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TRADE UNIONS
IN POLAND

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RISE AND GROWTH

Polish trade unions have twice as many members today as they had before the war. When the Provisional Central Committee of Trade Unions was created in 1944, before the whole of Poland was liberated, it gathered only 100,000 members as compared with the 941,000 union members in Poland before the war. It is significant that even as early as the end of 1945 this pre-war membership had been surpassed by 200,000 when the Polish trade union movement claimed 1.1 million workers. The year 1946 brought an unprecedented increase when union membership passed the two million mark. It is estimated that a half a million workers are still unorganized. Thus four-fifths of the labor force in Poland, including white collar workers and professionals, are organized.

Outstanding in the field of organization is the Textile Workers Union which organized 95 per cent of the workers employed in the textile industry.

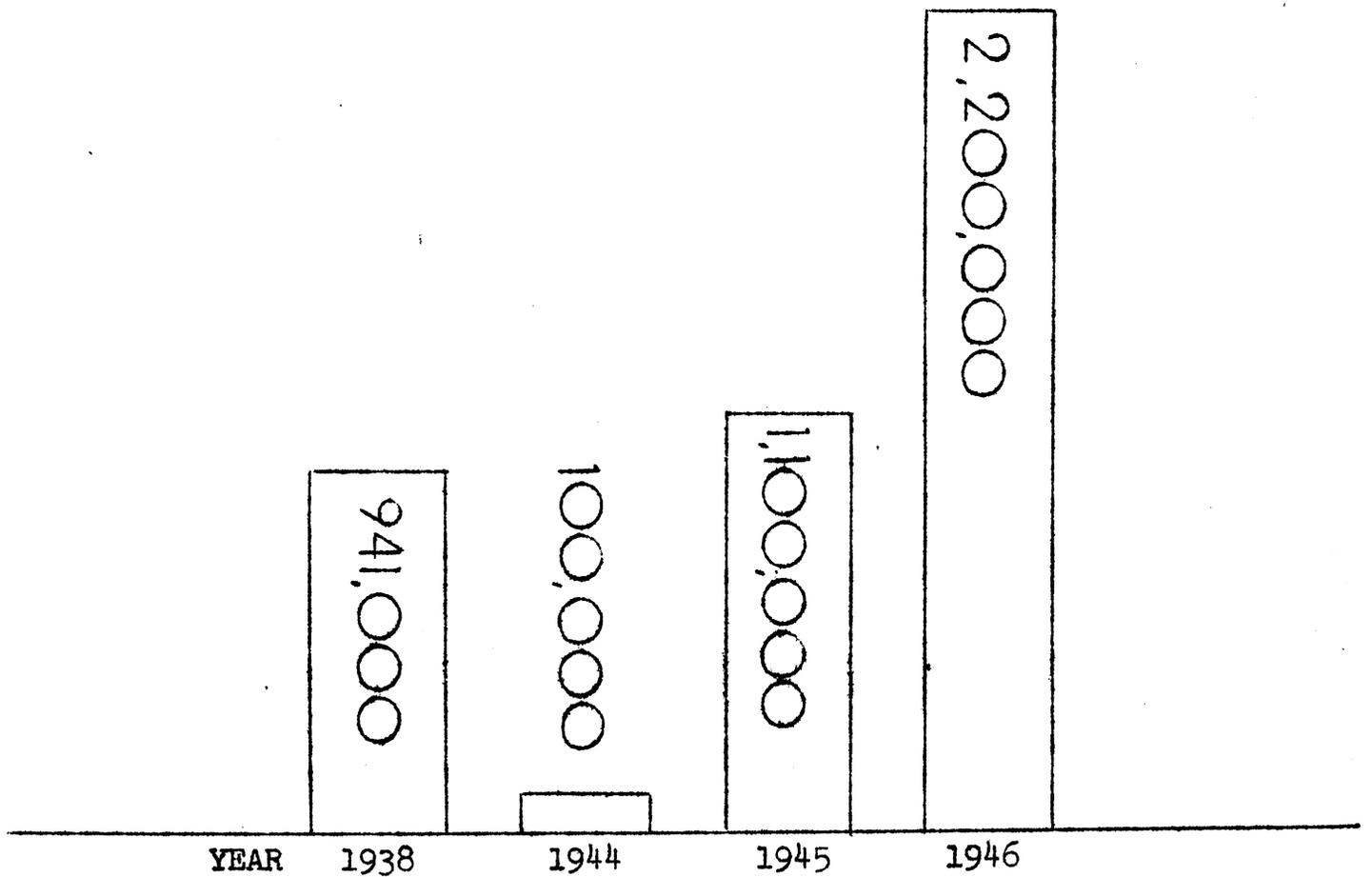
The reasons for this rapid growth of trade unions are numerous. One of them is that the Polish labor movement eliminated the internal rifts that had once wrought havoc within its ranks. At present the different Polish unions are all united within one central organization. This forms a sharp contrast to the prewar period when nine trade union federations existed in Poland. They ranged from the Christian Trade Unity, a conservative federation of Catholic trade unions, through the government sponsored Union of Trade Unions, to the leftist Central Committee of Trade Unions. As a result of this multiplicity, there were often two or more unions representing the same industry in one and the same plant. How far these divisions went before the war can be seen from the fact that among railroad workers alone there were eighteen different unions and among the textile workers, thirteen unions. A similar situation prevailed in other major Polish industries. The numerous unions which existed simultaneously in a given industry fought each other, making almost impossible any concerted action for improved working conditions.

Today this rivalry is a thing of the past. Even before the task of liberation was completed, the first trade union locals were organized in the freed areas on the principle of unity within the labor movement. In November, 1944, a conference of all existing trade unions was held in Lublin. This conference established the Provisional Central Trade Union Committee, which immediately put forth as its goal the building of a healthy, democratic and powerful trade union movement. It decided that this objective could be reached only by the following means:

- 1) the organization of all workers, irrespective of party affiliation and political conviction, into one unified body;
- 2) the uniting of physical laborers and white collar workers into the same unions in order to remove the class distinctions which existed before the war;
- 3) the adoption of the vertical structure as best suited to mass organization;
- 4) the establishment of membership in trade unions on a voluntary basis.

In November, 1945, the first post-war convention of Polish trade unions was held in Warsaw. It was an impressive occasion, attended by union representatives from France, England, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Palestine. From the United States came Leo Krzycki, vice president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, C.I.O. At this convention the Central Trade Union Committee was created as a permanent body with Kazimierz Witaszewski as president, Kazimierz Rusinek as general secretary and Adam Kurylowicz as secretary (see p. 6 for biographies of the leaders). National unions forming part of the Central Trade Union Committee were organized at the same time.

GROWTH OF UNION MEMBERSHIP



STRUCTURAL PATTERN

Central Trade Union Committee

On top of the trade union structure is the Central Trade Union Committee, the federation of all existing Polish trade unions and the highest organ of the united labor movement. It consists of the following departments: Administration; Foreign Affairs; Food Supply; Cooperatives and Workers' Housing; Culture and Education; Personnel; Physical Education and Sports; Youth; Government Workers; Creative Arts; Women; and the Economic-Legal Department.

National Unions

To the Central Trade Union Committee belong 36 national unions. Of these the most important are: the Railroad Workers Union, with 300,000 members, which was also one of the most powerful unions before the war; the Mine Workers Union, with 201,650 workers, which represents a 240 per cent increase over the prewar membership of 67,898; the Textile Workers Union with 201,427 members (pre-war membership - 70,939); the Metal Workers Union with over 200,000 workers; the Union of Construction Workers with 108,118 members; the Polish Teachers Union with 114,246 members; the Transport Workers Union with 65,000 members; and the Food Workers Union with a membership of 40,000. Among the 36 national unions are new ones operating in fields where no organization existed previously, such as the Union of Health Service Workers, comprised of medical doctors, nurses, pharmacists and all others who render health services.

The national unions follow the vertical structure principle, which means that they include all workers in a given industry or field.

Locals

Each national union in turn consists of locals. A local comprises either workers of one large factory or enterprise, or workers of a few small establishments. In the latter case the local consists of sub-locals. A sub-local includes all organized workers of a given small enterprise and forms the smallest existing division of the trade union organization.

Shop Committees

The executive organ of the trade union on the shop level is the shop committee. Every factory has such a committee, which is elected by all the workers in a given factory, including those who are not union members. The elections, conducted by the local to whose jurisdiction the factory belongs, are free, secret, equal and direct. The union, political organizations, or any other groups, can put forth their own candidates. These groups are represented at the shop committee in proportion to the number of votes they poll. In each group the seats go to the candidates with the highest number of votes. All candidates must be at least 18 years of age, must have worked in the given factory at least three months and have been union members at least one year prior to the elections.

Shop committees exist in establishments which employ more than twenty workers. In plants employing less than twenty workers, the "workers' delegate" (comparable to the American "shop chairman") represents the workers. In a place which has 250 to 500 employees, one member of the shop committee is relieved from his regular work enabling him to act as full time representative for the workers. The number of these full time representatives in a given factory increases proportionally to the number of workers in that factory.

Recently formulated by-laws make it the duty of management to meet at least once a month with the shop committee or the chairman where the shop committee is not in existence. These meetings serve to give the committee the opportunity to present the grievances of the workers. Such matters as the improvement of hygienic conditions and technical facilities are also discussed.

In addition to these monthly meetings the functions of the shop committee include insuring that the social legislation of the country is not transgressed by management and also that the collective agreement is complied with. Management can hire new employees only with the consent of the shop committee and must also show the committee due cause for any firings or lay-offs. The shop committee also actively participates in the management of the plant. In this sphere its activities resemble the labor-management committees which existed in America during the war.

In reference to this function of the shop committees, Adam Kurylowicz, general secretary of the Central Trade Union Committee said that "the role of the shop committee must not be limited to the defense of the workers but should also rest on the broadest cooperation with management". W. Sokorski, secretary of the Central Committee, threw light on the nature of this cooperation when he made the following pronouncement:

"We are interested in the harmonious cooperation of management and the shop committee. This cooperation is necessary for the carrying out of national tasks confronting us and for the establishment of material security for the workers. Such cooperation can only exist when the independence and separation of the functions of management, trade unions and government are maintained. No one of the above agents can take over the functions of another agent".

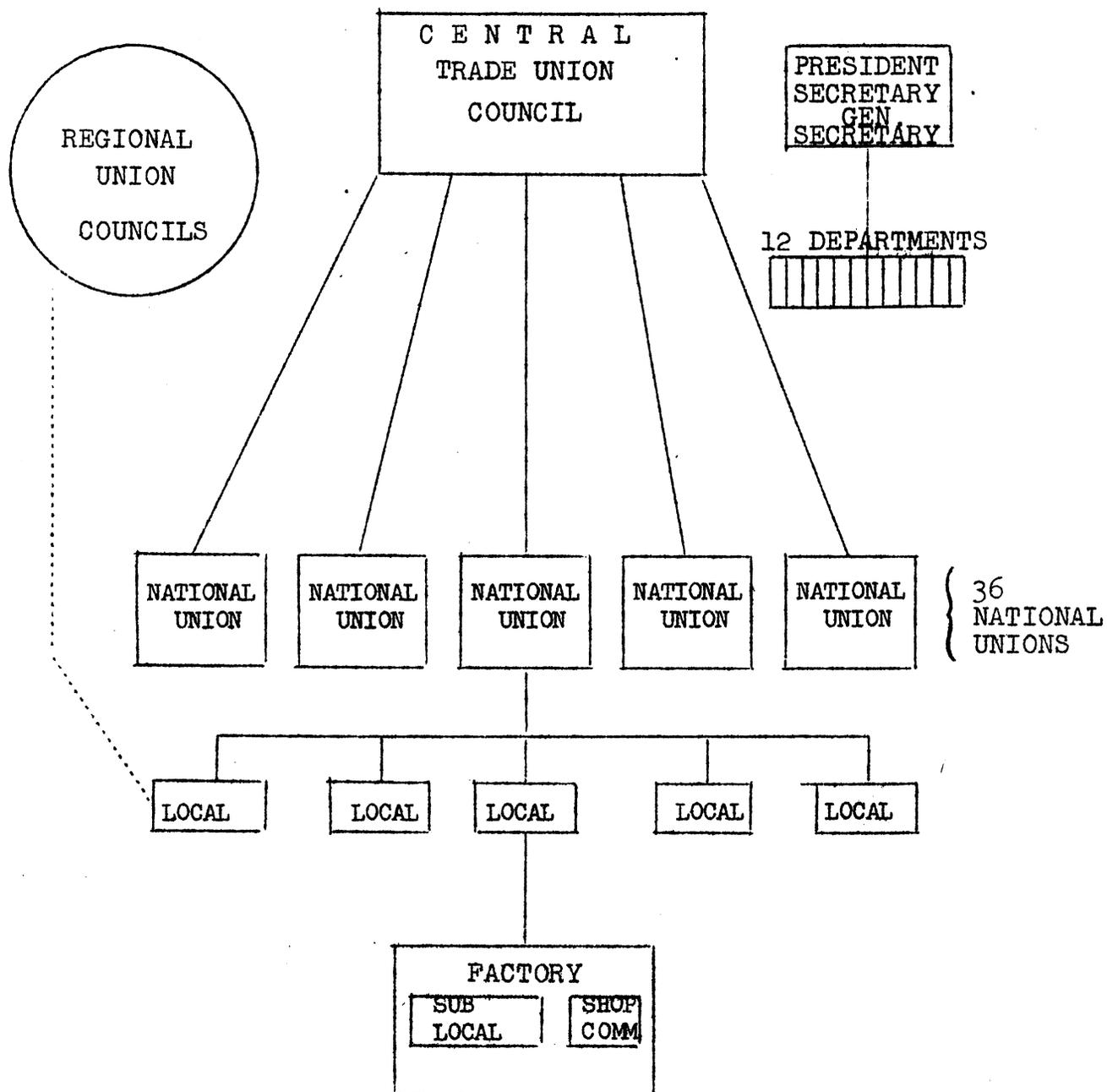
Liaison Men

In factories employing more than 100 workers there are, in addition to the shop committee, liaison men. For every 25 workers of a section there is one such man whose duty it is to act as a link between the workers of his section and the shop committee. On one hand the liaison man informs the committee of the needs and grievances of the workers and sees to it that those needs and grievances are taken care of swiftly and satisfactorily. On the other hand he must accurately inform the workers of his section of the shop committee's decisions and directives and see to it that they are carried out. Thus the liaison men help to activate the shop committee and the rank and file of the shop, but do not have the power to represent the workers on the outside. This means that they do not perform any functions in relation to management nor to the union. The above functions are exclusively reserved for the shop committee. Liaison men, elected by a simple majority of their section, cannot serve simultaneously as members of the shop committee.

Trade Union Councils

Before concluding the outline of the structure of trade unions it must be mentioned that there are geographical trade union organizations. These are the trade union councils which exist in all districts and in the major cities. They are the direct arms of the Central Trade Union Committee on the district and city level and they coordinate the activities of all trade unions from all industries in the given geographical area.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE



THE LEADERS

The major positions on the Central Trade Union Committee are those of the president, general secretary and secretary.

The President

Kazimierz Witaszewski, the president, was born in Lodz in 1906. His mother and father worked in a textile factory. As a boy of nine he started work as a messenger, and at 15 he took a job at the large Scheibler textile factory. Contact with the trade union there resulted in his becoming an active union member. In 1929 he was called into the army. When he returned from the service his former employers refused to take him back because of his previous union activities. The pressure of the union and the demands of the workers forced the management to give him back his job. Due to his activities on behalf of the workers he later was elected head of the shop committee. In 1937 he was sent, together with other trade unionists, to Bereza Kartuska, a concentration camp operated by the pre-war regime in Poland. After being freed from the concentration camp he vainly looked for work. All factories were closed to him because of his record in the trade union movement. He was therefore taken on as a paid official of his trade union. In 1938 he ran as a candidate for the city council of Lodz and was elected. During the war he sought refuge in the U.S.S.R., where he joined the Polish army and became an officer. In 1945, at the first post-war convention of the Central Trade Union Committee, he was elected its president. In this capacity he serves as the leader of the Polish labor movement.

The General Secretary

Adam Kurylowicz is the general secretary of the Central Trade Union Committee. He was born in 1890. After finishing school he started working as a railroad worker and became active in the union. In 1918 he was elected president of the All-Polish Railroad Workers Union, which union he headed till the beginning of World War II. He remained in Poland during the occupation, working in the underground. In 1941 he was sent to the notorious Oswiecim (Auschwitz) concentration camp. When Poland was liberated and the first postwar convention of all trade unions was held in 1945, he was elected as the secretary of the Central Trade Union Council. During 1946 he held the post of Minister of Labor and Social Welfare. Mr. Kurylowicz advanced to the position of general secretary when in 1947 Kasimierz Rusinek, former general secretary, became the Minister of Labor and Social Welfare.

The Secretary

Wlodzimierz Sokorski is the secretary of the Central Trade Union Council. He was born in 1908. After finishing high school he entered law school where he became a member of the Socialist Youth. In 1931 he was sentenced to five years imprisonment for his socialist activities. After the war he headed the law and economic section of the Central Trade Union Committee. He was also recently appointed by the President of Poland to head the Council of Higher Education, an agency for the promotion of higher learning.

THE IMPROVEMENT OF WORKING CONDITIONS

The numerous activities of the Polish trade unions can be divided into two broad categories. First there are the activities which are directed towards improving the well-being of its members; secondly, there are those activities which result from the labor movement's position as an integral and recognized part of the social structure of Poland.

Collective Bargaining

A very important instrumentality for the assurance of good working conditions is the collective agreement. Collective agreements are usually industry-wide, but contracts also exist with given individual firms. The agreements apply to union and non-union members alike. They include provisions for wages, wage increases, vacation periods, the establishment of special facilities such as reading rooms, nurseries for the children of working women and the upgrading of workers. (8000 workers have been recently advanced to positions in management and administration.)

The Right to Strike

Workers have the right to strike and they occasionally exercise this right. For example, recently the workers of the M. Wisniewski struck because the employer discharged a few workers without consulting the shop committee.

The Right to a Vacation

The right of every worker to a vacation is not only assured by the collective agreement but rests on an even broader base. The law provides that all physical laborers receive 8 days vacation with pay after one year, and 15 days after three years of employment. White collar workers are entitled to a yearly 30-day vacation with pay. Collective agreements may, however, provide longer vacation periods. For example, the Union of Government Workers won a 4-week vacation period for all physical laborers employed in governmental institutions, thus putting them on a par with the white collar workers.

In order to help the workers receive the full benefit of their vacation period, the trade unions strive to provide them with comfortable rest homes in mountain and seaside resorts. These homes maintain numerous recreational and entertainment facilities. Many of them are former mansions of landowners and government officials which are gifts of the government to the trade unions. One of the most beautiful is the Presidential Mansion in Spala which is known for its extensive hunting grounds.

The worker who spends his vacation in a union rest home receives free transportation as a gift from the Ministry of Transportation. He contributes only 30 per cent of the cost of room and board while 35 per cent of the cost is paid by the employer and 35 per cent by the union of which he is a member.

In 1946 Polish trade unions operated 540 rest homes which accommodated 350,000 workers. It is estimated that this year the number of workers spending their vacations in union rest homes will reach over 500,000. It must be kept in mind that in addition to union sponsored vacation facilities there are others run on a similar basis by industry and the government.

The Right to Safety

The unions put much emphasis on healthy working facilities. According to a directive from the Ministry of Work and Social Welfare, every factory employing more than 50 workers should have a safety committee. The trade unions see to it that this directive is put into operation. In 75 per cent of all factories employing more than 50 workers such committees are already in existence. Due to the existence of the safety committees and the watchfulness of the shop committees, the accident rate of many industries has decreased. For example, the metal industry has cut its accident rate in half since the safety committees went into operation.

The Right to Child Care

Another important measure is the provision for factory nurseries. The law requires that factories employing more than 100 women maintain nurseries where children can be left during working hours. The unions supplement these facilities by operating additional nurseries for the children of workers not covered by the above legislation.

Free Lunches

If nurseries are mostly the concern of women workers, there are other facilities furnished by the effort of trade unions which are of interest to all workers. An outstanding example is the free lunch which is often provided for in the collective agreement. Trade unions also make accessible to their members various food and clothing products at reduced prices. The importance of this can only be appreciated when one is fully aware of the shortages that exist in Poland as a result of the war years. Besides the reduced rates for food and clothing, trade unions also provide their members with theater and movie tickets at a considerable saving. Forty per cent of all movie tickets sold in Poland go to union members at reduced prices.

WOMEN TRADE UNIONISTS

The women's section, which functions on each level of the union structure, takes particular interest in the operation of nurseries. They are also active in protecting the health of women workers, in propagating hygienic principles, and providing women with educational and vocational training. On the economic front they see to it that the principle of "equal pay for equal work" is abided by. The women's department of the Central Trade Union Committee investigates the possibilities of placing women in new industries. It also gathered, among other facts, the following figures, which indicate the increase in the number of women employees in industry and trade unions.

There are at present 382,000 organized women workers. At the beginning of 1946 there were only 8,000 women in the textile industry; today the figure is 70,632. The coal industry, which employs 25,000 workers, has an unusually active women's section. They organized 32 nurseries and kindergartens which are attended by 6700 children. They also operate consultation centers for women workers and their children in 36 plants.

EDUCATION AND RECREATION FOR THE WORKER

Culture and Recreation Centers

As was shown previously, the Central Trade Union Committee has a department of culture and education. In November of 1946 this department called together a special Cultural and Educational Commission of outstanding educators and social workers including the well-known sociologist, Prof. Jozef Chalasinski. The main task of this commission is to help establish a network of recreation halls attached to each factory. The supervision of each hall is the job of the local Cultural and Educational Commission which functions on the factory level and which consists of factory workers. A factory employing more than 200 workers employs a special paid director to conduct these centers. In factories employing less than 200 workers, the responsibilities are shared by the members of the factory Educational and Cultural Committee. The recreational centers provide lecturers, classes, library facilities, and plan meetings, games and dances for the workers. An indication of the extent to which this program is carried out is given by the Textile Workers Union, which was instrumental in the establishment of 253 factory recreational centers.

Workers' Education

The trade unions also strive to raise the cultural level of the workers by offering them educational opportunities. In 1946 trade unions gave 170 courses for members of cultural and educational committees, 38 courses for recreational directors and 340 general courses. In addition to these the unions sponsored many vocational training programs. It is noteworthy that the Central Trade Union Committee granted 50 university scholarships to workers or their children.

Workers' Art

Polish trade unions pay great attention to the artistic development of their members. During April 26-30, 1947, the first festival and contest for trade union theatrical and musical groups was held in Warsaw. In order to encourage artistic creativeness the Central Trade Union Committee announced a contest of musical compositions suitable for use in Workers' Cultural and Educational Centers. One hundred and ninety-nine compositions for chorus, orchestra and solo poured in to the Committee.

An example of a union which pays much attention to developing the artistic potentialities of its members is the Mine Workers Union. This union has a special art service whose function is to advise and train talented members. Also well-known for its activities in this field is the Textile Workers Union which has organized 35 dramatic groups, 60 choruses, 31 orchestras and 13 dance groups. During the month of November, 1946, they gave 157 performances, which were attended by a total of 24,000 people.

Workers' Sports

There also exist extensive trade union sponsored sport activities. In 1946 the Central Trade Union Committee opened a Department of Sports and Physical Culture. Heading this department is Zdzislaw Zajaczkowski, well-known in the Polish world of sports. Union sports matches are held in many games, but soccer is the favorite. An inter-union Polish soccer team was sent to the international trade union match in France, where it won second place.

UNION PRESS

The Central Trade Union Committee issues two publications. One is "Zwiazkowiec" (Unionist), a weekly devoted exclusively to union matters. This weekly is directed to the needs of the rank and file. The second publication is "Labor Economic Review", a monthly magazine devoted to labor-economic thought. In addition to these two publications each union publishes its own paper. For example, the Mine Workers Union publishes "The Miner", the Metal Workers Union "The Metal Worker", the Textile Workers Union "The Textile Life" and the Polish Teachers Union "Teacher's Voice".

RELATIONS WITH THE TRADE UNIONS OF THE WORLD

The Polish labor movement maintains close contact with unions abroad, both in Europe and elsewhere. The fact that French, Yugoslav, Russian, Czechoslovak, Hungarian and American unions sent delegates to the Polish Trade Union Congress in Warsaw indicates the strong ties that bind the unions of Poland with those of the rest of the world.

Polish trade unions form part of the World Federation of Trade Unions. Not long ago, when Louis Saillant, president of the WFTU, visited Poland to acquaint himself with the development of the Polish labor movement, he congratulated the unions for their marked achievements.

LABOR AS A SOCIAL FORCE

The urgent need to reconstruct and transform Poland's entire life presents the trade unions with innumerable tasks of extreme importance. In accomplishing these tasks unions have become a determining factor in Poland's economy. They have 47 representatives in the Sejm, the legislature of Poland. Kazimierz Rusinek, former general secretary of the Central Trade Union Committee, is now the Minister of Labor and Social Welfare.

The trade unions work in closest cooperation with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and the Food Ministry, particularly as regards the distribution of relief products and former UNRRA relief shipments.

Rebuilding Warsaw

The part that trade unions are playing in the rebuilding of Warsaw may serve as an example of the strong ties of the trade unions with all phases of Polish life. The Social Fund for the rebuilding of Warsaw announced that the labor movement made the second largest financial contribution in the country. This contribution forms 27 per cent of the entire amount received in the last drive, which brought in 434 million zlotys. Fund drives were not the only contribution made by Polish trade unions to the rebuilding of Warsaw. Given trade unions took particular sections of Warsaw under their wing. The members of these unions, physical laborers, office workers and artists, worked side by side clearing the debris from the streets of Warsaw.

Fighting Speculation

The trade unions also play a major role in the fight against speculation and inflation. This inflationary condition exists because speculators take advantage of the great shortages in food and clothing.

The Central Trade Union Committee declared war on high prices by organizing local and factory committees whose task is to foster cooperation with price control commissions.

Fighting Anti-Semitism

Polish trade unions also fight against the evil of anti-Semitism. In a letter to William Green, head of the A.F. of L., the Central Trade Union Committee declared that "anti-Semitism in our country is the left-over of our pre-war regime. Even before the outbreak of war in 1939 Polish fascists for long years had poisoned the minds of the people. During the Pilsudski regime the fascist organizations used anti-Semitism as a weapon in their fight to divide the power and unity of the working class and the trade unions. During the six years of German occupation the Hitlerites daily spread the poison of anti-Semitism in their propaganda... Polish democracy destroys anti-Semitism with all severity. Polish trade unions and the Polish working class never in its history recognized, nor does it now recognize, chauvinistic and racial theories and practices. The Polish working class and the Polish trade union movement always put forth and realized the slogan of brotherhood and cooperation of all working men irrespective of race, religion or nationality. The best proof of this is our trade union organization, two million strong, which takes in all working people irrespective of nationality, religion or party affiliation. Our Jewish brothers enjoy equal rights in our organization with the rest of the membership." (Quotation translated from the Polish text.)

Relation to Government

At this point it would be worthwhile to throw some light on the relation of the labor movement to the government and political parties. It must be remembered that the trade unions in Poland are non-party entities and that they include in their ranks workers of different shades of political opinion and party affiliation as well as workers with no party affiliation. Mr. Witaszewski made clear the nature of Polish trade unions when he made the following pronouncement at a meeting of the Executive Board of C.T.U.C.:

"During different periods in the history of Polish labor the trade unions experienced many difficulties, including financial ones. These difficulties stemmed from the weak foundations on which the unions were built, such as the dependence of some unions upon financial aid from the government or from industry. Today we operate modestly on our own funds. We are completely independent of the government and political parties."

Road Ahead

Although the accomplishments of the Polish trade union movement are great, this does not mean that they consider all their goals realized. The Executive Board of the Central Trade Union Council, which met in December, 1946, put forth as the objectives of the labor movement for 1947:

- 1) to further the gains of the working people;
- 2) to direct all efforts toward the realization of the 3-year plan for the reconstruction of Poland;
- 3) to better the material conditions of workers by fighting for lower prices and against speculation;
- 4) to widen social legislation.

The realization of the above objectives will further the accomplishments of the Polish labor movement. Up to now the trade unions not only succeeded in recovering from the catastrophe of the German occupation, but they surpassed their pre-war achievements. It should be remembered that, though brutally persecuted and driven underground, the Polish unions continued their activities during the years of occupation. The Germans dissolved all unions, murdered many of their leaders, and subjected others to tortures in German concentration camps. For example, one-fourth of the membership of the Journalists Union was killed during the occupation. Nevertheless, underground union organization was carried on. The Central Trade Union Committee secretly organized the workers and published many underground papers. It is this underground activity that has become the basis of the present revival of the Polish trade union movement. The energy which was formerly applied to obstructing the Germans is now spent on improving the lot of the workers. Trade unions are now free to work for the establishment of conditions favorable to the development of a free, full and happy life for the people of Poland.