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# Prokhorov's Shock Modernization

By Boris Kagarlitsky

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The State Duma invented National Unity Day on Nov. 4 to replace the Nov. 7 holiday commemorating the Bolshevik Revolution, but it didn't catch on. Russians never quite understood who should be united with whom.

On the eve of National Unity Day, the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, or RSPP, sent its own unique gift to the country's workers. Kommersant reported that RSPP had prepared draft amendments to the Labor Code to increase the workweek to 60 hours and replace standard work contracts — the most common type of contract among employees containing no fixed terms — with fixed-term contracts. Another innovation dreamed up by the RSPP's human resources committee, headed by billionaire Mikhail Prokhorov, would give employers the right to act unilaterally to make changes to employment contracts "for economic reasons" and would reduce the period required for giving notice to employees that such changes are imminent from two months to one month.

The idea of mandating a 12-hour workday (assuming that Saturday remains a day off) looks like an anachronism when compared with Europe, where workers first started their battle for

eight-hour workday almost a century ago.

Chief sanitary doctor Gennady Onishchenko also supported the RSPP's proposal as long as people exhausted from slaving through 12-hour days do not let the quality of their work suffer. Of course, that is exactly what a sanitary doctor should be worried about. In all fairness, it should be noted that Onishchenko was willing to make an exception for two professions: miners and psychiatrists.

Onishchenko was the only government official who went out on a limb to support the proposal. Other officials avoided this political hot potato, understanding the public outrage that would — and did — ensue. The indignation was so strong that RSPP specialists tried to backtrack, explaining that their original proposal was misunderstood. But very little became clear from their "clarification." Union deputy chairman Fyodor Prokopov said that under the new rules, an employee would work the first 40 hours for his base salary and the next 20 hours for part-time pay. Prokopov didn't bother to explain why a person would voluntarily forego the standard overtime pay for those additional hours. Perhaps he would do so out of a sense of solidarity or compassion for his poor employer?

It is clear that the Duma will never pass such an unpopular initiative. But even if Prokhorov's exploitative proposal for "shock modernization" is buried, it has already sent a clear signal to society about the ruling class' priorities. Its labor ideologies are stuck in the mid- and late-1800s, when production gains were achieved by squeezing ever more from workers while paying them as little as possible.

But it is possible that the proposal for a 60-hour week was intentionally leaked to reporters to first create a false panic — and then to take the idea off the table, presenting it as a "compromise" to labor groups. It could also have been intended to divert attention away from less controversial amendments to the Labor Code that would restrict the rights of employees — fixed-term contracts, for example — that they can now try to sneak through the Duma without any public discussion.

But the problem is that the public outrage has gone beyond whatever the RSPP anticipated. Its reputation has been tarnished so much that whatever new proposals the RSPP might put forward will automatically be seen as anti-labor.

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