their problems except for a lack of money. Moreover, a rather popular concept was that the lion's share of the insufficient resources provided went to Kuzbass, while the Rostov miners were deprived. Shifting the blame for everything that was happening to enterprises outside the region, and, correspondingly, putting the interests of the Rostov coal basin in opposition with other regions was significant. The idea that management was also partly to blame for the problems was not allowed to be presumed even in relation to managers who had been dismissed from their posts. This topic was assiduously avoided. Everything possible was done to deny the unscrupulousness of the current management. The general director of Rostovugol' replied to a direct accusation from the hall as follows: 'Owing to theft from the Oktyabr'skaya-Yuzhnaya mine, greater security has been introduced'. (*from the hall – 'What's the point?'*) 'The association has decided to centralise mine security under its control. It will only answer to Rostovugol'. We are taking extreme measures. This wouldn't happen without you: someone loads something up, someone steals something. Why aren't you on the look out? I am taking the initiative to stop theft. But this is impossible without you. What are you indignant about? Your own people steal as well, and they do so in your presence'. (*From the*

*hall: 'Watch the director. He steals more than anyone else').*¹⁷⁵ 'I don't have time for this. I can't keep an eye on everything. It's not management who steal, not one of them is guilty of this. The prosecutor's office gave me a list of thefts and there are other people's names on it. In the interests of the investigations, I'll not say who.'

8.2.3 The position of the local authorities

The position of the local authorities is very similar to that of the directors. 'We are doing everything we can...', although they do have another excuse, 'We cannot (have no right to) interfere with enterprise affairs'. This was particularly clear in the speech of Governor Chub: discussing the situation at Obukhovskaya mine, which, as a result of management's carelessness, was on the verge of bankruptcy and where serious conflict had flared, he proposed the following action: 'I see only one path there: to change ownership through bankruptcy procedures. But this has to be your initiative. The owner will convince you and once bankruptcy procedures have begun, you will say that you don't want this. They will not be able to pay off their debts. They can promise you anything. I don't see any other way. We shall intervene, but you must also show the initiative...'

¹⁷⁵ During the meeting (16.01.99), the issue of theft at Oktyabr'skaya-Yuzhnaya mine, which had reached unbelievable levels, had been raised. Retorts from the hall were usually directed against the security provided by Rostovugol', the task of which, according to some of the workers, was to carry stuff off themselves, while preventing others from stealing. Faced with many months of accumulated wage arrears, many workers see the theft of coal and the removal of mine equipment or cable to sell as a method of individual survival. The workplace thus becomes a source of illegal income, while labour relations acquire a criminal shade in such conditions.

It goes without saying that the authorities' interference in an enterprise's affairs may be restricted, but, judging from what was said by the mayors and representatives of the administration, they are not even prepared to do this. The most the local authorities are prepared to do is to offer some support to the labour collectives and trade unions in their struggle against the negligence of the employers. The authorities are not prepared to become involved in a direct conflict with the employers.

The rest of the speakers made the same charges against Moscow and its representatives (Nemtsov, Gustov and against representatives of the Interdepartmental Commission and Federal Ministries and departments); insufficient funding, or the non-transfer of money, and a lack of proposals to change the situation. The level of mistrust of the local authorities is as high as with enterprise management, which was evident from the speeches: 'I don't trust Chub or the government, Gustov says one thing and then another...': 'I don't believe that Primakov will fulfil his promise on the 10 billion roubles.'¹⁷⁶ The reaction from the hall also indicated the audience's mistrust: open hostility and shouting left no doubt about reactions to the speeches of the local authority representatives.

8.2.4 The position of the workers and their leaders

The speeches from the workers differed in essence from those of the directors and local authority representatives. First of all, they were shorter and more emotional in

¹⁷⁶ On 1 March 1999 during an emergency congress of the miners in Moscow, the Prime Minister, Evgenii Primakov, confirmed the importance of the development of the coal industry for Russia's economy and announced an increase in the level of state subsidies in 1999 from the 5.85 billion provided by the state budget to between 10 and 12 billion.

nature. They mostly fell into two groups: either they mentioned the intolerable position of the workers on the whole or of a specific enterprise; or they called for radical action, marches, blockades and so on. There were few of the latter type of speech, but they, in particular, received support from the hall in the form of applause and shouts of approval.¹⁷⁷

The workers' speeches also mentioned many examples of deceit by, and the distrust of, various people, which has become a permanent feature of speeches by miners' leaders in various regions recently.

It should be noted, however, that a call from an NPG leader from one of the mines to take radical action met with hostility. He was not only removed from the tribune, but accused of provocation. To a great extent this reaction was related to the fact that during previous miners' protests, including the 'rail wars' for example, this leader did not support protest action. Another incident related to appeals for radical action led to an argument between the terkom chairperson, Katal'nikov, and one of the miners.

(From the hall: 'Let's got to Moscow, all representatives of the mines together. Let the whole crowd go, tomorrow. We'll show...')

¹⁷⁷ That fact that appeals to radical actions find immediate support in the form of applause and cries of approval, testifies to the mood of the majority of the workers regarding the effect of short-term extraordinary action. The threat of demonstrative radicalism is the other side of the inability to render day-to-day pressure on the employer and authorities by the efforts of the trade-union or any other workers' organisation.

Katal'nikov: 'Don't think that everyone will go. There were 1,000 on Gorbatyi bridge (at the White House in Moscow). We have 26,000 invalids, 60,000 in the mines. There were only 2,000 on the road. Today – they're all heroes'

(From the hall: '60–70,000 will go! In a couple of days. If no positive outcome is reached. You have to take an interest. You have to organise this.')

Katal'nikov: 'It's impossible without preparation.'

(From the hall: 'And did the Romanians prepare'?)

Katal'nikov: 'There are local conflicts at Ayutinskaya and Oktyabr'skaya-Yuzhnaya mines, but we have to show a united front. Everyone has to be together.'

(From the hall: 'You do the organising! We're not robots, we don't have batteries!')

Katal'nikov: 'We'll organise and we'll see who goes. There's no personal responsibility.'

Contradictions existed not only between the workers and management and the local authorities, but also internally between the workers. Disunity and a lack of solidarity not only between the collectives at various enterprises, but also between shifts and shops within an enterprise, characterised the general background of protest action in the region and complicated the work of the trade unions (although this was also a consequence of a lack of organisational work by the trade union leaders at the level of the enterprise and the terkom).

The last thing that should be noted is the speech from Katal'nikov, the State Duma deputy and chairperson of the Rosugleprof terkom. In form, it was similar to a director's speech, i.e. it was long and covered measures and events, while in

content, it presented a generalisation of the workers' position and contained a programme of action for the immediate future. Following his speech, it became clear in the hall that it was necessary to 'publish a specific resolution', one which would allow for negotiations to be conducted in a resolute tone during the meeting with the government. While this was not welcomed, it was accepted. In essence, Katal'nikov looked like a 'workers' director'; he spoke about specific issues, avoided emotional statements but, unlike the directors, he enjoyed the trust of the auditorium.

8.2.5 General characteristics of the conflict

The participants in the assembly effectively represented the three sides participating in the system of 'social partnership'. The assembly should therefore be considered as a forum of the social partners. It was not negotiations, nor was it a commission on the development of mutually acceptable decisions. During the assembly, the parties involved became acquainted with each other's position.

At the end of the assembly, a resolution was adopted, which was more like a list of the serious problems to be addressed, formulated 'in the Soviet style', with the stock 'Ask for more, they'll give less, but they'll give something'. In other words, there was an understanding amongst the assembly's participants and those who formulated the resolution that not all the demands put forward would be met (e.g. the decision on the indexing of wage arrears). The details of the resolution therefore had no principal significance to the assembly participants. What was significant was the general tone of the resolution, which was comprised of a long list of problems with a demand that they be resolved.

For those observing the meeting, the exchange of opinions that took place during the assembly had little in common with the content of the resolution adopted. The mutual misunderstanding and hostility between workers and management was not reflected in the final document. It was more like the next round of demands from the workers, management, and the local authorities to the government. The logic of the participants was more or less as follows: We must 'win' resources from the government and then fight for how they should be used and implemented. For the sake of this, the parties, coming from very different positions, and not hiding their hostility from each other, participated in this forum. Whether this position was effective remains open to question. Ideally, before funds are demanded from the government, the parties should agree on how much and on what they will be spent. In conditions of great uncertainty, however, when it was not clear how much money would be given to the coal basin, or for what needs a greater amount would be given, the development of a preliminary agreement is hardly expedient. Its lack, however, means that, should the funds appear, distribution will begin in conditions whereby there is no agreement or sense of the mutual responsibilities of the parties. Conflict and accusations of injustice and dishonesty against those who obtain the funds are therefore guaranteed. As the miners often characterise such meetings, it's a 'dialogue between the auto pilot and the answering machine', which results in the situation being reproduced. Consolidation only exists in the question of 'winning' funds from the government. In all other issues there is no dialogue, nor understanding. The lack of an agreement and control mechanisms from the side of the trade unions for spending the money obtained creates the basis for their non-expedient use and leads to problems regarding non-effective state support and the corruption of the participants in the coal process etc.

Despite the conflicts between workers and directors in the enterprises, the leaders of the trade unions agree to overlook this in favour of lobbying branch interests. The meeting of the coal industry of the Russian Donbass was used by the trade union and regional authorities as the threat of beginning a march against the policy of the Centre. At the same time, the territorial committee of the trade union does not support strikes at individual enterprises, not wishing or not seeing an opportunity to improve the situation of the workers by pressure on the director of a concrete mine.¹⁷⁸

8.3 *The situation at the enterprises*

The general state of mutual relations between the trade unions on the one side, and management and the local authorities on the other becomes clearer if the situation at the enterprise is taken into account, including the financial and economic position, months of accumulated wage arrears, and the state of labour relations, which form a background for spontaneous (more often than not) protest action by the labour collective.

¹⁷⁸ As observation has shown, a representative of the regional committee of the trade union participates in the meetings of labour collectives when the question of whether to begin a strike is considered. Almost without exception, his role is to explain to the workers the impossibility of resolving anything by means of strikes in individual enterprises and to call on them to postpone their strike during the conduct of regional or all-Russian trade union actions. Thus, by contrast to the director of the mine, the workers receive no real help from the regional committee of the trade union.

8.3.1 The Obukhovskaya mine AO

8.3.1.1 Brief history and the present situation

Production. The mine is relatively young. It was under construction for 15 years, began to produce coal in 1979, and has been actively engaged in coal production since 1983. The mine's planned capacity is 3 million tonnes, and coal production peaked in 1986, when the miners produced 3.6 million tonnes of coal. The coal produced at the mines enjoys steady demand in the west, so the mine is thought to have very good prospects. According to the acting mine director, such coal does not exist anywhere else in Russia. While it may exist at some individual mines in Kuzbass, it is not in such abundance and exporting from Kuzbass is complicated. 'We have no competitors in Russia', he added. The anthracite produced at the mine is certified by the European Union and the enterprise therefore has no problem selling its coal. It does, however, face no less serious problems. One of its main problems is the deterioration of fixed capital, 60% of which, according to rough estimates, comprises 'machines on their third term of work'. Consequently, the mine operates at only one-sixth of planned capacity. The number of serious incidents is increasing, accidents are becoming more frequent, and the miners are forced to produce coal in extreme conditions. Health and safety is not observed at the mine owing to a lack of the resources required for this. The miners say that there is not even enough equipment: 'They give one for everyone, like in '41: one overall for 40 workers...' This applies to basic equipment, never mind more serious equipment such as fire extinguishers, medications, or special clothing, for example. For the mine to work, 380 million roubles has to be invested in production. This sum allowed only 750,000 tonnes of coal to be produced in 1999, exactly the

amount specified in the design plan. Moreover, as a result of increases in the cost of electricity, the cost price of coal is also increasing. The mine also requires additional resources to maintain the tunnel system and to develop new seams. For the mine to be profitable requires capital investment. This was understood by the miners themselves, who recalled the 'golden days' after privatisation, when they received foreign cars and other goods then in deficit from barter deals.

This poor situation of the mine was made more difficult by its huge dimensions (it occupies an area of more than 190 square kilometres), so that the mine requires a high number of workers to service it. While there are 467 face workers and around 300 development workers, auxiliary workers number more than 2,500. Some of them work at the coal enrichment factory, which is also part of the joint-stock company, while some are employed to maintain the workings of the mine.

Theft. As in many other mines in the Russian Donbass, theft flourishes at Obukhovskaya. 'Theft is such that anything can be stolen', say the miners. The miners carry off bags of coal from the mine; according to the miners, some workers take coal in cars and even wagons. Cars stand at the mine entrance offering coal for sale. Equipment is also stolen, and cables cut. This is related to the impoverished position of the workers and members of their families, for whom this is almost the only means of obtaining 'live money', on the one hand, and to the weak control on the part of the administration and the negligent attitude of the workers, on the other. The mine's workers believe that the administration is at least as heavily involved in theft and fraud as are the workers, providing examples of the misallocation of resources, allocated for the necessary purchase of equipment. The administration explain this as a need to buy equipment cheaply because of the lack of working

capital, but the workers see this as the administration's desire to make a profit: 'The administration overestimates the price and buys cheap, but low quality'.

8.3.1.2 The labour collective's loss of independence and new sources of conflict.

Obukhovskaya mine is a joint-stock enterprise without state capital. It was privatised in 1991, at a time when it could earn huge profits and pay high wages by exporting anthracite. On privatisation it left the Gukhovougol' association. The result was the creation of a closed joint stock enterprise, which enabled the mine to trade successfully with western partners; most of the coal produced was sent for export. Following privatisation, most shares were held by the mine's labour collective. The workers' collective maintained the controlling packet of shares until 1998, while the remaining shares were passed from hand to hand. However, the economic position of the mine had deteriorated sharply, as a result of increasing costs, bad management and unfavourable movements in the dollar exchange rate, and wage arrears had mounted.

The workers now have only 47% of the shares, having been induced to sell some of their shares in April 1998, when a new owner (whom all the miners we interviewed with not a little alienation and contempt called the 'Investor') appeared. Having secured the support of the Zverevo town administration, the investor suggested that the miners sell their shares to him. He promised that if he had 51% of the shares, he would invest 26 million dollars in the mine and settle the wage arrears that had accumulated under the previous owners. The mayor served as guarantor of these promises, and also represented the party interested in the mine on local television. However, a controlling packet of shares was not received. Taking advantage of the

difficult financial situation, the investor then made the following offer: those who sold their shares would receive their wages, while those who did not sell, would not be paid. Management therefore used the issue of wages, which it frequently holds up, to force the workers to hand over their shares for next to nothing in exchange for the payment of their wage arrears.

The price offered for the shares was laughable: 3 roubles per share, which was later increased to 5 roubles, compared to a face value of 500 roubles per share. According to the miners, the whole mine was valued at 89,780 roubles (\$15,000). Many workers were forced to sell some of their shares in order to receive at least some money. As a result, the investor obtained 51% of the mine's shares. Those who 'handed over' their shares first were paid up to 5,000 roubles on account of their arrears, those who decided later were paid 3,000, but when the shares were collected, they received only around 1,600 roubles each.

The 'investor' did not invest the promised money in the mine. The situation at the mine was made worse by the fact that the directors appointed by the owner were not competent and were replaced one after another. According to the miners, a new director was introduced to them almost every month. When they asked about wage arrears, they were told by the new director that he was not responsible for the acts and promises of the previous director. Wage arrears continued to mount under the new owner, the fixed capital was not renewed, and the atmosphere of tension, which had resulted in much protest action from the miners during 1998 and 1999, increased.

Tension was not only caused by the non-payment of wages, but also by the devious methods used by management to reduce the wages they should have paid.

According to the miners' contracts, they were only paid two-thirds of the tariff if the monthly plan was not met. It appears that for most of the month, the workers produce coal, but suddenly towards the end of the month, management intentionally stops the enterprise under the pretext of the beginning of a strike, or for technical reasons. The lighting and electricity is switched off, and no work can be done. As the enterprise is at a standstill, no-one is producing coal and the miners work only to maintain the mine. As a result, the plan is almost met, but not quite. If the plan is not met, the workers' wages are cut and savings are made on account of the wage bill.

People may arrive at work to discover that the mine is at a standstill, as if a spontaneous strike had begun. Management informs them of the strike, but they are unable to find out who is on strike, or since when, but no-one is working at the mine. Alternatively, they announce that the mine has been closed by a decision from the Russian mining-technical inspection (RGTI). That this is the result of management machinations is revealed by the fact that the decision of the RGTI on a stoppage in coal production is carried out very selectively, that is, only in those cases when this is in someone's interests. As the equipment at most mines is between 60 and 80% worn out, violations of health and safety at work are not simply a mass, but a permanent phenomenon. The mining-technical inspection therefore almost always has grounds to take the decision to stop the production process. To heed this decision or not usually depends on enterprise management. On 24 January, for example, the RGTI had banned underground work at Obukhovskaya mine, but coal production nevertheless continued despite an underground strike organised by the workers of one of the face shops.

3.1.4. Protest activity

The false promises of the new owners angered the workers and increased tension in the mine, but the confrontation between the workers and management had preceded the change of ownership and spontaneous strikes were a regular occurrence, usually being settled by paying those directly involved in the strike. 76 people were involved in a strike in November 1997, when they spent 5 days underground. There were 4 strikes in 1998, all spontaneous without any preliminary preparation and without the organisational work of the trade union. Two production shops refused to go to work in May. Around 20 people were involved in the strike and for 24 days they refused to come above ground. They were demanding wages, which had not been paid to those who didn't give up their shares. The former general director had promised to pay, on condition that those receiving money handed in their notice voluntarily to leave their jobs. This was the traditional form of hiring, which many directors began to use as a means of getting rid of those who violated the order of their enterprises. The miners who handed in their notice could then in principle appeal to the courts to be reinstated, having shown they quit their jobs under duress.

In the summer there was a strike at shop no.2, which lasted for 21 days. 20 miners declared a hunger strike, as a result of which they were paid their wages, but again on condition that they quit their jobs, while the others (those who didn't strike) obtained nothing and were not paid. Shops no. 1 and 5 went on strike in October, and were later joined by shop no. 12, but this protest was without results. There was a general strike in October 1998, which lasted 10 days, but once again nothing was obtained. According to the miners, this was because the owner was able to convince some of the miners of the necessity to continue work, by promising to help them and to pay money. They were followed back to work by others.

In spite of the fact that the Obukhovskaya miners fought actively enough for their rights, the privatisation of the mine in 1991 had already been a declaration of independence from the rest of the miners, in the belief that they could prosper by selling their high quality coal abroad, and so they had not participated in any wider collective actions. For example, they did not participate in the 'rail wars', although they expressed their support for those involved. The miners explained such behaviour as follows: 'During the rail wars, we had to work because we don't receive money from the government, but from the coal. We receive subsidies only for coal at the power station'. It is interesting that some workers now believe they should actively participate in any protest action, regardless of whether they are a state or non-state mine. Speaking at a meeting of miners in Eastern Donbass, the deputy chairperson of the Independent Union of Mineworkers at the mine said, 'We didn't take part in the rails war, didn't sit on the Gorbatyi bridge, but we weren't right (not to do so)...'

8.3.1.3 Divisions within the collective.

The labour collective had not only cut themselves off from other mine collectives as a result of the privatisation of their mine, but there were also serious divisions within the collective, which had been encouraged and intensified by management. A former director had established a personnel policy aimed at destroying the existing collectives of shifts and shops. According to the workers, for example, the collectives were 'married off', i.e. stable collectives were merged with those newly arrived from other mines, which destroyed the old developed system of mutual understanding and solidarity amongst the miners. This was named as one of the main reasons for the schism in the collective.

Widespread mine closures and non-payment of wages meant that workers also came from many different localities, weakening the connection between the labour collective and the local community (it goes without saying that one of the bases for miners' solidarity is related to the fact the workers of a brigade live near to each other: community spirit – so necessary for organised united protest – is being undermined). The miners who work at the mine are mainly from the town of Zverevo, but there are also '*inogorodniye*', people from neighbouring settlements, and some from further afield. The acting director of Tashanin mine believed that this was one of the reasons for conflict between the miners. 'Many are from out of town, which caused friction. People in Zverevo live in blocks of flats and depend on the rouble, on their wages. Those from outside the town mainly live in the private sector and therefore have allotments. They thus differed psychologically. We fight for the settlements, they fight for themselves.'

Hostility between shops was also engendered by the fact that every shop had to sign a separate contract on the development of a specific quantity of coal in a specific seam, so every shop wanted a richer seam to work. If the seam was exhausted, a new contract had to be concluded, while it was not known whether a new place would be found for a given shop. Rivalry therefore appeared between the shops, which developed into conflict. In cases where the contract was not met, the shop was not paid in full. Some contracts were from the very beginning unrealistic, which the miners noted: 'We were given a 600 metre seam and the plan was 300 tonnes of coal. This wasn't feasible, it was difficult to make half the plan...' Whether the shop signs a contract or not depends on the brigadier. If the shop doesn't conclude a contract, the workers are paid their wages last of all. The other

shops will not support a refusal to sign a contract since it's not in their interests. The miners say they simply play each other off against themselves.

The directors similarly play the miners off against each other in their management of spontaneous strikes. On the one hand, they have adopted the common practice of paying wages due only to those directly involved in the protest action, usually on condition that they voluntarily leave their jobs, although the miners might hope to be reinstated for illegal dismissal. On the other hand, as we have seen, the director may use a spontaneous strike by one group of workers as an excuse to close the mine so that others cannot make the plan and earn their normal wages. Thus these spontaneous strikes benefit only those directly involved, while all of the other workers suffer the negative consequences imposed by management.

Finally, the mine supplies electricity and heating to the town of Zverevo, whose mayor is a supporter of the new owners of the mine. As soon as the mine comes to a standstill, electricity and heating is switched off in the town, as if to show that the miners were not producing coal and therefore there was no heating or energy. This set the townspeople against the miners: 'They don't work, and everyone begins to live worse as a result'. The town administration thus manipulated public opinion, directing it against the striking miners.

The trade unions play a minimal role at the mine. Neither trade union (the NPG and Rosugelprof) had any significant influence on the course of conflict. The miners explained this by saying that the trade union workers were intimidated, afraid to take responsibility upon themselves: 'The trade union used to exist, but one trade union worker was killed in 1989, others have been beaten, their families intimidated...' The members of the conciliation committee said that they had

assumed the responsibility of the trade unions, since, 'They are not interested in the fate of the mine and are devoid of meaning for the workers'.¹⁷⁹

Connections between primary trade union organisations and the regional committee of the union practically came to a stop once the mine left the coal association. The Obukhovskaya trade-union organisations did not participate in the 'rails war' and in other measures organised by higher organisations. In turn, the regional trade union committee had not shown any interest in what was happening in the mine. On leaving the coal association, the mine dropped out of the mechanism of lobbying for branch interests and, thus, dropped out of the sphere of interest of the coal association and the regional trade union committee. Since the basic conflict at Obukhovskaya mine, once it had left the association, was between the labour collective, on the one hand, and the new proprietor and director, on the other, the regional trade union committee simply did not have the opportunity (experience and desire) to give any help to the members of the trade union from Obukhovskaya, since its main channel was to put pressure on directors on the basis of their understandings with the management of the association. The traditional lever of pressure on the director in this case had been liquidated, and both the chairman of the mine trade union committee, and the representatives of the regional committee, are simply not able to organise a real strike against their own director.

¹⁷⁹ The murder of workers' leaders was not unusual, but it was usually connected with mafia involvement in the export of coal and the acquisition of barter goods than with any diligence with which the leaders defended the workers.

8.3.1.4 Description of the current conflict.

Relations between the workers' collective and the mine's owner had become heated again. The reason for the conflict was the contradiction between the administration's wish to reduce production costs, including by reducing expenditure on wages, and the miners' hope of receiving an income commensurate with their work. Not having received their wages, or having received them only in part during 1996–8, the miners again began to protest, to 'kick up a fuss' as they said.

The conflict developed as follows. As usual, unrest among the workers and outbursts of conflict occurred constantly. However, leaders of the trade union managed to extinguish them, convincing the miners that there is no sense in a separate strike and saying that the February 1 congress of miners will resolve many things. After the end of the congress the representative of the mine arrived from Moscow and could not say anything to console the miners. The miners, having felt themselves to have been deceived as usual, decided to begin a protest action. On 3 February 1999, two days after the emergency congress of miners in Moscow, the miners of shop no. 2 spoke to the miners of shops nos. 1 and 5 and decided not to go to work the following day. Shops no. 1 and 5 decided to begin to strike from that very day, while those of shop no.2, who had encouraged them into taking this action, did not fulfil their promise. 19 miners remained down the mine, deciding to see it through to the end until they were paid their arrears for the previous year. They informed the director about the beginning of an underground strike, although no demands were formulated in written form. The rest of the miners (from their shops and from other shops) simply 'stepped around' them, and continued to work.

For five days, no-one paid any attention to the miners occupying the mine, no-one even went down to them, nor were there any negotiations. The other shops continued to work. 'The mine worked for 10 days, although according to the documentation it was at a standstill [This was according to a decision of the labour inspectorate]. They said to us, "What's the point of occupying the mine if it's closed?"'.

'Five days into the strike, the former chief engineer, Pesok, came for a chat, but he came off his own bat and not on behalf of the administration. On the second day we wrote our demands and sent them above ground, but there was no answer for five days. The main demand was for the full payment of wage arrears, including for January. Initially we wanted to have a general strike, which everyone would join. We seemed to have agreed with everyone, but no-one came.... But why should we beat ourselves up for others? They were stepping around us in the mine. So we asked for ourselves alone... The boss stopped meals being brought to us. Our men didn't even bring us food.' The miners on strike ended up being completely isolated.

Above ground, a conciliation committee was created on the initiative of the trade union and with the agreement of management, which included representatives from the mine's various shops, and which was supposed to put forward the official demands of the enterprise's labour collective and organise work to maintain the mine. However, friction arose between those miners occupying the mine and the conciliation committee. The former believed that they should have received greater support from the day of the 3rd, while the latter were afraid that the miners below ground would achieve something, while they were paid nothing themselves. It was suggested to those working in the shop at that time that they accept a cut in their

wages to pay those on strike. The conciliation committee told the workers in other shops that the striking miners were being paid money at their expense.

Within a few days, negotiations had begun between the administration and the miners on the underground strike. The following proposals were made: 'Come out and you'll be paid when it's your turn'; 'We'll pay wage arrears for October, and the rest according to the repayment schedule'; 'We'll pay October / November, you come out and we'll resolve all problems'; 'You come out and hand in your notice to quit and you'll be paid everything you're owed'. Such proposals obviously did not suit the miners, but the administration would make no further concessions. As a result, two weeks after they went underground, the miners came back to the surface, having accepted the last offer. They had, however, demanded the right to be paid through the bank, and not through the mine's accounts' department, as they did not trust the mine's chief accountant and considered that she was one of the reasons for their impoverished state. 'Even when the director orders, she says there's no money... Even he is afraid of her...'. As a result, 15 miners handed in their notice to quit, while a further two – the youngest – decided to be paid for two months and to wait for the rest while continuing to work, while another miner had come up earlier owing to the death of a relative. It is interesting to note that the money was paid the day after the meeting of the miners of the Russian Donbass at which the regional governor had suggested that the mine could be taken back into the association if the labour collective initiated bankruptcy proceedings over the non-payment of wages. The fear of the proprietor that some interested party might enter the conflict and use it for the redistribution of property was probably one reason for the rapid resolution of the conflict and payment of money to the strikers.

8.3.1.5 Results and perspectives.

Despite the fact that this is a reasonably new mine, rich in reserves (47 million tonnes) of high quality coal, the mine cannot work effectively owing to the deterioration of its fixed capital, a chronic lack of materials, the incompetence of management, and the unhealthy psychological climate that exists at the mine. It is highly probable that the mine will close as a result of internal conflicts destroying the enterprise. Many miners already see no future for themselves at the mine; 'This mine has no prospects... There's no real owner... Our wages will only be paid through realising scrap metal'. Instead of holding out any hopes of the effectiveness of collective action, they see their future elsewhere: 'It'll be gone, and we'll find other work. There are plenty of other mines where good workers are required...'.

The mine's NPG leader suggested that the mine should rejoin the coal association, an idea which the representatives of the regional structures were, in principle, ready to consider. The regional governor referred to the case at the emergency meeting of the Miners of the Russian Donbass, but would not take responsibility on himself. He noted that a change of ownership would require bankruptcy procedures to be implemented and that the initiative to do so must come from the workers' collective. However, as a result of conflict within the collective, there is no basis for any kind of joint decision, particularly because the management and private owners would not support such a decision. According to the acting mine director: 'We have to maintain our independence. A certain share of production has to be given to the Coal Committee to obtain the necessary equipment from them. When we were part of Gukhovougol', the structure was not developed. They only took money from

us...’ However, now even Gukhovougol’ does not want to take the mine back into the fold because its debts are too high.

8.3.1.6 Conclusion

1. The mine’s disassociation from Gukhovougol’ simultaneously meant a weakening of trade union links between the enterprise and the territorial committee. The problem of mutual relations was related to the fact that, as a trade union organisation, Rosugleprof represented the Russian national coal company, Rosugol’. The territorial committee of Rosugleprof fulfilled the role of the company’s trade union at the lower level, which in this case is Gukhovougol’. Since, for many years, the main function of the trade union was the fight aimed at winning state support funds from the government, Rosugol’ and Gukhovougol’, the functions of the terkom leaders were directed at this alone. Each union organisation saw the network of interaction and the sense of their existence in the fulfilment of the collective agreement and primarily the winning of state support funds. When Obukhovskaya mine became a joint stock company and left the coal association, this deprived it of the right to receive state subsidies and removed the sense of the former relations between the primary trade union organisations and the territorial committee. In the situation that developed, the paradox was that the grass roots organisations almost dropped out of the trade union structures at a time when confrontation was beginning with the new owner. The lack of support from the higher trade union organisations resulted in a paralysis of the grass roots organisations, which were not prepared to work in the new situation. The result of the lack of action from the trade union organisations was the spontaneous action of various groups of workers. The creation at the enterprise of a conciliation

committee in turn took up the job of splitting and isolating the strikers from the rest of the collective.

The privatisation of the mine led to the loss of any possibility of winning something for themselves as a result of joint action with the profkoms of other enterprises. The labour collective did not therefore take part in the 'rail wars'. Objective processes thus led to the undermining of the traditional basis for miners' solidarity – the struggle for government subsidies. The signing by the employers of separate contracts for every shop made the workers dependent on the employers (who could send them to a good or bad seam) and undermined the basis for united action at the enterprise (the collective agreement). A consequence of this was the occurrence of increasingly greater numbers of local protests and the fragmentation of the miners' protests.

2. After the mine was privatised, the local authorities, with reference to the independence of the directors, practically disconnected itself as a structure from resolving conflicts at enterprise level. Of course at Obukhovskaya mine the town mayor was obviously involved in the conflict on the side of the employer, but this was explained by his personal position and interests.

3. The appearance of a new owner at the enterprise meant that negotiations between the workers and the employer lost any sense. The numerous changes of director at the initiative of the owner devalued agreements and promises signed by them. There is no right of succession in the actions of the employers: subsequent directors refuse to answer for their predecessors. Responsibility is linked to individuals and not to the specific position they occupy in the management structure.

4. The fact that the participants in the conflict at Obukhovskaya mine received money the day after the emergency assembly confirms the hypothesis put forward in the previous chapter that labour collectives which begin strikes before the start of a wider protest or event have a greater chance of using them to satisfy their demands than those who begin a strike together with everyone else. Moreover, the 'unwinding' of conflict at such large events as the regional assembly can attract the attention of external forces that want to use it for their own purposes. The fact that the day after the governor spoke about the possible replacement of the owner, the strikers were paid some money, shows the owner's fear that the regional authorities were getting involved in the conflict, and that the situation would no longer be under his control. This confirms the assertion that, when labour conflict goes beyond the realms of the enterprise, this publicises the conflict and promotes its speedy resolution.

8.3.2 Oktyabr'skaya-Yuzhnaya mine

Oktyabr'skaya-Yuzhnaya mine began to produce coal in 1992 and is one of Rostovugol's six mines considered to have most prospects. Coal production amounted to 67,200 tonnes in 1999. According to the trade union chairperson, the deterioration of the equipment stands at no more than 40%. However, in spite of the mine's fairly young age, it makes a loss of 20%.

The mine structure is situated in the countryside far from population settlements, as a consequence of which the miners have to be bussed to work. This has led to an increase in transport costs, and also determined the number of workers at the mine.

As of January 1999, 1800 people were employed at the mine, and turnover was very high. According to the Rosugleprof profkom chair, Labuzov, 'Every year about 800

people leave the mine and just as many come to work here'. The former workers leave because they can no longer tolerate constant wage delays, while people from other mines take their place. According to Labuzov, this has been one of the main reasons for conflict at the mine: 'The collective is new, and has yet to settle. There's a feeling of discord. There's no unity'. As a result there are two trade unions in operation at the mine: the NPG and Rosugleprof. In spite of the fact that both unions claim to have the same objective – to uphold the interests of the miners – there is no unity of action between them. In fact they are clearly in conflict with each other.

The conflict goes back some time. When the Independent Union of Miners (NPG) was created it was led by Labuzov, who described the situation thus: 'At that time, there was serious discontent with the official unions. The independent union was created, which I headed. I went through all the echelons of power, to end up in Moscow, where I became disillusioned. Chlebnikov was then the chairman of the regional organisation. He was made a full-time official, but he did nothing except talk. Then we had a conference and put him up for re-election. And then we were told that this was unauthorised and that our activity discredited the union. In Moscow they said, "We need grey horses that will feed us". Following this, a decision was taken by all organisations to transfer to Rosugleprof'. According to the present NPG chairman, however, far from all the members of the NPG transferred to Rosugleprof, only around 600 of them, while 400 remain with the NPG. In his words, the main thing is that Labuzov transferred to the other union with money belonging to the NPG.

The two trade unions do not have the same status within the enterprise. Rosugleprof has a full-time chairperson, whose wages are paid by the union. The NPG leader is

not full-time or freed from his professional activity. For those days when he does not work at the mine as a result of his fulfilment of trade union obligations, the enterprise pays his wages. NPG activists obtain the right to conduct paid trade union work only with the agreement of the mine administration, as laid down in the collective agreement.

When this research was being conducted, conflict flared between the leaders of the two trade unions, who accused each other of being inactive.¹⁸⁰ As Labuzov said: 'We went to Posyl'nyi (Rostovugol's General Director) about paying off wage arrears. They didn't go. No documents contain the signatures of the NPG representatives. When they are asked why they are not fulfilling an agreement, they say they were not signatories. "We do not have any responsibility, we are only here to monitor". They believe they are more popular, but this popularity comes cheap. The chief engineer complained to the NPG leader at a conference about the non-fulfilment of a resolution from the commission for conducting work in the coal seam. His response was that he was not familiar with the document, and had not signed it.' Work stopped on 3 February 1999 and a strike was announced, led by the NPG in the mine. Labuzov gave two reasons for this: firstly, when the strike began, he was a delegate at the emergency Miners' Congress in Moscow. Secondly, the NPG leaders wanted to have their revenge on Rosugleprof for the 'rail wars', in which they showed themselves up badly. The present conflict between the trade unions does not allow them really to combine their forces and present a united front against the employer.

¹⁸⁰ The roots of the conflict are old and go back to the time when Labuzov transferred from NPG to Rosugleprofsoyuz, transferring the money in the account of the NPG primary group to the latter. Since then conflict has been continuous, in open or latent form.

8.3.2.1 Chronology of the strike

On 29 January 1999, the administration of Oktyabr'skaya-Yuzhnaya mine and the Rosugleprof chairperson, Labuzov, warned the general director of Rostovugol' of a pre-strike situation at the mine. On 3 February 1999, not having received their wages once again, the workers of the third shift decided not to go to work. This happened after it became known that the work of the miners' congress in Moscow, in which the miners had invested high hopes, had been concluded. The strike broke out spontaneously and was an act of despair and a reaction to their disappointed hopes. The main demand issued to mine management was the settling of all wage arrears. When the strike began, the miners were owed 4.5 months' wages for 1998, and for January 1999. Every worker was also owed wages from 1996 and 1997. The last time the workers had been paid, towards the end of December, had been for August 1998. The New Year holiday had left many families without the means to exist. The bulk of the miners therefore hoped to receive at least something towards the end of January. According to the chairperson of the Rosugleprof profkom, if their hopes had been met, there would have been no stoppage of work. However, when interviewed, he spoke about other reasons for the conflict. 'Confrontation began with the boorish attitude of the shop chiefs to workers. The problem is not only wages, the shop chiefs are not involved with the workers. They don't fulfil their official duties. They say to the workers, 'There are a lot of you; I'll sack you'. We are humiliated there (speaking about top management), and they humiliate their own people here (at shop level). Emotions build...' That not only financial reasons were behind the protest was also revealed by our interview with the former chairman of the mine's Rosugelprof profkom: 'The workers immediately made

three demands to the mine's administration and five to the management of Rostovugol'.¹⁸¹ The demands were as follows:

To the mine's administration:

- that the director take personal questions on any subject twice a week;
- to investigate the poor attitude to the workers of the employees in the accounts' department;
- to bring order to the work of the mine's accounts' department.

To the management of Rostovugol':

- to settle wage arrears;
- to pay the current wage without delay;
- to resolve the coal rationing problem;
- to resolve the social problems of electricity supplies;
- to introduce wage indexing for wage arrears.

The management of Rostovugol' promised the miners that they would fulfil their demands, but only on condition that they returned to work. However, no documents were signed. 'We were told by the association that they'd investigate everything, if

¹⁸¹ These demands were repeatedly expressed by both trade unions during a large number of shift meetings, whenever there were spontaneous short-term work stoppages or when the workers declared before the shift that they refused to work. The chairmen of both trade unions spoke to the workers, demonstrating the senselessness of a strike in a separate mine and calling on them to postpone their protest until a wider trade-union action. The leaders of the trade unions wrote down the demands, discussed with the director the possibility of their fulfillment, and they were known by all the workers of the mine.

we'd work. But the NPG leaders forbade the workers to return to work'.¹⁸² They declared that they did not any longer trust in the promises which they had also been given in the past, but were never carried out either by the authorities or by the administration. They called on the workers to go back to work only when they had got money in their hands. The administration of the enterprise insisted that the miners begin work, and their problems would be resolved in due course.

Explaining the reason behind the conflict with the workers, the mine's deputy director responsible for production said the following: 'I proposed to the comrade workers that they return to work, but the chairman of the workers' committee forbade them. I was told that boundaries were made of steel, but not people. If the labour collective does not follow my orders, I have the right to refuse to take responsibility for production... If you (the workers) go against a request to preserve the equipment, I'll take you to court'.

On 9 February 1999, not having been satisfied by the response provided by the management of Rostovugol' association, the miners took the decision to continue the protest until wage arrears were paid off fully. However, maintenance work continued at the mine. The miners went to the mine to register, while those who did not were marked up as not turning up to work. The workers also formed a watch to patrol the mine, along with the existing mine security guards. The creation of a double watch over the administrative buildings was enforced as a consequence of mass theft.

¹⁸² From interview with Labuzov, chairperson at Oktyabr'skaya-Yuzhnaya mine, 17/02/99.

On 15 February 1999, the leaders of both trade unions took part in the emergency meeting of the Miners of the Russian Donbass and supported the appeal to the government.

8.3.2.2 17th February Conference of the Labour Collective-

On 16 February 1999, the administration claimed that it was necessary to hold a conference of the labour collective in order to resolve the issue of the future existence of the mine, which the mine's director claimed was compromised by the consequences of the strike: 'Maintenance of the mine has cost us a lot of money. Safety is not guaranteed, while there is no schedule for the arrival of an emergency brigade. Maintenance of the mine has developed into the form of theft. During the stoppage, equipment to the sum of 98,100 roubles has been stolen'. Both trade union leaders supported the decision of the mine administration to convene such a conference, but the conference had to be postponed to the following day as a result of the lack of a quorum. According to the former Rosugelprof profkom chairman, 'There should have been a conference yesterday, but there wasn't a quorum. An additional day was given to enable the shops to hold meetings to elect delegates'. The conference showed the low level of activity of the workers, the extent of disunity within the labour collective along professional lines, and their lack of readiness for solidarity. For the mine director the decision to call a conference of the labour collective meant an opportunity to take the initiative back into his hands and completely to restore his control of the enterprise. The miscalculations, the inept and disunited leadership of the action on the part of the two trade unions gave the director many opportunities to accuse the leaders of the trade unions of an inability to maintain order and discipline among the miners. He was going to

remove both trade unions from participation in adopting managerial decisions, but wanted to do it through the hands of the collective. The leaders of both trade unions were also interested in calling a conference of the labour collective, as they did not wish to take responsibility for the deterioration in the condition of the mine, the definitive decline of discipline and the growth of theft which had occurred during the strike. They gave the impression that they inwardly wanted the director to take back in full all of the authority that he had lost from the beginning of the strike, as they could not see any positive results for themselves in opposition to the management of the mine and the coal association.

The hall was divided into two halves; the workers sat on one side of the aisle, while the ITR and representatives from the administration sat on the other. The ITR had supported voting by secret ballot, but they were in the minority and so voting was open. The distribution of people in the hall made it very clear who voted and how they voted.

The conference was dominated by the mine director, who sat at the table of the presidium, right in the centre. On each side sat activists from both trade unions. There was a telephone and a microphone in front of him on the table. Periodically, he'd talk on the phone, and his conversation was heard by the whole room. At such times, any delegate speaking had to stop, since no-one but the director was audible. He constantly interrupted the speakers, issuing orders. He was particularly domineering with representatives of the ITR and the administration. An example from the conference report: A shop chief was speaking: '70 metres of copper cable was stolen from the shop... I consider it necessary to take all the cable from the roller'. The director interrupts: 'Just tell us the facts, there's no need to draw conclusions'; 'Why are you hollering from your seat? Everyone will be given a

chance to speak'. From the hall, 'But we didn't elect the audit commission'. The director: 'You've already voted them in.'; the workers: 'No, we didn't'. The director: 'Okay, so vote!'

The conference was very poorly organised. The registration of the delegates, the election of an audit group, and voting on the conference rules took 90 minutes. Once the rules had been passed by vote, the delegates were re-registered, since it was discovered that there were more delegates registered than had voted. Following re-registration, the conference delegates were sent for a break.

The conference was extremely confused, with no structured argument or clear themes. There was a constant jumping from theme to theme. Throughout the conference, there was shouting and noise in the hall as the participants simultaneously discussed several issues, interrupted each other, and didn't hear each other out. Everyone taking a turn at the microphone or shouting out from their seat tried to discuss either their own personal problem, or the problems of their brigade. The mine director was shouted at and heckled by the workers, while the ITR left him in peace. Speaking at the conference to the delegates, Labuzov said, 'There were shouts of, "Lets go to Moscow"'.¹⁸³ I replied that they should give notice in

¹⁸³ The past unrest of the miners in Romania, with the organisation of a protest march on Bucharest, had excited the Russian miners. They had seen in this form of protest an additional lever of pressure on Moscow and in all disputes and conversations among themselves threatened the administration that they would organise a march on Moscow. At the same time, the past miner's actions in 1998, including the 'rails war', expressed in blocking the railway, showed a low level of real participation of workers in the protest actions. Only about two thousand out of sixty thousand people took part in blocking the railway, though almost all, without exception, had cried that they would participate in the action. Such difference between intentions to protest and real protest behaviour enabled the

writing of their voluntary participation in the protest. Because I knew what your level of activity is like. You have to be pulled off the bus by your legs. You can't even cross the road. You all speak very loudly'.

As well as expressing their own grievances and those of their sections, delegates expressed grievances against the labour collectives of other mines. From the conference report: 'Our mine is almost the only one holding some sort of protest. Only we, it appears, are unhappy. Appealing to the workers, a former profkom chairman attempted to show the importance of uniting their interests for the sake of the struggle: 'We have been separated from Vorkuta and Kuzbass. Now they want to divide us here. The directors have tried to divide the mines with prospects from those without. How can we speak about a fight if we pull a blanket over ourselves? Every ill-conceived decision buries our fight and us...' In response, 'Why does no one support us? This means they're better off than us. It's worth nothing to them'.

The director made no attempt to find any common factors within the collective. The former profkom chairperson again warned: 'Management is very strongly disciplined. Any protest will only be successful if after the 18 February (we) act

authorities as well as the chiefs of enterprises and associations to accuse the trade union leaders of not expressing the interests of the workers, and using them to provoke disorder in the regions, carrying out the social orders of certain political forces. For this reason the leaders of Rosugleprof decided to collect from the workers individual statements of their intention to participate in the subsequent action. This had two purposes. First, it gave the trade union leaders documentary confirmation that the miners are not satisfied and are ready to participate in the action. Secondly, it raised the individual responsibility of workers who have written the statement – it meant that none of them could say that they had not been asked whether or not they wanted to strike.

together. There is no discipline now, so our protest will have no results'. His words, however, were ignored.

The main issue that the director presented to the meeting for a decision was that of the 'preservation' of the mine, but although he forced the issue to a vote, it was not at all clear what was meant by this term and the director insisted on a vote in principle before any discussion of detail. The director was proposing what was in effect a 'lock-out', to allow him to lay-off the workers without pay and to bring the mine back under his control, but workers believed that they were voting on whether or not to continue the strike. The ITR voted against the stoppage at the mine, trying to explain to the workers that this would take the enterprise to the edge of destruction. The workers voted for a stoppage.

The director presented the issue as being one of improving the maintenance and security of the mine and ordered all the shop chiefs to speak about the problem of theft. The conclusion was drawn that the only way to stop theft was for the mine to be transferred to 'preservation' status, and for no-one to be allowed onto its territory except for the maintenance brigade. When a proposal was made to vote on the issue again, the director replied that, 'The administration will not co-ordinate with anyone (the discussion was about a proposal to organise work in two shifts), or with any committee. All responsibility will be with us, it's us who will be asked. You answer for nothing. The mine is in a war situation. I leave control for performance with myself. That's already been accepted (talking about the vote).' Thus the workers discovered that they had voted to lock themselves out, although most of them didn't even understand what they were voting for. According to the former Rosugleprof chairman, 'They take decisions, but they don't realise they are stepping on their

own toes. They have only one thing on their minds - to fill their stomachs. It's all emotions. There's no common sense. That comes later, but it'll be late'.

'Preservation' meant that, without even realising so themselves, the labour collective had voted to turn the strike into a lockout, with the consequent dissolution of the workers' committee, which had been playing just a formal role, and the transfer of the mine to a maintenance regime. The workers had also voted to be sent on administrative leave without payment, whereas if they had been refusing to work as a result of the non-payment of wages they would have been due to be paid something because the stoppage was the fault of the administration. The labour collective was effectively laid-off without pay, but the decision was taken not by the director, but by the conference of the labour collective. No-one came to register at the mine, no-one was marked up for not turning up. Consequently the miners had nothing to be paid for.

The transition to a lock-out deprived the leaders of both trade unions and members of the workers' committee of an opportunity to influence the situation. The remoteness of the mine from population settlements, the territorial disassociation of the miners, and the closure of all bus routes to the mine for the duration of the 'preservation' period prevented them from uniting outside the limits of the enterprise, into which no-one was now allowed. Two weeks after the beginning of the lockout the management of the enterprise received the usual portion of money from the association, after which the miners, having received a part of the money due to them for their wages, went back to work.

8.4 Conclusions

The cases considered give a demonstration of the complete set of instruments which the management of the enterprise uses to destroy the unity of the workers in the course of spontaneous bursts of strike activity. All of the management policy of the enterprises, including personnel selection, is directed at the destruction of the collectives of shifts and sections which have taken shape (and so which represent a certain force). So, at Obukhovskaya mine, according to the workers, the collectives were 'married off', i.e. stable collectives were combined with those newly arrived from other enterprises and in that way they destroyed the old, established system of mutual understanding and solidarity among the miners. This was said to have been one of the main reasons for the split in the collective.

Another example, confirming this thesis, is the situation in the Assembly-Disassembly section (MDU) of Oktyabr'skaya-Yuzhnaya mine. According to the representative of the workers' committee: *'Management transferred the most rebellious by order to the lowest paid sections for two months. And then they transferred all the 'loudmouths' to newly formed sections in which they are now slaving'*.

The geographical dispersion of the workers of the enterprise was an important factor in the dissociation of the labour collective. In connection with the liquidation of a large number of mines in the coal basin the inhabitants of many settlements work at one enterprise (one of the bases of miners' solidarity, the fact that the workers of one brigade live in one neighbourhood, is destroyed. The communal spirit so necessary for organised solidary demonstrations is undermined).

A feature of these strikes is the interference of the city administration in the labour relations within the enterprise. In relation to Obukhovskaya mine this took the form of the pressure of the mayor on the labour collective. In the course of the strike the town switched off heating, water and energy, allegedly because the mine was not supplying the necessary coal. Thus the city authorities isolated the striking miners from the remainder of the population of the city.

One example of the deliberate division of the collective by the administration of the enterprise is the payment of wages only to participants in the actions, for example, only to the twenty-one participants in the hunger-strike at Obukhovskaya mine. The workers of the striking faces were told that if they left they would be paid all their money, but not from the wages fund, so that they agreed and left. The workers in the section at this time were invited to sign a statement that they agreed to a reduction of their wages in order to pay the strikers. The conciliation commission told the workers of other sections that they would pay the strikers underground at their expense.

The administration of the enterprises applies all efforts 'to clean' labour collectives of active workers and other 'violators of order'. The idea of paying off all debts to the strikers on condition that they voluntarily quit their jobs has become one of the methods of doing this.

In the case of both conflicts the miners received no help at the enterprise from the trade union terkom, the branch (Rostovugol' AO), or from the local administrations. All were busy preparing for the government 'coal' assembly. All forces were involved in the fight for budget funds, and the terkom's threat of a possible miners' march was an argument that strengthened the position of the Rostov participants at

the government meeting. The existence of disagreements between Rosugleprof and NPG rounds off the picture of splits in the miners' movement. The absence of trust in one another made it impossible for the leaders and activists of both trade unions to unite their forces, not ritually but really, in the workers' committees.

Thus the purposeful efforts of enterprise management and the local authorities directed at undermining organic workers' solidarity are supplemented by the absence of real support of primary groups on the part of higher trade union bodies and the split between the primary groups of different trade unions at one enterprise. One can say that solidarity in trade-union structures is unidirectional, i.e. primary groups even occasionally postpone the beginning of a strike until a day of united action, strengthening the demands of the territorial or branch trade union, while higher trade union bodies never organise solidarity strikes with striking enterprises.

Organised participation in town protests and their implementation does not mean an end to strikes at individual enterprises. The higher trade union structures therefore received additional weight in their negotiations as a result of the participation of the grass roots organisations in wider-scale protests, while the grass roots organisations felt no positive changes from this themselves.

The fact that calls for radical action receive support in the form of applause and shouts of approval indicates the mood of the majority of workers to obtain results from short-term emergency protests. The threat of demonstrative radicalism is the reverse side of an inability to render daily pressure on the employers and the authorities using the efforts of the trade unions or any other workers' organisation. Thus one can confirm that we are dealing with a ritual strike which begins spontaneously, but then, through the efforts of the trade union organisation is

brought into a 'civilised channel', providing a law-abiding (read 'harmless for management and the authorities') form of expression of protest.

The assembly of the Miners of the Russian Donbass was the normal Russian form of 'social partnership'. In spite of the fact that the parties spoke, each one talking of their problems, this can hardly be called a negotiating process between the parties. The problems existing between the authorities, the workers, and the employers were not solved by the assembly, but this was not even one of the tasks it set itself. Internal differences and contradictions receded into the background compared to the problem of defending regional branch interests. The aim of the assembly can be defined as the formulation of a regional position for negotiations with the government. In this sense, the function of the assembly is very clear: it is a means of lobbying regional interests.

As a result of the analysis of the material presented in this chapter it becomes obvious that the split inside the trade union is supplemented by a split among the workers inside the enterprise, that grows out of the quite deliberate policy of the employers. The latter have no interest in the loss of control over their enterprise, that occurs during strikes which have not been sanctioned by them, and try to prevent possible association of the workers. The leaders of the trade unions behave in this situation as activists, or at least play a supporting role, but in either case only as individuals having weak support among the members of the trade union. Even if the president of the trade union committee takes a principled position, he cannot resist the director on his own, therefore we have not come across any strikes organised by trade union leaders against the directors and the spontaneous strikes were quickly extinguished by the directors. This task was facilitated for them by the fact that after the outbreak of spontaneous protests leaders of one or the other trade

union emerged at the head of the protests and did not undertake any resolute actions, but tried through force of habit to agree with the director to press together against the management of the association. The change in the economic situation presents the trade-union leaders with the task of uniting the workers at the level of the enterprise, something that they are completely unable to do independently.

A feature of both the case studies and the meeting of miners of the Donetsk coal basin is, that neither the workers, nor the trade union committee leaders, nor the directors have any confidence in the effectiveness of strikes in the enterprises. For the leaders of the trade union committees, participation in strikes becomes a duty determined by their situation, and some kind of ritual called to prove to the workers the necessity of the trade union committee or the given trade union chairman at the enterprise. For the workers in such conditions a strike becomes an act of despair, as they do not see for themselves any other way of expressing their discontent. Thus even in the case of a strike which begins as a result of the actions of an initiative group, the trade union committee will call a meeting of the labour collective, which traditionally elects the trade union chairman to be a member of the strike committee. After that all develops in the traditional channels, i.e. the strike gradually fades, and the demands are readdressed from the director to higher bodies.

After the elections to the State Duma in December, 1995 and presidential elections of 1996 basically there was a political balance for the following four years and the miners could not expect that their protests would be able to break this balance and to be used by any political force inside the government or parliament to strengthen their positions - you see only in this case their performances(statement) could involve(attract) in itself attention and support of political forces. Therefore in place of All-Russian protests, regional actions, or the threat of starting such actions

(including in the form of civil disobedience), were used for lobbying regional interests at the centre.

The difference between the Rostov meeting and similar meetings in other regions was that the meeting was organised by the leader of the Rostov miners' union who, due to his status as a Deputy in the Duma (i.e. his inclusion in the *political* structure at the highest level) had the opportunity *personally* to participate in negotiations with the government. Usually the negotiating function has been taken away from territorial trade-union organisations by the management of the coal companies and/or by the regional administration.

As the Russian Committee of the trade union speaks on behalf of *all* coal miners, and for trade unions at local level it is most important to resolve local and regional problems (since the budget has been reduced and there is not enough money for everyone), at the top governmental level the Russian Committee of the union and the company Rosugol' (later the State Coal Committee) express the interests of the branch, while the directors of the coal companies and local administration represent the regional interests, so it is to the latter that the miners delegate their votes, supporting them with regional actions.

In both the cases considered in this chapter the conflicts at the enterprises begun by the workers, received a sharp rebuff on the part of the directors. The fact that both conflicts were 'extinguished', but remained unsolved and did not extend beyond the limits of the enterprise, testifies to the fact that the directors have the authority to allow or to prevent the conflict from going beyond the framework of the enterprise, and they can direct the conflict in any direction necessary to them. The presence or absence of trade-union organisation at the enterprise has very little influence on the course of the conflict at the enterprise; it appears important only if the conflict

extends beyond the gates of the mine – in such a case the director will operate the protest action through the trade-union organisation or will use a strike committee created in the enterprise.

As a lesson for trade unions it can be noted that when the enterprise is owned by a private proprietor issues of the payment of due wages and other aspects connected to the regulation of labour relations have to be resolved only within the framework of the enterprise, by pressure on the proprietor. Only the work of the trade union committee and trade union activists at the base can overcome disunity. The development of the conflict beyond the limits of the enterprise can benefit the labour collective, if there is a danger for the proprietor of losing his property as a result of the intervention of external forces in the conflict.

9 Conclusions

9.1 *The development of the post-soviet strike*

In this thesis I have examined a series of strikes which have taken place in the coal-mining industry in Russia and Ukraine in the ten years since 1989. Each of these strikes has had its own specific features, but each is also indicative of general relationships between workers, employers, trade unions and the government. The most important factor determining the development and outcome of the strikes is the relationship that is established in the course of the strike between the interests of the striking workers, on the one hand, and the interests of the employers and of factions of the government, on the other.

The 1989 strike was remarkable not only in being the first large-scale open strike action in the history of the Soviet Union, but also in the extent to which the directors of mines and coal associations and, particularly, the local and regional authorities attached themselves to the miners' struggle and used the miners to realise their own economic and political aspirations. This set a pattern which has characterised the workers' movement ever since 1989. In Chapter Three I examined the development of the 1989 miners' strike in some detail to show how the movement developed as the miners were drawn into negotiations and the movement became institutionalised.

The miners' strikes of 1989 and 1991 gave a false impression of the degree of solidarity exhibited by the miners and the Russian working class as a whole. The solidarity of the strike movement was not established on the basis of the common

demands of the workers, but on the basis of common branch and regional interests represented by managers and bureaucrats. In 1989 there was a genuine degree of common interest between the workers, their employers and the local and regional authorities in resisting their common exploitation by the central state economic bodies, so the strike was successful in increasing miners' wages and in improving living conditions in the mining regions. The strike in Ukrainian Donbass in 1993, which I examined in Chapter Four, developed in a very similar way to the 1989 strike in Kuzbass, although the workers in this case had and maintained their own independent organisation. However, the negotiations were effectively manipulated by the employers and the regional authorities and incorporated into the structure of regional and branch bargaining over the allocation of state resources. But by this time the state was bankrupt, and was neither willing nor able to buy off the miners with increased wages, using the strike instead as an opportunity to divide the workers of Ukraine by inflaming branch and national divisions among the workers.

The common interests of workers and management in lobbying for resources from the centre, which underlay the solidarity of the 1989 strike, continued after the collapse of the soviet system in those branches of the economy which still depended on state financial support: in particular, the coal mining industry and the budget sectors of education and health care. These have been the most strike-prone branches of the Russian economy because they have been those in which the strike has been incorporated into the system of lobbying for resources. However, changes in the system of financing and growing political pressure from the government have steadily eroded the objective basis for this solidarity, so that the lobbying activity of the trade unions at federal level has less and less relevance for their ordinary members. In Chapter Five I looked at the attempts of the Russian coal miners'

union, Rosugleprof, to organise national strike actions, focusing on the strikes of 1995 and 1996. The account of these strikes shows very clearly the extent to which the preparation for and the conduct of the strikes was conditioned by the alliance between the union leadership and the leadership of the industry in the struggle for power and resources between the various branches of the government. At the same time, changes in the subsidy system meant that the attempt of the trade union to advance the cause of the workers on the basis of the interests of their branch intensified the divisions within the trade union, between different enterprises, coal associations and coal-mining regions, according to the extent each was dependent on particular kinds of subsidies, whether the mines were scheduled for closure, and so on. The trade union was therefore unable to establish any effective unity of the workers of the industry and it was only able to organise national strikes with the tacit support of the enterprise directors and the Coal 'Generals'. In 1994 and 1995, it was only able to hold one-day strikes, while in 1996 an indefinite strike, which was not supported by the leadership of Rosugol', collapsed within three days, despite the massive increase in the non-payment of wages.

The failure of national action to deliver miners their wages and to protect them from the 'wild' closure of their mines led to growing frustration and social tension in the coal-mining regions.

The divisions of interests between mines and coal companies and regions was expressed in divisions within the coal miners' trade union. The national leadership of the union continued to try to represent the interests of the branch as a whole, but the regional trade union committees each sought more or less openly to press the interests of their coal association or region at the expense of the unity of the trade union as a whole. The ideology of social partnership became a convenient form

within which to express the collaboration between the trade union leaders and the directorate. Miners' protests, no longer supported by the directorate, lost their organisation and became basically spontaneous protest actions and expressions of complete despair. The trade union, having functioned for a long time as representative of the branch, fragmented into separate regional and primary organisations, each of which tried to act on its own, not even managing to organise the workers at the level of the enterprise to put pressure on the employers. The problem was that the trade union leaders were used to resolving problems by bureaucratic means, agreeing to collaborate with the social partner at their level to put pressure on higher levels.

The following three chapters exemplified the consequences of these processes by examining examples of spontaneous strikes in post-Soviet Russia, as workers were driven by frustration and desperation to take increasingly extreme measures, but the lack of support from their trade union or their fellow workers in increasingly difficult economic circumstances made it easier and easier for management to extinguish strikes by the use of selective concessions and increasingly ruthless repression. The lack of solidarity among the miners cannot be put down to subjective causes, nor can it be said to be the inevitable result of competition for scarce resources. The role of the trade unions cannot be ignored. At regional and national level the trade unions have been preoccupied with retaining their position in the system of 'social partnership', supporting the lobbying activities of regional and branch management.¹⁸⁴ At the level of the mine, the priority of the trade unions

¹⁸⁴ The regional lobbying character of strikes is indicated by the fact that they tend to occur in the wake of All-Russian protest actions, once the issue of the distribution of the spoils between the

is to avoid conflict, in part because they retain their dependence on management but also because they come under pressure from higher union bodies not to undermine the solidarity of the branch which is the basis of its lobbying power. The objective basis of the collaboration of the trade union with management has been steadily eroded as more and more mines are closed, employment has been halved, investment has collapsed, health and safety is ignored and wages are unpaid so that the principal line of division is not that between the coal mining industry and the President and Prime Minister of Russia, but that between the miner and the mine director.

9.2 *Explaining strikes: Why do so few Russian workers' strike?*

The first point to make is that when we take into account the scale of the decline in wages and employment in Russia the most remarkable thing is how little Russian workers strike, with strikes overwhelmingly concentrated in the state sector or in industries which are still heavily subsidised by the state.

Workers are permanently in a state of discontentment with the employers: problems related to working conditions, out-of-date equipment, low pay, job losses and in particular many months of wage arrears and the payment of part of their wages in

regions arises. There are plenty of examples of this, other than the case studies included here. Thus, immediately after the 1995 strike the presidents of both trade unions in Vorkuta declared a hunger strike, demanding that the Interbranch commission should meet in Vorkuta. At that meeting the Vorkuta miners managed to get hold of the bulk of the funds which Rosugol' had received from the government as a result of the All-Russian action. A similar situation arose in Rostov, which had started its strike in advance of the All-Russian action and which received a promise that Anatolii Chubais, at that time First Deputy Prime Minister and chair of the inter-branch commission, would visit Rostov.

the form of goods are constantly accumulating and create a permanent basis for an explosion of emotions and for spontaneous action. Despite the existence of reasons for discontent and protest, the workers at most enterprises nevertheless do not strike. We cannot really explain this absence of protest directly on the basis of a series of case studies of strikes (see Ashwin, 1999, for a very thorough analysis of this issue on the basis of a case study of everyday working relations in a south Kuzbass mine), but we can get some indication of the means by which conflict is prevented from erupting into a strike by looking at the social context and at the characteristics of the relations between the workers and management during the period leading up to the conflict.

In the strikes that I have studied the strikes were preceded by a period of increasing social tension but in a situation in which there was a certain 'contentment-discontentment' or 'discontentment-compensatory' balance in relations between the workers and management. The absence of a strike at an enterprise with months of wage arrears may superficially suggest the complete suppression of the workers by enterprise management and the lack of any opportunity somehow to defend their rights. The situation is more complicated and confusing than it appears, however, which brings us into the sphere of informal relations at the enterprise. The workers immediately respond to worsening working and safety conditions at work and to wage arrears by reducing their labour intensity and productivity, theft at the enterprise and an increasing lack of discipline.¹⁸⁵ A certain balance is established: enterprise management don't pay wages on time, but weaken control over the

¹⁸⁵ The essence of mutual relations was precisely captured by the Russian satirist, Zhvanetskyi, when he said: 'They pretend to pay us and we pretend to work'.

workers at the work-place (much research shows that top management don't visit the coal seams for months on end, although they are supposed to do so on a regular basis), ignoring cases of violations of labour discipline and health and safety regulations. Such a 'strengthening' of the workers' position accompanied by a corresponding 'weakening' of the managers' authority acts as compensation in conditions of wage delays and allows for the 'peaceful' continuation of production activities. The demand 'to work!' and increased control on the part of management personnel in such conditions is perceived by the workers as unprecedented impudence. 'Let them thank us for even bothering to turn up to work' - characterises the workers' position. Months of wage arrears has led to an almost complete absence of any motivation to work.

The absence of the opportunity for management to stimulate work by financial levers also leads to a focus on the use of more 'repressive' levers. This most often means the use of the threat of dismissal. While wages may not have been paid fully for months on end at a mine, the situation with wage delays may be even worse at other enterprises where workers are on unpaid administrative leave (i.e. have been laid off). Moreover, with wage arrears of between 3 and 4 to as much as ten months, coal enterprise workers count on receiving (and receive) part of their wages in barter, or their monthly wages in instalments over 2 to 3 months. If they are sacked, even if they can get work at another enterprise, they start from nothing and are compelled to work for between 3 and 4 months for free before it is their turn to be paid for the month that they began to work at the enterprise. As a rule, the threat of dismissal acts as a constant environment of pressure on the workers, which helps management to keep them 'in check'. There is no doubt that in the coal-mining industry, surface and auxiliary workers have far fewer prospects of getting

alternative employment, while the situation for all workers has deteriorated considerably over the past two or three years, so that unemployment is nowadays perceived by all workers as a real threat. However, where the position of the workers deteriorates further (price increases on essential food products and goods, the non-payment within the agreed period of promised money for example), the rigid action of management is perceived by the workers as an insult and causes a backlash from the workers in the form of an explosion of emotions and a refusal to go to work. The balance, upset by external factors and not restored from the side of the workers by any kind of action directed at restoring the balance in the new conditions, is completely upset when management begins to talk with the workers in an intolerant tone.

9.3 *Explaining strikes: What provokes a strike?*

Workers have plenty of cause to go on strike, so the key to understanding the strike is to understand what provokes the strike. The first, and most obvious, feature of the strikes that we have studied is that they start spontaneously, without the participation of the trade union, and if the strikers overstep the boundary laid down by the enterprise director, as in the case of Biryulinskaya, the trade union collaborates with the director in suppressing the strikers.¹⁸⁶ In other words, the organisation which the workers join in order to defend and advance their interests does not in practice do so, but collaborates with the enterprise director and with the

¹⁸⁶ Of course, the strikes which are held as part of national actions are organised by the trade union, usually in collaboration with the enterprise director, but these are usually more like an extra holiday than a strike.

managers of the branch in seeking to advance the position of the enterprise and the industry as the whole, not necessarily to the benefit of the workers.

Even with an effective trade union it is often difficult to organise a strike. In the absence of a trade union it is even more difficult, which is why social tension is usually expressed in individual forms of resentment and protest. However, in the coal-mining industry there are traditions of solidarity and independence among underground miners which perhaps help to explain the particular strike-proneness of miners in Russia.¹⁸⁷ Thus, the great majority of spontaneous strikes begin with discussions among groups of underground miners at or around the meetings at the beginning of the shift. Moreover, in many cases the strike is provoked by perceived insults or humiliations directed at the miners by members of management, which define the antagonism between workers and management and the unity of the workers. The outbreak of the strike is usually an emotional expression of this solidarity and antagonism, which is not immediately expressed in an articulate set of demands.

Spontaneous strikes tend to happen when the fragile balance in the mine is upset by management directive, and all the accumulated rage is directed at a specific manager and is expressed in a refusal to fulfil his order (as a rule, this usually concerns his order to get to work quick). There may be many reasons that upset the balance, including a deterioration in geological conditions (the wagons are empty and the payment of wages is made according to the number of tonnes produced), the

¹⁸⁷ It is a feature of all the professions which are prone to strike that they do not work under the direct supervision of management, but form their own 'self-managing' work collectives (teachers, health workers, transport drivers, dockers, pilots and air traffic controllers).

breakdown of equipment (emotional counter arguments to management - 'You try working with this rubbish'), and the redistribution of the traditional work load to fewer workers ('I'm not doing the work of the whole mine') and so on. One factor which most often leads to an emotional outburst and the subsequent spontaneous action of the workers is either management acting 'as though nothing had happened', or their demands becoming more rigid and pressure applied at what is the most inappropriate time for this. The fact that the workers consider such action as an injustice towards them is of great significance here. The lack of any readiness on the part of the employers to make any concessions, somehow to compensate for the deterioration in the workers' status, appears to contradict the understanding within the working environment of social justice and the norms of mutual relations (that management abuses their subordinates and even swears at them is perceived as usual behaviour, but only in conditions where wages are paid on time, that is when they are working well and fulfilling their obligations. The inability of directors to fulfil their main obligations reduces their authority in the eyes of the workers and revokes their right to make demands of them).

The decline in the status of the workers gives rise to an expectation amongst the workers that management will take some action or other to improve their position (wage indexing, for example, where prices have increased), or to react to the deterioration in their status (by being less demanding, adopting a more lax attitude to how they work etc.) Whatever the situation, it is important that the boss is perceived as 'being in amongst it', that he (even if with great reticence) is accepted as 'one of us'. If this does not happen, he automatically places himself on the other side of the barricades, 'drawing the fire to himself' and provoking the beginning of 'military' actions. In other words, it is important that the difference between the

status of the workers and management does not grow too much: they can move 'up or down' the social scale together by the number of divisions between them should remain relatively constant.¹⁸⁸ This is hardly realised by the workers, but the above-mentioned appears as a result of many cases of observation and analysis of labour conflicts (Kozina and Borisov, 1996).

9.4 *Explaining strikes: the generalisation of the strike*

The process of expansion of strikes depends to a great extent on the technological process of a given enterprise. Of most influence are the key operations, the stoppage of which automatically results in a stoppage of production as a whole. In the mines, strikes are almost always initiated by representatives of underground groups, in particular the two main professions of development and face workers; the only case we know of in which protest action at a mine was begun by technical or auxiliary personnel was that of Tsentral'naya mine discussed in Chapter Seven. A stoppage of the work of development and production sections will paralyse the activity of a mine as a coal-producing enterprise (and at Tsentral'naya mine the women went underground in the hope of thereby stopping production). Surface workers are not infrequently compelled to become involved in the strike, while, as a rule, the workers of the administration and living complex (ABKh), continue to work despite the declaration of a strike. This has led to conflict, as firstly, the workers of the administrative apparatus, although members of the trade union, sabotage the protest, even if it has been supported by their trade union, and act in the role of strike-breakers, and secondly, the administration usually pays itself wages for the duration

¹⁸⁸ We are not talking about economic distinctions here, but only of the morally composed status position.

of the strike since they do not stop work, while the rest of the workers lose their wages for every day they were on strike. In due course, this forced the strikers to stop the work of the administration by force in order to deprive them of a legal basis for receiving their wages for the duration of the strike and to restore their understanding of justice.

In response to an isolated outbreak of action, attempts are immediately made to intimidate or to buy-off the strikers before the strike spreads. However, if the strike resonates with other workers, a group of activists may call a meeting and the strike may then enter into an institutionalised phase, with the election of a strike committee, which may well be joined by trade union representatives, and moving into negotiations with management and perhaps into the legal framework of conciliation and arbitration. This latter course is much more likely if the trade union has become involved in the strike, in which case the trade union may organise meetings of the labour collective and take steps to try to ensure that the strike is conducted within the framework of the law. Following this, the trade union committee, 'in fulfilling the decision of the conference of the labour collective' may take part in negotiations with enterprise management, the local authorities, and representatives of the coal association. In doing so, the trade union leaders try to avoid using the word 'strike' as this would give rise to a violation of the law on collective labour disputes (in particular, the observance of the period of preparation) and lead to the start of legal proceedings.

As a rule, following negotiations and the signing of agreements, the most organised proportion of the workers and also those whose demands were more or less fulfilled return to the jobs. However, the workers' demands are never fully satisfied by the administration, which provides a reason behind the discontent of a small proportion

of the workers, who may refuse to return to work, in spite of the agreements reached and the signing of protocols. The strike once again enters a spontaneous phase, which can be characterised as a phase of spontaneous extension of the protest. It can be asserted that, in general terms, the larger the scale of a strike (number of participants, enterprises, branches, territories), the longer it takes for the spontaneous phase of the strike to end, and the more likely a spontaneous return to a strike of the collectives which have already gone back to work. The typical course of an open strike in Russian conditions is thus a three-stage model: 'spontaneous beginning – organised protest – spontaneous extension'.

The ending of the strike does not result in an end to the conflict that underlay the strike. Workers who have gone on strike are paid part of their wage arrears and they return to their jobs. The system of mutual relations between the workers and employers, the wage system, and the organisation of production etc., that is, the factors which led to the strike, remain unchanged. As such, the reasons for discontent are not eliminated, and the conflict passes from an open to a latent form. Taking this fact into account, it can be asserted that the history of the development of labour relations in Russia during the last decade has been a fluctuation of labour conflicts from the latent form to the open form and vice-versa.

However, as a result of the insurmountable reasons for discontent and the progressive weakening of the trade union, conflicts decreasingly take the form of an organised struggle by the workers for their rights, while increasingly taking the form of an expression of despair.

9.5 *The relationship between the trade union and the workers' movement*

Rosugleprof has had a consistent policy of discouraging isolated strikes at individual enterprises in favour of the co-ordinated pressure of the workers being exerted on days of collective action. Of course, as we saw in Chapter Five, the trade union has tended to use this as a pretext for orchestrating strikes in agreement with the generals of the industry, as a means of putting pressure on the government, rather than as a means of mobilising the collective forces of the workers of the industry. However, this strategy had a significant impact on the pattern of local strikes. On the one hand, strikes at enterprises before days of collective action have received little publicity and have had little impact. Their demands are 'lost' in the general flow of demands and go unheard by those they are intended for, although in some cases the workers' demands may be met if the authorities are anxious about the forthcoming event. On the other hand, following general protests, there tends to be a wave of local actions. Some of them begin a few days after the end of the general protest, when it has become clear to the workers that neither the employer, not the authorities intend to take any steps to resolve their problems. Others begin on the day of collective action, and don't end even after the majority of enterprises have returned to work. It is clear in both cases that the united trade union protest is political by nature and does not in any way influence the state of affairs at enterprises. The organisation of similar protest action provides a temporary 'trump' for the Central Committees of the trade unions in their negotiation with the government and somewhat enlivens the negotiation process. However, this is in no way connected with changes to the situation of the trade union organisations at the enterprise.

9.5.1 The role of the trade unions as representatives of the branch

As a result of the 1989 strike the leaders of the workers' committees, who later became the leaders of the Independent Miners' Union, acquired considerable influence in Moscow, which they were able to use to secure the interests of their followers by representing the interests of their branch and their regions. On the basis of their alliance with the 'democratic movement' in 1991, the NPG leaders were in an even stronger position once Yeltsin took power, and for a short period were able to 'kick open the doors to all offices in the Kremlin'. Rosugleprof, on the other hand, relied on its traditional connections with branch management in its attempt to represent the interests of the miners in Moscow. From 1991 to 1993 the miners' unions were able to use their political connections to secure substantial pay increases for miners, and to press the government to cover the cost of these pay increases by subsidising the industry's wage bill. However, this situation did not last long and from 1994 onwards the form and level of subsidy to the industry changed radically. The maximisation of state support for the industry was still in the interests of the management of the industry, but it was less and less relevant to the mass of the workers, whose wages depended on the ability of their mines to sell the coal that they produced at a profit and to persuade their customers to pay for the coal that had been delivered. Nevertheless, under the banner of 'social partnership', Rosugleprof remained committed to the branch approach despite the fact that both the trade union and Rosugol' were losing their authority and their efforts were doing less and less for their members. In the changing circumstances, the role of the trade union appears to resist the changes, insofar as they bring with them a cut in social guarantees for the workers. Instead of adapting to the processes occurring in society of decentralisation and concentrating efforts at the level of the enterprise,

trade union structures are fighting for the restoration of their traditional status and the preservation of their former role by demanding an increase in the volume of government subsidies and the restoration of a central branch management body in the form of a State Committee for Coal.

The ordinary members of the union did not see any results from the trade union days of action in 1994 and 1995 or the national strikes in 1996. Nevertheless, this orientation of the trade union to 'big politics' had an impact on the politicisation of spontaneous strikes at enterprise level, which tended to look to Moscow for the solution to their problems, even a strike of a single section customarily forwarding its demands to Moscow, including the demand for the resignation of the President.

9.5.2 The role of the trade union in the enterprise

The trade union was traditionally little more than the social and welfare department of the enterprise administration, while the trade union president was the junior member of the troika of director, party secretary and trade union president, which ran the enterprise. Since the collapse of the soviet system the trade unions have lost even many of their former functions:

- the right to dispose of social insurance funds was lost through transfer to the government (November 1993);
- the function of health and safety inspection was transferred from the unions to specially created state technical inspectors (May 1994);
- social sphere 'objects' were transferred from the enterprises to the municipalities (1994–7);

- the ministries were liquidated and the negotiation process decentralised (1995–8);
- the corporatisation and privatisation of enterprises (1993 – present) removed trade unions from participation in management of the enterprise.

The declining role of the trade union has not led to a lessening of its dependence on the employer, but more usually to a weakening of the trade union organisation as it performs even fewer functions for its members and has even less capacity to defend their individual or collective interests. The ‘worker-employer’ relation is changing, with a strengthening of the employer’s position and a corresponding weakening of the workers’ position and of the trade union representing their interests. Besides the traditional dependence of the trade union leaders on the enterprise directors, the reduced role of the union has led to a reduced level of activism, so that the trade union is often identified only with its president or with the trade union committee, and to a low level of commitment of the members to the union. With the threat of redundancy, the traditional passivity of the rank and file members is supplemented by fear of losing their job; the workers therefore increasingly entrust to their managers or to the trade union chairperson the sole responsibility to assert and publicise the workers’ interests at all events. The success or lack of success of trade union activity therefore directly depends on the personal qualities of the trade union leader. However, since the presidency of the trade union is no longer a step on the managerial career ladder, most trade union leaders are pensioners or just working out their pensionable service.

The problem of many months of wage arrears and also the payment for the workers’ labour in products and goods obtained through barter has had an adverse effect on

the material bases of the grassroots trade union organisations. Wage arrears automatically signify arrears in the payment of membership dues, while the payment of wages in products deprived the union organisation of its main source of existence. Although this issue is not discussed in the mass media, it does present a great threat to the viability of the unions. For example, as of 01/01/98, arrears in payments of membership dues from the regional organisations to the Russian committee of Rosugleprof amounted to more than 18 billion roubles (approximately 3 million dollars). Asked why this problem is not publicised by the mass media and why rank and file members are not organised to hold active protests with the aim of putting pressure on the employers, trade union leaders at various levels have a standard response: 'People would simply not understand us. They don't receive their wages for months on end and we're going to fight for the payment of the membership dues'. This is a very serious symptom which testifies to the distance from the trade union organisation (the profkom and its chairperson) to the rank and file members, who do not perceive the non-payment of their membership dues as a violation of their rights and the rights of the organisations they created. They understand that the payment or non-payment of dues to the profkom will not in any way affect their living and working conditions, and perceive the employers' non-payment of dues deducted from their wages only as one of the many facts of non-payment between juridical organisations that are alien to them. Most significantly, even the profkom chairs do not decide to appeal to the rank and file members for their support, not only as a result of moral reasons previously stated, but more so because, being unable to achieve the timely distribution of wages to the workers, they will draw the fire onto themselves if they call on them to take action for the payment of membership arrears. Money received by the profkom is alien to them,

just as the rank and file members do not take decisions on how they are spent and have little concept of what the money may be spent on, i.e. they have almost no control over the budget of the trade union organisations. No-one is therefore prepared to strike 'for the sake of them', which is perfectly well understood by the trade union organisation chairs.

9.6 *The distinctive features of coal miners*

In this thesis I have explored the issue of strikes in Russia by concentrating on case studies of strikes in the coal-mining industry. This is justified by the fact that it was the coal-miners who initiated the strike waves which played a crucial role in the collapse of the soviet system and the fact that the mining industry has continued to display the widest range of strike activity in post-soviet Russia. It is also justified by the fact that the structures and processes displayed in the miners' strikes are not specific to the coal-mining industry, but are features of the soviet legacy of Russian society and so are potentially characteristic of all branches. It is just that they appear in sharpest form in the coal-mining industry. Nevertheless, it is important to say a few words about the specific characteristics of Russian coal miners which have helped to shape miners' strike movements.

9.6.1 The formation of the miner's image

Amongst all professional groups, the miners were allocated the ideology, which prevailed during the Soviet era, of a special group, the vanguard of the working class. The hero worship of the miners' labour was a part of communist ideology. To extol the miner as a representative of one of the most important professions for the development of the country was one of the tasks of the proletarian state. The

significance accorded to the coal industry in implementing the country's industrialisation programme found its expression in the miners' privileges, their higher earnings and their high status as a social-professional group. The Stakhanov movement, and subsequent movements including 'Women – into the mines' helped to form public opinion in such a way that a special right was attributed to the miners to be the vanguard of the most advanced class, and on behalf of this class to express the interests of society as a whole.

Difficult working conditions, and dangerous work fostered psychological collectivism amongst the miners, but simultaneously promoted a certain isolation of this group of workers, an isolation which was also encouraged from above. State policy aimed at the creation of worker dynasties found a response in the miners' milieu. The high status of the miners' profession, as 'activity for real men', and high wages led to the miners' collectives being relatively stable, with low turnover levels compared to other categories of workers.

All these factors led to the formation of a special psychology: the status of the miner¹⁸⁹ provided self-respect, dangerous working conditions, and also high independence at the work place and mutually-related earnings rallied labour collectives, which found an expression in the high level of miners' solidarity shown during the 1989 strike. As the highest paid category of workers, it was the miners who felt more sharply than others the deterioration of their material position and proved the most active social force to express their discontent openly for the first

¹⁸⁹ For more on the miners' status, see Borisov and Kozina, 1994; Robertson, 1999.

time during the decades of Soviet rule in the form of a strike, which seized the largest coal regions of the Soviet Union.¹⁹⁰

Although unexpected in the Soviet system, miners' strikes are quite organic in the international context. Amongst professions and branches of industry there are workers who are more predisposed to strike activity and those where strike activity is a very rare occurrence. In Russia, as throughout the world, examples of the latter include agriculture, retail trade, administrative services, and the textile industry. Examples of the former include the coal industry, transport and the steel industry (Hyman, 1984), where the highest paid workers are employed, which also determines the greater predisposition to strike.

The greatest activity in Russia was also shown by the miners and transport workers.¹⁹¹ It is also possible to note a certain feature of the representatives of these professions. The 'new unions', the creation of which was provoked by the miners' strike of 1989, were organised along professional lines (like western trade unions) and not along the usual branch principle of the Soviet era.

On the one hand, this led to the creation of as yet a few, but nevertheless quite well-organised trade unions, the members of which clearly recognised the interests of their professional groups and were able to assert them. On the other hand, focusing

¹⁹⁰ The concept of the miners being perceived by the public as the vanguard of the working class is supported by the fact that on 5 April 1989, a few months before the miners' strike, a three day strike was held by workers in the iron-mining industry at the Matrosov mine in Magadan region. However, unlike the July miners' strike, the protest did not attract a wide response in industry.

¹⁹¹ The strongest trade unions have been created by the transport workers: the PLS – Union of Flight Crews; the Federation of Employees of Aviation Dispatchers (FPAD), which has repeatedly taken the sector into strike mode or pre-strike mode.

on these interest provided the grounds for certain groups of workers in a branch (usually the lower paid) to accuse others of separatism, sectionalism and narrow-minded egotism etc.¹⁹²

9.6.2 The miners in the public consciousness

What was characteristic in the public's perception of the miners' protests was that the miners' demands represented the conformable expectations of society (few understood the contradictions between the two mining unions, any protest was assessed by the public as the 'Soviet miners' movement', and later as the Russian miners, which were traditionally perceived as the vanguard of the working class and therefore of the whole 'Soviet people'). From the very beginning, every miners' protest, irrespective of the reason behind them, were attributed not with a branch, nor with a class, but with a 'general public' content. Consequently, even protests with particularly economic demands always had a political slant. Such a state of affairs guaranteed the miners' movement the support of the general public, which was not an insignificant factor in their effectiveness. The image of the labour hero was transformed into an image of a fighter for the justice and happiness of all workers.

As already mentioned, the strike of 1989 was unexpected for many. However, what was even more unexpected and surprising was that in the conditions then prevailing in Russia of enthusiasm and expectations of democratic transformations, the strike did not go beyond the limits of the miners' protests. In the summer of 1989, people

¹⁹² This is to some extent reflected in the words of the president of the PLS, A. Malinovskiy, 'The stewardesses complains about the pilots, saying that they want to sleep with us, and not to accept us in their unions', From interview, 21/02/92

from many different trades and professions came to the newly created strike committees; builders, doctors, teachers, retail and service employees. Many were prepared to support the miners and join the strike. People came out onto the squares, offering their help to the strikers. The following is an example which is characteristic of this time: a railroad worker consults those gathered on the square; 'I want you to know that we can bring to a halt not only the station, but the whole railroad' (Kostyukovskii, 1990, p, 29). However, the representatives of the strike committees usually rejected such offers, saying that they could resolve all the problems themselves, as who would be worse off if a flat was not built or the bakery left a town without bread etc. This situation was typical in all regions. The perimeter of October Square in Donetsk, where in July 1989 meetings of miners were held over several days, was cordoned off with red flag bunting, and miners stood duty, only allowing onto the square people in miners' uniform who supplied their identification tags. The rest of the population of Donetsk could participate only as sympathetic onlookers. Thus, from the beginning, the miners, probably unconsciously, claimed the role of expressing the interests of most of the population, at the same time isolating themselves from this population. The professional exclusivism of the miners was further aggravated by the negative attitude of the strikers to the representatives of various political currents. The reaction of the strikers to those who at that time called themselves informal was remarkable. A small sketch from the summer of 1989:

14 July, Kemerovo, Soviet Square.

Man with microphone: 'We express solidarity with the strikers and if called for, we'll provide all round help to the strikers. As a member of the Democratic Union...'
(interrupted by whistles and shouts)

Member of the strike committee: 'We express our protest at this statement! Miners, let's not play into the hands of such people!'

A rebuff was then given to the informal groups by the workers as a whole. So, on the following day, the members of the Kemerovo strike committee stopped distributing on the square the bulletin of the 'independent Siberian information agency'
(Kostyukovskii, 1990, pp. 52-53).

Self-organisation occurred during the 1989 strike; strike committees were created which in time became the grass roots and city organisations of the NPG. The miners' milieu put forward its leaders, provided an opportunity for these leaders to obtain skills in organising strikes and holding negotiations with administrative employees at various levels, and created the conditions for the creation of worker organisations which were independent from official structures and party control.

However, having taken upon themselves in 1989 the role of expressing the interests of society as a whole, the miners thereby extinguished a powerful impulse of independent strike activity that existed amongst the workers of other branches. One year later, when these people once again tried to support the miners' protest, they were easily suppressed by enterprise management, who had restored confidence in their power. The workers of other branches were unable to oppose management through the creation of strike committees or through the experience of strikes, which had by this time been accumulated by the miners.

On the basis of this, it is possible to draw a conclusion on the contradictory and inconsistent influence of the miners' movement on the workers' movement as a whole.

On the one hand, the fact of the miners' protest was significant, as it dispelled the Soviet myth of strikes as an especially capitalist phenomenon. The 1989 strike was a turning point in the history of industrial conflicts at Soviet enterprises and acted as a stimulus for many local protests in other branches, which in many cases led to the creation of new trade unions at federal level (the FPAD, the PLS, the locomotive machine drivers, amongst others).

On the other hand, the miners' movement, having taken upon itself the function of expressing the general interest (and having overestimated its possibilities to oppose the government), acted as a factor which slowed the development of strike activity and the formation of strike committees and independent trade unions in other branches. In this sense, it is hardly possible to talk of the miners' movement as the basis for the workers' movement or to give it any special role. The miners' movement is an independent part of the workers' movement alongside the teachers', or medical employees' movement, amongst others. It has been the most active social-professional group, which focuses on branch interests and seldom embarks on joint action with the workers of other branches (which is limited to participation in joint meetings or the signing of joint appeals).

9.6.3 The role of the social background in the miners' protests

The outcome of miners' protests depends strongly on the social context in which they occurred and their orientation.

The 1989 strike was supported by representatives of the most varied of social groups in the population. In spite of the fact that the organisers of the strike avoided political slogans and demands in every way, the anti-totalitarian and democratic orientation of the miners' protest was clear.

Spring 1991: a two-month spring strike, which ended with the transfer of Russian mines from Soviet to Russian jurisdiction. Once again the miners' struggle was not independent, but was included, probably unconsciously, in the collision between the Russian structures, headed by Yeltsin, and the USSR government.¹⁹³ As in the first case, the miners' component was perceived by the public in a wider context.

February 1995: the miners' strike coincided with the adverse reaction of society and the mass media to the war in Chechnya, which was started by the Russian government and aroused strong public opposition, the strike receiving very active public support. The government quickly concluded an agreement with the miners, fearful of 'wars on two fronts'.

January 1996: the strike began in the wake of a convincing victory by the communists in December's elections to the State Duma, which was followed in mid-January by the resignation of the first deputy chair of the government of the Russian

¹⁹³ According to the chairman of Rosugelprof, Vitaly Bud'ko, 'the strike began with economic demands, but political forces began to become involved; in particular, Yeltsin came to Novokuznetsk and expressed his support for the striking miners. The strike lasted a long time, and the decision on the mines being removed to Russian jurisdiction was for the organisers the only grounds to bring it to an end, while managing to save face. They could have been transferred without a strike; no-one was stopping this'. The political game represented mutual interests: not only the political forces played the 'miner's card', but also the leaders of the miners' movement used the tactical opportunity presented to them by their participation in politics.

Federation, A. Chubais, who had been the last advocate of market reforms in the government. As a result of this, the political balance was upset, and the miners' protest could have led to the further destabilisation of society and changes to the echelons of power. Afraid of such repercussions, the government made significant concessions to the miners.

The 'rail wars' of May 1998 coincided with society's expectations being disappointed yet again following the arrival of Kirienko to the post of prime minister of the Russian government. Changes to the pace of reforms, on which the workers of all branches insisted during meetings organised by the FNPR within the framework of their day of collective action, were not implemented, which provoked an adverse reaction throughout Russia's regions. Consequently, the demands made by the miners for a new government, the resignation of the president, and a change to the pace of reform were supported almost unanimously by public opinion, as verified by publications from that time.

What is characteristic of the cases above is that they coincided with society's expectations, and that the miners' protests thus coincided with public expectations, however temporarily, hence the general support. It is therefore possible to assert that the miners' movement achieved success where and when it coincided with the general democratic movement or caught the mood of public consciousness.

This hypothesis on the success of the miners' movement being related to the social and political context is confirmed by the unsuccessful All-Kuzbass protest of 12 October 1995, which was initially offered by the people of Kuzbass as a locomotive for an All-Russian miners' strike. The thought that the miners' protest could, on the eve of elections to the State Duma, help the miners' hand was not justified.

Representatives from all political powers were fighting for a place in the future parliaments, but this was a period of a rather strong balance of power and public opinion almost failed entirely to react to the miners' action, everyone was too tied up with other problems. It was simply not the miners' time.

The role of the social background in the success of the miners' protests has another aspect. In accordance with public expectations, from the beginning, purely economic miner protests¹⁹⁴ were attributed with an ideological orientation, and the workers' indignation was directed along political channels against the then existing regime. During the first wave of miners' strikes, leaders of the miners' movement had appeared, who from the very early days had been involved in politics: negotiations with the heads of the Soviet state, attention of the wider public etc. All this took place against the background of high level politicisation throughout the country and coincided with the 1st Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR to be transmitted throughout the country and which raised the issue of the first miners' strike. The demand to supply gloves and soap and resolving narrow branch economic questions in no way coincided with society's expectations and could not be used by politicians to further their struggle for power. The result was not long awaited: three months after the first strike the miners of Vorkuta included in their demands a point on the removal from the Constitution of the USSR of the article on the leading role of the CPSU. The miners' leaders very quickly felt (although it is possible that they did so unconsciously) that economic demands would be met almost automatically if they were put forward in a package with political demands.

¹⁹⁴ For example, workers at the Shevyakova mine, which initiated the All-Union miners' strike, demanded that gloves, soap, and washing powder be supplied.

Putting forward political demands guaranteed the support of society as a whole, while the authorities, manoeuvring quickly agreed to fulfil the economic part of the package, while postponing a decisions on the political part 'until better times'.

The above is based in an analysis of the all-Russian miners' protests, but also applies to local protests, which explains why a strike at one enterprise or another is suddenly given a national airing and manages to influence the highest government authorities, forcing them to take decisions and to send resources from the budget. As already noted, the social background to the miners' protests is important, although the explanation behind depends on how and by whom this background is created. In my opinion, the following factors are the most significant:

- a) support for the strike (not necessarily obvious) from enterprise management, which is caused by their interest in the enterprise receiving financial resources should the protest prove successful. During such protests, the directors and representatives of the labour collectives on behalf of the profkom chairs flew to Moscow to obtain money from Rosugol', financed the travel and staying in Moscow of participants in the pickets etc.;
- b) support for the protest from the head of Rosugol' (although in their television appearances they may call for the end of a protest, this is only a part of their political games); if demands are directed towards the government and are complemented by political threats, then it is the government and not the directors of Rosugol' who should pay, and the sector obtains additional resources from the state budget;
- c) traditional support for the miners from the mass media and the widest information in the local and central mass media;

- d) the interest of the regional administration, which control the local mass media, in providing information on the beginning of a strike, and lastly, but most importantly;
- e) political struggle within the ruling groups, which use the opportunity to play the 'miners' card' to improve their rating and attack their opponents.¹⁹⁵

All these factors, which are linked together and coincide with a deterioration in the struggle for power in the ruling circles, cause a large public resonance in the miners' protest. The politicisation of demands, the radicalisation and increase in the democratisation of protests help the mass media to begin work on processing public opinion. The political machine is started which precisely traces changes in the rating of one or another political force, from time to time bringing the necessary information to a potential electorate. The political uncertainty of the miners' branch trade unions plays an important role in the playing of the 'miners' card'. As the miners are not linked with any political bloc or obligations,¹⁹⁶ this enables them to

¹⁹⁵ An indicator of this is that, two days after an appearance of the LDPR leader, Zhirinovskii in the State Duma, in defence of the labour collective at Sudzhenskaya mine, the vice-premier of the Russian government, Oleg Soskovets (a member of the ruling group, 'Nash dom – Rossiya') spoke on national Russian radio, also to defend their 'legitimate demands' and reported that money was being sent to Kuzbass. It therefore appeared that the struggle for wages at the level of the enterprise was transformed into a struggle for the right to defend the working class, which brought into opposition the State Duma (and fractions within it) and the Government (and lobbying groups within it).

¹⁹⁶ Appearing at the extended session of the Presidium of the union on 02/07/95, the chairman of Rosugleprof in response to the question, 'why doesn't the union participate in any political bloc to participate in elections to the State Duma?', he replied that, 'the union has members with the most varied political orientations, and the conclusion of an agreement with one of the political parties could result in schism within the trade union'.

count on the support of opposing political forces, drawn sometimes towards one and at other times to the other.¹⁹⁷

Each of the participants in this struggle have their own interests to protect. The directors and trade unions are fighting for money, the politicians for power, while the local administration try to benefit from the one and the other. There is a struggle for 'beating' the money out of the budget, for which the miners, teachers, and medics use the same methods, being the traditional organisations subsidised from the state budget.

This in brief is the pattern according to which events traditionally develop. If we consider the facts, we can see that during different periods various participants in the coal process placed their stakes.

In 1989, for example, the regional authorities were the level and subjects which reaped the benefits from the miners' strikes; in an agreement between the government and the workers' committee representatives, the regional authorities were included in the issue of financing regional development and significant

¹⁹⁷ This last rule is proved true by the fact that, despite the politicisation of all trade union protests at the enterprise, of all the cases known to us, only the strike at Sudzhenskaya mine (July – November 1994) provides an example of the direct involvement in the conflict of representatives of political parties, promoting their line. In all the other cases, the workers of enterprises did not allow any political party to manage the course of the strike either at the enterprise or at city or regional level. All the rumours heard and published by the mass media of the management of the 'rail wars' by the KPRF were groundless. Perhaps the communists would have liked to have the influence ascribed to them, but in reality, they didn't. The paradox then is that the politicisation of miners' protest action occurs without any direct participation in the conflict of political parties or their active involvement in the bodies managing the strikes.

resources were transferred from the USSR budget to the coal regions to resolve social and industrial problems.

Following price liberalisation in 1992, the price of coal remained fixed, which necessitated the allocation of huge budget resources to support the industry. This flow of money was distributed through Rosugol', which became the real owner in the regions where the coal industry is the main industry (Kuzbass and Pechora). During this time the regional authorities did not receive any direct injections from the strikes, but their interests continued to be helped as a result of 'by-products' from the strike.

The price of coal was freed in 1993, but by then the price of coal to consumers had already reached world levels, while production costs were already higher than world levels and deprived the economy not only of competitiveness, but of viability in general. In the struggle for finance, the coal industry also experienced the deleterious influence of the railways ministry, insofar as the cost of rail transport was a significant proportion of the cost of coal.

The policy of coal industry restructuring conducted in 1994 was directed in the financial sphere to the elimination of government support to the coal industry, the amount of money was cut and competition increased between coal regions and companies. The transfer of the social infrastructure from coal enterprises to the municipalities began, increasing the interest of the local authorities in the success of the miners' protests. Their interest was additionally strengthened by changes to the channels through which state support was directed to the regions. In accordance with the recommendations of the World Bank (and interested parties in the government and regional authorities), government support funds began to be sent by

the Finance ministry not through Rosugol', but directly to the regions through the treasury system (from 1995–6).

Taking all this into account, it becomes clear why local protest action found such resonance in society. As soon as the strikers provide a traditional package of economic and political demands, the sharp struggle begins for the 'coal' money under the fluttering banners of various political parties. The trade unions, supported by the directors and regional administrations, and strengthened by the branch structure in the form of Rosugol', which in a little time appears to be heard by the government, which sends money from the budget to the 'hot spots' to maintain 'social peace'.

The funds received by the enterprise are spent by the administration at its own discretion. The fact that the money, secured with the help of the trade unions, is then distributed without their participation or control shows the real distribution of roles between the parties 'of the coal partnership'. The miners may have won great victories in the eyes of society, but the miners were the last to benefit, if they benefited at all.

9.7 *Prospects for the development of a workers' movement in Russia*

The analysis of the development of miners' strikes in Russia since 1989 has shown how the incorporation of the miners' trade union into the structures of branch and regional lobbying has had less and less relevance for the fate of the ordinary coal miners, struggling to keep their jobs, to defend their working conditions and to be paid a living wage. The preoccupation of the miners' trade union with maintaining the unity of the branch at regional and national level, and at limiting displays of

militancy to the role of supporting the lobbying efforts of branch management, has led the trade union not only to fail to support its members in conflict with their own management, but even to act on behalf of management in suppressing such conflict and in punishing the 'trouble-makers'. This is not the result of the subjective intentions of the leaders of the trade union, who are quite genuine in their commitment to the well-being of their members, but of the failure of the leaders of the union to adapt their strategy and tactics to changing economic and political conditions. The apparent strength of the coal miners did not depend on their own solidarity and effective organisation, but on their participation in bureaucratic and political structures which had only a provisional and contingent unity of interest with the coal miners. Beneath the appearance of solidity, the real organisation and solidarity of the coal miners at the level of the mine and the shop was being steadily eroded.

The possibility of a renewal of the miners' trade union depends on the possibility of its renewal from below. This does not necessarily require the withdrawal of the trade union from participation in the institutions of social partnership, but it does require that the trade union participate in those institutions on the basis of its own strength rather than as a means of hiding its own weakness.

This thesis has concentrated on the coal-mining industry, but much the same story could be told of the organisation of workers in the other sectors of the economy which have been marked by high levels of strike activity: transport, health care and education, where the decentralisation of finance, the growing importance of commercial principles, rising unemployment and increasingly aggressive management has removed the basis for the participation of the trade unions in lobbying at the federal level, while leaving the workers in the enterprises

undefended, engaging in spontaneous strikes and hunger strikes which on occasion result in those directly involved achieving their demands, but increasingly often result in their outright defeat.

Strikes in Russia have developed since 1989 as an expression of the frustration and despair of ordinary workers. But such strikes have only developed beyond the level of the brigade, section or shop when they have been taken up by management as a means of lobbying for their own interests, and it has only been in such circumstances that the dominant, former state, trade unions have become involved in actively supporting strike actions. However, the political leaders of the country have responded to such forms of lobbying by changing the forms of financing of the budget sector and of state-subsidised branches, and have effectively pressed directors of associations and enterprises by holding them responsible for strikes and civil disorder. As the directors have lost interest in strike actions, so the trade unions have been more reluctant to organise or to lead strikes, and have been too weak to take the initiative and to organise strike actions on their own account, in defense of their members. Miners' strikes in Russia have been a dramatic expression of the organised strength and solidarity of employers, not their employees. Now that the employers have lost interest in using strikes as a means of beating money out of the Centre, the trade unions are not able to use this form of protest on their own account because of their organisational weakness.

The results of the emergence of trade unions as part of the general mechanism of lobbying branch and regional interests has been the expression of workers' protest in spontaneous and mainly in non-trade-union forms. In conditions in which everybody speaks about the necessity of creating a law-governed state, the trade unions have been the only one of the social partners who have observed the laws,

including laws on strikes, collective disputes etc. As a result of the encroachment of government and employers on the rights of workers the legislative field has been narrowed and the trade unions have less and less room for manoeuvre and ever fewer opportunities to achieve the realisation of the demands of the workers without going beyond the limits of the law. For this reason the most resolute actions are undertaken by the workers without any leadership on the part of the trade-union leaders and sometimes even contrary to their position. In such cases the workers movement is released from the trade-union shell, which confines their protest to 'civilised channels', i.e. where the rules are dictated by the opponents, and where the workers are put in an obviously losing situation.

The lesson, which the trade unions should draw from this is that laws change. They can change under the initiative of the government, 'from above', as a result of changes in the market and political conjuncture. But they can also change under pressure from the actions of the workers. Attempts of the trade unions to lobby the interests of the workers, by coordinating them with the interests of these or those groups in government or groups of employers, is a game played on another's field and by others' methods, which other social parties command much more effectively, than do the trade unions. The future of the trade unions must be in strengthening their influence among the workers and building up their organisation through the organisation of workers' actions. Only here do the trade unions not have competitors on the side of the employer and the state, and only here can struggle be conducted according to rules which are determined by workers and their trade unions. A political regime, which expresses the political conjuncture, cannot provide any guarantee of the enforcement of labour legislation. The only such guarantee can be the force of the organised workers, i.e. trade unions.

It is striking that those who have been most successful in lobbying have been the trade unions of the workers of the budget sector, and also of those working in branches receiving subsidies from the state budget. Thus the result of trade-union actions has been the regular receipt of additional budget funding by the chiefs of the branches and enterprises. Social partnership was quite often perceived as the traditional skill of 'agreeing with the bosses'. The re-structuring of the economy, contemporary processes of privatisation and subsequent transfers of property do not any longer provide any guarantee that of security to the trade-union leader who has managed to agree with the director. 'With the change of employer he will chew his nails, having realised that he has failed to create a system of guarantees. It forces the trade-union leaders to be more principled in negotiating and concluding collective agreements'.¹⁹⁸ There is a gradual transition from the attitude to the collective agreement as a ritual document, to the perception of it as a working document. Moreover, despite all the imperfections of Russian labour legislation, the collective agreement is a legal document, for whose infringement the employer can be brought to court. Every year judicial practice in the resolution of labour disputes becomes more and more widespread. However, this approach is also unpromising from the point of view the establishment of trade unions as organisations which are able to stand up for themselves, since the force of the state is opposed to the employer instead of the force of the organised workers; thus judicial decisions in many respects are determined by the general course of the president and government and only to a small degree by the position of the trade unions. The emphasis of trade unions on judicial practice and transformation of collective labour

¹⁹⁸ From interview with the chairman of the mining-metallurgical trade union of Russia (GMPR).

disputes into a set of individual judicial claims is, in my view, an indicator of the development of the trade-union movement in a bureaucratic direction at the expense of solidaristic development based on collective actions of the workers, organised by the trade-union leaders. The contemporary processes of privatisation with the subsequent transfer of the property throw into question the fate of whole labour collectives and trade-union organisations. There are conflicts, during the threat of dismissal hangs over the collectives, and the threat of liquidation hangs over the trade-union organisation. Such an existential situation serves as a test for the survival of trade unions as real organisations able to protect the interests of the workers. It is possible to speak about a certain vector 'from guaranteed, but not realised rights – through labour conflicts and hard struggle – to real partnership', which has still only been weakly pushed through. At the present time very few trade-union organisations in Russia have developed in this direction. However, the general course of economic development and the actively continuing processes of privatisation will sooner or later touch all trade-union organisations. 'Granted rights can not be appreciated. The sooner we lose them, the faster trade unions will begin to struggle for them, not expecting that anyone else will do it for them' (ibid.). The pressure which appears on trade unions, forces them to look for support to their ordinary members and to occupy themselves with their organisation.

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