

# What Do Our Recent Strikes Tell Us ?

*March 2, 1908*

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Characteristic of the January and February strikes are certain new features, which introduce new elements into our movement. One of these features—the defensive character of the strikes—has already been mentioned in Gudok. <sup>1</sup> But that is an external feature. Of much greater interest are the other, internal features, which throw a clear light on the development of our movement. We have in mind the character of the demands, the methods of waging the strikes, the new methods of struggle, etc.

The first thing that strikes one is the content of the demands. It is characteristic that in a considerable number of the strikes no demands for bonuses were put forward (at Nobel's, Motovilikha, Molot, Mirzoyev's, Adamov's and others). Where demands for bonuses were put forward, the workers, ashamed to fight only for "beshkesh," tried to put them at the end of their lists of demands (at Pitoyev's and others). Evidently, the old beshkesh habits are breaking down. "Beshkesh" is beginning to lose importance in the eyes of the workers. From petty-bourgeois demands (for bonuses), the workers are passing to proletarian demands: dismissal of the more arrogant managers (at Nobel's, Molot, Adamov's), reinstatement of discharged comrades (at Mirzoyev's), extension of the rights of the oil field and works commission (at Nobel's, Mirzoyev's). In this respect, the strike at Mirzoyev's is of special interest. <sup>2</sup> The workers at this firm demand recognition of the commission and the reinstatement of discharged comrades as a guarantee that the firm will not discharge a single worker in future without the consent of the commission. The strike has already lasted two weeks, and is being conducted with rare solidarity. One must see these workers, one must know with what pride they say: "We are not fighting for bonuses, or for towels and soap, but for the rights and the honour of the workers' commission"—one must know all this, I say, to realise what a change has taken place in the minds of the workers.

The second feature of the recent strikes is the awakening and activity of the masses of the oil workers. The point is that up to now the oil workers had to follow the mechanics, and they did not always follow them willingly; they rose independently only for bonuses. Moreover, a certain hostility towards the *mechanics* existed among them, and this was fanned by the provocative beshkesh policy of the oil owners (the Bibi-Eibat Company last year, and Lapshin's recently). The recent strikes show that the passivity of the oil workers is receding into the past. It was they who started the strike at Nobel's (in January) and the mechanics followed their lead; the strike at Mirzoyev's (in February) was also inspired by the oil workers. It goes without saying that with the awakening activity of the oil workers, their hostility towards the mechanics is waning. The oil workers are beginning to go hand in hand with the mechanics.

Of still greater interest is the third feature—the friendly attitude of the strikers towards our union and, in general, the relatively well-organised way in which the strikes were conducted. Characteristic, first of all, is the absence of yard-long lists of demands, which hindered the successful conduct of strikes (recall the strike at the Caspian Company last year); now only a few important demands capable of uniting the masses are put forward (at Nobel's, Mirzoyev's, Motovilikha, Molot, and Adamov's). Secondly, hardly any of these strikes take place

without the active intervention of the union: the workers consider it necessary to invite representatives of the union (at Kokorev's, Nobel's, Molot, Mir-zoyev's, and others). The rivalry that formerly existed between the oil field and works commissions on the one hand and the union on the other is becoming a thing of the past. The workers are beginning to regard the union as their own offspring. Instead of being the union's competitors, the oil field and works commissions are becoming its supporters. This explains the larger degree of organisation observed in the recent strikes.

From this follows the fourth feature—the relative success of the recent strikes, or rather, the fact that partial strikes do not fail so often, and then not always completely. We have in mind primarily the strike at Kokorev's. We think that the strike at Kokorev's marked a turning point in the development of our methods of struggle. It and several other strikes (at Pi-toyev's and Motovilikha) show that, given 1) the organised conduct of the strikes, 2) the active intervention of the union, 3) a certain amount of perseverance and 4) the right choice of the moment for launching the struggle, partial strikes may be far from fruitless. At all events, it has become clear that those who "on principle" cry: "Down with partial strikes!" are advancing a risky slogan which is not sufficiently justified by the facts of the recent movement. On the contrary, we think that, given leadership by the union and the right choice of the moment to launch the struggle, partial strikes can be converted into a very important factor in uniting the proletariat.

Such, in our opinion, are the most important internal features of the recent strikes.

*Gudok*, No. 21, March 2, 1908

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### Notes

1. *Gudok (The Siren)* — a legal Bolshevik weekly newspaper, the organ of the Baku oil industry workers' union. No. 1 of *Gudok* was issued on August 12, 1907. The paper published a number of leading articles written by J. V. Stalin which are included in the present volume. Frequent contributors to the paper were S. Shaumyan, A. Japaridze, S. Spandaryan, and others. No. 34, the last issue to be published under Bolshevik editorship, appeared on June 1, 1908. After that *Gudok* passed into Menshevik hands. The Bolsheviks began to issue in Baku a new legal trade union newspaper called *Bakinsky Rabochy (The Baku Worker)*, the first number of which came out on September 6, 1908.

2. As many as 1,500 workers took part in a strike at the Mirzoyev oil fields in Baku. The strike began on February 14, 1908, and lasted 73 days.

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