

Czech Trade Unions

/ 150 Years Here for You

1870 **When were Trade Unions formed?**

We can consider 7 April 1870 to be the starting date of our trade union movement. On that day, the Austrian Parliament passed the Freedom of Association Act, which authorised *“the use of a collective stoppage of work ... to compel higher wages or overall better working conditions.”* Until then, strike organizers were subjected to persecution and imprisonment of up to three months. At the end of the 19th century, larger trade unions and central headquarters began to emerge through the integration of individual organisations.

1918 **How did the position of Trade Unions change during the First Republic?**

During World War I, trade unions used every means available to help their members to survive the inhumane wartime conditions. They supported the families of the fallen and defended the employees against the bosses abusing wartime restrictions of democratic rights. During the First Republic era, unions continued to organise numerous strikes. However, it became increasingly clear that better working conditions could also be achieved in other ways – through collective bargaining conducted between trade unions and employers or employer organisations.

1939 **How did Trade Unions react to the Nazi occupation?**

After the end of the First Republic and the start of the Nazi occupation on 15 March 1939, all organisations merged into the National Employee Trade Union Headquarters and the Public Employee Central Office. The goal was to stand united to better resist the German oppression. They joined the resistance movement and many active trade unionists, for example, Rudolf Tayerle, Robert Klein, and Antonín Hampl, paid for their fight the price of life in Nazi concentration camps and prisons.

1948 **How did Trade Unions operate under the Communist regime?**

At the end of the war, a group of functionaries managed to turn the National Employee Trade Union Headquarters into a base for a new united Trade Unions – the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement (in Czech abbreviated as ROH). The ROH was closely connected with the Communist Party (KSČ), which used the Trade Unions to increase labour productivity after 1948. ROH members defied the official KSČ policy in November 1989. Many local branches condemned the police crackdown on protesters and supported the general strike against the regime. The strike committees, which spontaneously prepared a general strike, laid the foundations for the new unions, which were officially formed at the All-Union congress in March 1990. The congress thus laid the groundwork for the establishment of the Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions, ČMKOS.



From the start of ČMKOS to the present day

1989 Which organisation became the main Trade Union representative after 1989?

After 1989, Trade Unions formed the Czechoslovak Confederation of Trade Unions at the national level and the Czech-Moravian Chamber (later Confederation) of Trade Unions – ČMKOS – at the Czech lands level. After the breakup of Czechoslovakia, ČMKOS became the main representative of the Czech trade union movement.

1990 How did Trade Unions perceive the 1990s economic reforms?

ČMKOS supported the transformation into a market economy and the process of European integration. The Confederation fought for the transformation to be socially bearable and its burdens not borne by working people alone. ČMKOS mainly clashed with right-wing governments, fighting against anti-social policies, the weakening of the Labour Code, the privatization of healthcare and education, and the unfair tax burden imposed on employees.

What is the mission of today's Trade Unions?

Trade Unions are an association of employees created for employees to protect their economic and social interests and to provide mutual aid. Trade Unions negotiate with employers on behalf of employees, seeking to improve their remuneration and other working conditions. Unions also present initiatives of a more generic nature, e.g., in the field of education, healthcare, and social legislation. Alongside providing material help for their members, Unions also strive at making the world fairer.

What does ČMKOS do today?

Today's ČMKOS calls for maintaining the security of well-paid and safe work for Czech employees. Under the End of Cheap Labour campaign, we are fighting to bring Czech wages up to the European level. We also draw attention to the large number of workplace accidents and unsafe working conditions. We fight against anti-social policies, the weakening of the Labour Code, the privatization of healthcare and education, and the unfair tax burden imposed on employees.



A stylized graphic of three orange human figures holding hands in a circle, with several orange rectangular shapes floating above them, all set against a red background.

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150 Years Here for You

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