



inform **contact**

NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

No.38

July-September 2002

GCTU 4th CONGRESS TAKES PLACE IN MOSCOW

The 4th Congress of the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) took place in Moscow 12 September 2002. It brought together 153 delegates representing 75 million members of the national trade union centres in 10 CIS countries and the 37 industrial Trade Union Internationals.

Attending the event were also fraternal delegates from friendly organisations, such as the World Federation of Trade Unions, the World Confederation of Labour, the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity, the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions, the Azerbaijan Trade Union Confederation, and the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, and also the International Labour Organisation. The General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation and the Central Committee of the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour sent their messages of solidarity.

The guests of honour who spoke at the Congress included Chairman of the Russian State Duma Guennady Seleznev, Executive Secretary of the Commonwealth of Independent States Youry Yarov, President of the International Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs Viktor

Glukhikh, First Deputy Mayor of Moscow Ludmilla Shvetsova and other personalities.

The Congress received messages from the Presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Tajikistan, General Secretary of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, Moscow's Mayor, and others.

The Congress agenda included the following items.

1. Report of the Executive Committee on the GCTU's activity in the period since its 3rd Congress and on the guidelines for GCTU activity in 2002–2007.
2. Report by the GCTU Auditing Commission.
3. Election of GCTU President and Vice-Presidents.
4. Formation of the GCTU Executive Committee.
5. Election of the GCTU Auditing Commission.
6. On the Constitution of the GCTU.
7. On the Regulations of the GCTU Auditing Commission.

8. Adoption of the statements, appeals and resolutions by the GCTU 4th Congress.

In his report to the Congress, GCTU President Vladimir Scherbakov stressed that the Confederation's contribution to the building of a new system of social and labour relations and the development of civilised social partnership had been particularly notable over the previous few years. He called on the Commonwealth trade unions to rally around such goals as securing better living standards, establishing a common social space in the CIS, and developing and strengthening the trade union movement in the region.

Affiliation with the GCTU enabled the CIS trade unions to cope more effectively with the most serious challenges of the new times. «We have all we need for the purpose: the time-tested solidarity, the knowledge we have gained in the arduous transitional period of our history, the brisk and bold leaders of our member organisations who keep abreast with time, and the priceless experience of trade union work», concluded Vladimir Scherbakov.

The leaders of all the affiliated national trade union centres and some industrial Trade Union Internationals took the floor in the debate.

The activity of the GCTU Executive in the period under review and the Report of the GCTU Auditing Commission were approved by a majority of votes.

Vladimir Scherbakov was elected GCTU President.

Alexander Jinjolia, Yevgeny Lebedev, Natalia Podshibyakina, Albert Potapov, Valery Youriev and Ermek Zhakselekov were elected Vice-Presidents.

The Congress formed an Executive Committee of 25 members including the GCTU President and Vice-Presidents, representatives of the nine national trade union centres, and the leaders of nine industrial Trade Union Internationals.

The first session of the newly elected Auditing Commission elected Vladimir Kanyshv as its chair.

The Congress decided against amending the GCTU Constitution or the Regulations of the GCTU Auditing Commission.

The Congress approved and adopted the final documents drafted and submitted by ad hoc working groups composed of representatives of affiliated organisations.

The principal document of the Congress is the Guidelines for GCTU Activity in 2002–2007.

Other documents include:

- Statement «Decent Wages for Workers in the CIS Countries».

- Statement «On Workers' Social Insurance».

- Appeal to the Heads of State and Heads of Government of the CIS countries for promoting integration in the region.

- Resolution «Globalisation and the Position of Trade Unions in the CIS Countries».

- Statement «Let Us Promote International Solidarity and the Unity of the World Trade Union Movement!» (available in English below).

GCTU & IPA TO STRENGTHEN LINKS

On the 24th of September 2002, leaders of the GCTU met with Mikhail Krotov, General Secretary of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (IPA) that had lately marked its 10th anniversary. The meeting took place in the GCTU headquarters in Moscow.

GCTU President Vladimir Scherbakov spoke highly of the role the IPA had been playing in promoting partner relations between MPs and trade unions at the CIS level. In fact, he said, today the GCTU enjoyed the right to legislative initiative.

The parties exchanged opinions on their further co-operation in the sphere of lawmaking. Mikhail Krotov said the MPA was currently considering applications for the development of over 200 new legislative acts whose aim it was to harmonise legislation in the CIS member states. He hoped the GCTU would give its opinion on their topicality and present trade union comments on some of the draft laws. He believed that, instead of concentrating exclusively on socially oriented bills, the Confederation should display a broader approach to the challenges of integration.

ILO LEADER VISITS MOSCOW

The ILO Director-General Juan Somavia has visited Russia this summer to have talks with the principal actors in the sphere of social and labour relations.

The negotiations focused mainly on the programme of co-operation between the Russian Federation and the ILO signed last March. Its aim is to help develop a national strategy to do away with low-paid employment, raise the population's incomes, and increase the impact of wages on work motivation.

Mr Somavia met with Government Members, including a Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Labour and Social Development, and with the general director of the employers' organisation of Russia.

The meeting with FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov was, among other things, devoted to the problems of implementing the Russia-ILO Programme and enhancing the FNPR contribution to the activity of the ILO Governing Body where a representative of the Russian unions is a member. Mikhail Shmakov said he was happy the ILO had undertaken to evaluate the social aftermath of Russia's entry into the WTO.

GCTU PRESIDENT MEETS FOREIGN COUNTERPARTS

On the 31st of July 2002, GCTU President Vladimir Scherbakov met a delegation of

the National Council of Trade Unions of Transport Industries (KOUN ROKYO) of Japan. The delegation comprised four leaders of national transport workers' unions headed by Bro. Tadao Takahashi, Assistant General Secretary of KOUN ROKYO. The delegation was invited to visit Russia by the TUI of Workers in the Automobile Transport and the Motor Road Sector, jointly with its Russian affiliate.

The GCTU President acquainted the Japanese guests with the goals and tasks of the Confederation, and its structure and main lines of activity, and told them about the preparations for the GCTU 4th Congress.

He dwelt on the economic and social situation in the Commonwealth of Independent States, and on the struggles waged by CIS trade unions to curb the growing influence of TNCs in the region. The participants also discussed some problems of international trade union co-operation in a globalizing world economy, and development of contacts between GCTU affiliates and their fraternal unions in Japan.

* * *

A delegation of Egypt's General Union of Workers in Agriculture and Irrigation comprising its general secretary Mohamed Mahi El-Din Mohamed Ismail and vice-president El-Sayed El-Araby Ali Mohamed Keseiba visited GCTU President Vladimir Scherbakov 19 August 2002 in Moscow.

The GCTU leader gave the guests a detailed account of the current socio-economic situation in the CIS countries. Special attention was devoted to agriculture and the consequences of the new Russian law on free purchase and sale of land.

The Egyptian guests were informed in detail of the GCTU's goals and tasks, and its current activity aiming to promote the integration processes in the CIS, strengthen the position of trade unions in the

Commonwealth, and support their struggles to protect workers' interests in the context of globalisation and increasing influence of TNCs. Vladimir Scherbakov also touched upon the preparations for the 4th Congress of the GCTU.

BFTU HOLDS EXTRAORDINARY CONGRESS

The extraordinary congress of the Belarus Trade Union Federation, BFTU, held in Minsk from 18–19 September 2002, considered the policies to be pursued by the Federation following the change in its leadership.

In his report to the congress, the new President of the BFTU, Leonid Kozik, presented his views on the orientation and objectives of the country's trade unions. According to him, the task of the unions was to work for a gradual formation of a «democratic, social and law-abiding state», and further improve social partnership. Such an ideology would make it possible for the Federation to strengthen its organisational and personnel policies, watch over workers' rights, and secure a constant rise in the living standards of Belarussian workers. Leonid Kozik believes, however, that all this will only be possible if the unions' relations with the state authorities are based on co-operation rather than on confrontation.

This idea was picked up and developed by President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko, who was also a delegate to the congress.

«Should the union leaders want the Head of State to support them and get involved in the inner affairs of trade unions, in your internal problems, I would be willing to do so», he said. Given the lack of powerful political and public organisations, he went on to say, the President needs strong trade unions, and he is prepared to take steps in order to «incorporate the trade unions into the renewal process, into the system of state power».

Most of the delegates who took the floor supported the course proposed by the country's President and the BFTU leader.

To avoid any future doubts as to the legitimacy of his powers, BFTU President Leonid Kozik suggested that the congress delegates confirm his mandate, which they did by means of voting.

Delegates were satisfied to hear that on the 18th of September the Government made a decision concerning the procedure of collecting trade union dues. From now on, the check-off system can be applied provided the union member gives his/her written consent.

GCTU President Vladimir Scherbakov took part in the congress. An ICFTU representative, Vadim Borisov, was present as an observer.

GEORGIA: UNIONS CONCERNED WITH ENERGY PLIGHT

In response to the grave situation in the energy sector, the Georgian Trade Union Amalgamation, GTUA, in conjunction with the ICFTU, conducted a trade union campaign from 26 June to 1 July 2002.

A seminar for trade unionists of the energy and electrical engineering industries was held as part of the campaign. Its participants discussed problems relating to trade union motivation, activity of TNCs in Georgia, planning for and organising union protest actions, and the international campaign currently waged by the ICFTU against violations of trade union rights.

On the eve of the seminar GTUA President Irakly Tugushi met with journalists to explain the GTUA's opinion on the problems in the energy sector.

On the 28th of June, the GTUA staged a mass protest action outside the building of the National Commission for Regulating the Energy Industry and the Wholesale Market of Electric Power in Georgia. The rally demanded a settlement of the wage arrears

amounting to almost US\$ 30 million, and protested against placing the country's electric power companies under the management of Ireland's ESB International who are planning massive job cuts.

KAZAKHSTAN: MPs BACKING UNIONS

A meeting between leading representatives of the Federation of Trade Unions of Kazakhstan, FTUK, and the Yenbek Parliamentary Group closely co-operating with the country's trade unions took place at the House of Trade Unions in Astana.

They discussed joint measures to be taken to accelerate the adoption of amendments to the laws on labour, health and safety, social insurance, etc. Amending the above laws will make it possible to raise the pensions, work remuneration, and, in particular, guaranteed minimum wages.

The participants also considered the necessity to restore justice to the workers with long records of service at enterprises with harmful work conditions who had been stripped of the privileges formerly inherent in their occupations. They decided to develop and submit to Parliament a bill on special social benefits to be paid by the state to such categories of workers. «Our Federation will not budge an inch as far as this demand is concerned», FTUK President Siyazbek Mukashev said at the meeting.

KAZAKHSTAN: CONFLICT OVER?

The previous issue of the «Inform-Contact» carried a GCTU appeal about the situation at the Nefteorgsyntez plant in Chimkent, Kazakhstan. The management of Canada's Hurricane Hydrocarbons Ltd, who own the plant, had refused to involve the local trade union in the process of preparation and implementation of their restructuring plans threatening to cut two-thirds of the jobs.

According to the information we have received from the Federation of Trade Unions of Kazakhstan and the Trade Union

International of Workers in the Chemical and Allied Industries, the management and the trade union organisation of the plant have come to an agreement in what concerns the segmentation of the enterprise.

As prescribed by the Law on Labour in the Republic of Kazakhstan, all the employees affected by restructuring will be provided with a new job. They will receive an average monthly wage plus a sum equal to their annual holiday pay. Apart from that, the Nefteorgsyntez management will undertake to pay additional compensation. Upon signing the collective agreement, every worker employed at the new enterprises will receive an extra of 75,000 tenghes, or US\$ 490.

MOLDOVA: COLLECTIVE ACCORD SUPPLEMENTED

The Confederation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Moldova (a GCTU affiliate), the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the Government and the National Patronat Confederation (employers' organisation) have signed a supplement to the national collective agreement for 2001. The Government has agreed to prolong the term of the current national collective agreement till the end of 2002, and give effect to the above supplement.

The supplement provides for new measures to be taken in the spheres of economic stabilisation, employment, work remuneration, social aid, and health and safety. It also stipulates for the involvement of the social partners in lawmaking activity, and for enhanced social and legal protection of workers.

The Government has pledged to draw up new laws on the collective agreement and individual contract, on the procedures for settling labour disputes, on the obligatory professional pension systems, etc. The Government will also propose that Parliament ratify another seven ILO conventions, including those on work safety in agriculture.

RUSSIA: SOCIAL TENSIONS PERSIST

Nonobservance by the state authorities and employers of their accords with the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, FNPR, has recently aggravated the situation in the sphere of social and labour relations.

The wage arrears started to grow again, reaching a total of US\$ 1.13 billion in late August 2002. The wages and salaries are still extremely low, while the utility rates and rentals increased by 50 per cent last year. The system of obligatory social insurance has been actually curtailed, whereas the switch to the budgetary social security has led to a considerable drop in the degree of social protection of employees and their families.

Given all this, the FNPR Executive Committee decided to hold, 17 October 2002, an all-Russia protest action «For Decent Pay and Social Guarantees» that will be organised by trade unions in the form of marches, rallies, strikes and work stoppages.

The Executive approved of the principal demands to be addressed by trade union protesters to the state authorities and employers:

- * settle immediately the arrears of wages and salaries and pay them on time in amounts sufficient to ensure decent living;
- * make the minimum wages match at least the subsistence minimum;
- * prevent the utility rates and rentals from growing faster than the wages;
- * restore the system of obligatory social insurance and abolish the single social tax; and
- * save the system of health resorts and rest and recreation facilities for workers and their families.

RUSSIA: YOUNG PEOPLE, COME TO UNIONS!

The FNPR organised a trade union youth forum «Your Future Starts Today, Join the Union!» from 19-20 September 2002 in Moscow. The forum that brought together 400 young union activists, discussed the following three main items:

- ways to recruit the younger generation to the trade unions;
- trade unions' youth policy; and
- doctrine of state youth policy.

The forum wound up with adopting a resolution containing demands addressed to President, the Government and Parliament, an appeal to young workers and students, and an appeal to Russia's trade unions. Participants demanded creation of new jobs for young people (today one in three Russians of up to 35 years is unemployed), a rise in the current miserable wages and scholarships, and restoration of the rights to free education and free health service.

«No one will solve these and other problems for us», an appeal says. «It is high time we took care of our future ourselves. For this purpose, we must come together in the trade unions, display solidarity, achieve unity and become socially active in order to secure the genuine right to work, decent remuneration and legal protection, and be able to solve the numerous burning problems».

TAJIKISTAN: GENERAL ACCORD SIGNED

As the social, political and economic situation gets more stable in Tajikistan, there appear increasingly new possibilities for establishing a mechanism of social partnership.

In June 2002, the Federation of Trade Unions of Tajikistan, the Employers'

Organisation and the Government approved and signed a General Agreement for 2003–2005.

The agreement contains over 80 mutual commitments by the parties in the sphere of production stabilisation and economic development. Their accomplishment will help remove tensions from the labour market. A top priority will be given to the protection of workers' rights and interests, labour safety, settlement of pay arrears, and wage raises.

Measures will be taken to organise workers' recreation and medical treatment, secure the right to social insurance, and protect working people's interests in the transition economy.

STATEMENT BY THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

The UN World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio+10) opens today in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Ten years ago, the Conference in Rio de Janeiro adopted a historic document, the Rio Declaration, that for the first time ever linked the social development objectives with the environmental concerns, and defined the commitments to be taken by world states to that effect. As follow-up to the above Declaration, a Protocol on world climate change was signed in 1997 in Kyoto, Japan, setting the rules for reducing the emission of pollutants into the Earth's atmosphere. It is to be regretted that this document has not been ratified by several major states, including the USA, that are the worst polluters of the global environment.

Many specialists are inclined to attribute this year's dramatic natural disasters to the so called «hothouse effect», or, in other words, to the global climate warming, which makes even more urgent the need to comply with the provisions of the world documents adopted at Rio de Janeiro and Kyoto.

The problems of the environment, and primarily the working environment, have long been of close concern for the international trade union movement. As far back as the 1970-ies, they were the subject of discussion at several European Trade Union Conferences in Geneva. The world, regional and national trade union centres approved of the UN documents on sustainable development, and have ever since been consistently advocating urgent measures for their practical implementation.

On the day of the opening of the Johannesburg Earth Summit, the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) reiterates its solidarity with the just demands by the world trade union movement that the financing of sustainable development projects should be increased at all levels, the discussion of this issue be put on a tripartite basis, and due regard be paid to the opinion of workers who are the main contingent interested in an improved workplace environment. The GCTU joins the efforts by the world trade union movement in its attempts to enhance its contribution to the activities of UN bodies dealing with sustainable development issues.

While emphasising the importance of this problem for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and its workers and peoples, the General Confederation of Trade Unions urges the Governments of the CIS countries to take most earnest measures that would ensure full implementation of the international instruments on the protection of the natural and working environment within the context of social development.

We also appeal to trade unions in the CIS countries to render active support to international trade union efforts that will be aimed at fulfilling the decisions to be adopted at Johannesburg and to promote successful sustainable development in their countries.

General Confederation of Trade Unions

Moscow, 26 August 2002 2

PUBLISHED BY

**INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT AND
DEPARTMENT FOR HUMANITARIAN PROBLEMS AND INFORMATION
OF THE GCTU**

**42 LENINSKY PROSPEKT
117199 MOSCOW, RUSSIA
TELEFAX +7(095) 938-2155
PHONE +7(095)938-7215
+7(095)938-8274
TELEX 411 010**

Web site: www.vkp.ru; E-mail: inter@vkp.ru

THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS, GCTU, IS AN INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION ORGANISATION THAT WAS FOUNDED AT ITS FIRST CONGRESS ON 16 APRIL 1992.

ITS CONSTITUTION, WHICH WAS APPROVED BY THE FIRST CONGRESS, WAS AMENDED AND SUPPLEMENTED BY THE SECOND CONGRESS OF THE GCTU ON 22 SEPTEMBER 1993, AND THE THIRD CONGRESS OF THE GCTU ON 18 SEPTEMBER 1997

THE BASIC OBJECTIVES OF THE GCTU ARE:

- CO-ORDINATION OF ITS AFFILIATES' ACTIVITIES ON THE PROTECTION OF SOCIAL RIGHTS OF WORKERS, STUDENTS AND PENSIONERS;*
- ASSISTANCE IN THEIR PROTECTION OF TRADE UNION RIGHTS AND GUARANTEES;*
- AND*
- ORGANISING TRADE UNION SOLIDARITY AND CO-ORDINATION OF ITS AFFILIATES' INTERNATIONAL POLICIES.*

*THE GCTU BUILDS ITS ACTIVITIES IN CONFORMITY WITH THE UNIVERSALLY RECOGNISED STANDARDS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW, WITH FULL RESPECT FOR ITS AFFILIATES' COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE AND THE EQUALITY OF THEIR RIGHTS AND DUTIES.
THE GCTU AFFILIATES NATIONAL TRADE UNION CENTRES OF ARMENIA, BELARUS, GEORGIA, KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGHYZSTAN, MOLDOVA, RUSSIA, TAJIKISTAN, UZBEKISTAN, AND UKRAINE, AS WELL AS 37 BRANCH TRADE UNION INTERNATIONALS. BESIDES BILATERAL AGREEMENTS ON CO-OPERATION WAS SIGNED WITH THE TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION OF AZERBAIJAN .*

THE GCTU IS READY TO CO-OPERATE WITH ANY OTHER NATIONAL TRADE UNION FEDERATIONS, IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR BEING MEMBERS OF OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THEIR PARTICIPATION IN GCTU ACTIVITIES DOES NOT IN ANY WAY RESTRICT THE INDEPENDENCE OF ITS AFFILIATES.

THE CONFEDERATION ENJOYS OBSERVER STATUS WITH THE CIS INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY, THE CIS COUNCIL OF HEADS OF STATE, THE CIS COUNCIL OF HEADS OF GOVERNMENT, THE CIS INTERSTATE ECONOMIC COMMITTEE, ETC.

INTERNATIONALLY, IT IS IN CONSULTATIVE RELATIONS WITH THE ILO , UN DPI AND ECOSOC.

THE GCTU SUPREME BODIES ARE THE CONGRESS, CONVENED ONCE EVERY FIVE YEARS, AND, IN THE INTERVALS BETWEEN THE CONGRESSES, THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

CONTROL OVER FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES IS EXERCISED BY THE GCTU AUDITING COMMISSION.

PRESIDENT OF THE GCTU IS VLADIMIR SCHERBAKOV

DEAR READERS

The GCTU information bulletin "Inform-Contact" is also distributed by E-mail. Apart from that, the English and French versions of our publication are available on our web site: www.vkp.ru

(C) GCTU Executive Committee,
Reprinting is welcome,
provided there is a reference
to the *Inform-Contact*