



# *inform* **contact**

## **NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS**

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### **GCTU EXECUTIVE MEETS IN MOSCOW**

Pressing issues of the Commonwealth trade union community were the focal subjects discussed at a session of the GCTU Executive Committee held on 4 April 2003 in Moscow.

The Executive also addressed the problem that emerged in the GCTU-FNPR relations following the decision by the Russian trade union centre to suspend its membership with the GCTU. The session which was attended by a FNPR delegation discussed the perspectives and possible joint efforts to be undertaken by the two organizations and looked into specific ways and means to overcome the existing differences. The GCTU Executive reiterated its willingness to maintain productive co-operation with the FNPR and expressed its hope that the suspension decision will be eventually revoked.

The Executive gave full support to the efforts by the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, FTUB, and its new

leadership in defending workers' social and economic interests and pledged to help enhance the Federation's position within the international trade union community. Executive members rejected all attempts to interfere in the FTUB internal affairs as contradicting the principle of international trade union solidarity.

The Executive adopted a message to the Iraqi General Federation of Trade Unions expressing its "full solidarity with the people and workers of Iraq who have been subjected to an act of unprovoked aggression by the USA, Great Britain and their close NATO allies". Executive members believed this war would not only bring death and destruction to the Iraqi people but could also result in a humanitarian catastrophe and an escalation in violence. The GCTU demanded that an immediate stop be put to the hostilities and discussion of the issue be resumed within the United Nations.

The report by GCTU President Vladimir Scherbakov highlighted

further progress made in the field of regional integration following the 4th GCTU Congress. The Confederation took an active part in elaborating the Treaty on Co-ordinated Social Policy of the Eurasian Economic Community Member-States. "In its core part, this document incorporates our proposals as well", the GCTU President said. All member organizations and primarily the national trade union centres will have to work hard to attain gradual convergence of guarantees and regulatory labour relations standards in the sphere of employment, remuneration and implementation of labour protection regulations and standards.

In view of the expected emergence in September 2003 of a new structure, the Regional Integration Organization, involving Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine, and the ongoing preparation of an agreement on setting up a Single Economic Space it was found appropriate for GCTU member organizations to offer their own proposals and establish contacts with the new integration-oriented structure to promote workers' interests. The GCTU President expressed his confidence that the policy of dialogue and compromise along with efforts to bring closer the respective positions could possibly lead to mutually acceptable solutions to any problem thereby benefitting the trade unions in the Commonwealth.

## **BELARUS**

At its session held 1 April 2003, the Presidium of the Council of the

Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, FTUB, underlined that a number of provisions in the tripartite General Agreement reached between the Government, the trade unions and the Republican employers' association are not implemented through the Government's fault. Thus, the Government has raised the rent and communal services rates without any compensatory increase in the income of the population. Moreover, the minimal wages lag behind the subsistence minimum. The Presidium emphasized the need for all the parties to the Agreement to manifest more responsibility in meeting their commitments.

The decision by the leadership of the State Customs Committee forbidding the customs personnel to be unionised was labeled by FTUB President Leonid Kozik as a direct violation of the Belarussian Law "On Trade Unions" and of the citizens' democratic right to the freedom of association. He sent a letter to the Chairman of the State Customs Committee demanding a stop to the pressure upon trade union members. Leonid Kozik stressed that the Federation would continue to actively defend the rights and freedoms of its member organizations and rank and file union members.

The Belarussian Trade Union Federation sent out letters to the International Labour Organization, International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, World Federation of Trade Unions, World Confederation of Labour and a number of foreign national trade union centres outlining

the FTUB position vis-a-vis the situation prevailing in the country's trade union movement. The reason for the move was that the ICFTU and the leaders of the Belarussian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions, the Automobile and Agricultural Machine-Building Workers' Union and Radioelectronic Industry Workers' Union had submitted "additional information on Case No. 2090" to the ILO (a complaint about the violation of the freedom of association principles in Belarus). The FTUB believes that the information has an "insulting nature and affects the lawful rights and interests as well as the image of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus". The letter "condemns the attempts to split the Belarussian trade union movement and isolate the FTUB from the international trade union community".

On 29 May 2003 the FTUB Presidium decided to revoke the FTUB complaint submitted to the ILO in 2000. President of the Automobile and Agricultural Machine-Building Workers' Union A. Bukhvostov spoke resolutely against recalling the complaint as he believed that the ILO recommendations to eliminate violations of ILO Conventions Nos. 87 and 98 in Belarus had not been implemented.

The FTUB intends to restore its co-operation with the World Federation of Trade Unions. The news was made public at a press-conference following the visit of a WFTU delegation led by its General Secretary Alexander Zharikov to Belarus from 19-23 May. A joint communique states that the

Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus commits itself to play a more tangible role in the World Federation of Trade Unions and keep its members better informed of the WFTU activity. In its turn, the WFTU will help enhance the FTUB image at international level. Alexander Zharikov emphasized that the objective of the co-operation between the two organizations is to improve workers' social and economic status. "We have a lot of common views not only on the current world situation but also on the ways how to seek appropriate solutions", he stressed.

## **GEORGIA**

Over five thousand people took part in a May Day rally in Tbilisi organized by the Georgian Trade Union Amalgamation, GTUA. The major demands of the trade union rally included the protection of workers' and trade union rights, and the need to combat corruption, create new jobs, and increase wages and salaries up to the subsistence minimum level. As he addressed the meeting, GTUA President Irakly Tugushi underlined that the current aggravation of the workers' situation had been caused by the social and economic policy pursued by the Government. The rally appealed to the President of the country, giving a negative assessment of the Government's activity and putting forward trade union claims. Similar GTUA rallies and demonstrations were held in other Georgian cities and towns.

A wide-scale industrial action began on 28 May in the Georgian power

engineering industry. According to the power workers' strike committee, the action of protest might leave 70 per cent of the Georgian population and practically all the industrial enterprises without power supplies. The industrial action was sparked off by pay arrears in the industry. Workers had not been paid at a number of public power companies for a year and a half. Negotiations carried on by the industrial trade union with the management of the Georgian State Power System have so far yielded no results.

## **KAZAKHSTAN**

Representatives of the Kazakhstan trade unions came out with a proposal aiming to enhance the powers of trade unions to exercise public control over the implementation of labour protection standards. The proposal was put forward at a tripartite meeting organized at the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection to address issues relating to improvements in the labour safety legislation. The meeting was held as part of the ILO-proclaimed World Labour Safety and Health Care Day. It was attended by an ILO representative W.Husberg who shared his knowledge of international experience on social partnership in the sphere of labour safety and health in various regions of the world.

A three-day workshop for trade union lawyers called "Trade Union Rights and Instruments for their Protection" was organised jointly by the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FTURK) and International Confederation of Free Trade Unions in

the Kazakh capital. The participants in the seminar reviewed international standards in the field of labour relations and collective bargaining and outlined strategies in defending workers' interests and trade union rights and freedoms.

"The legislation in force does not always give trade unions full opportunity to carry out their tasks and duties in protecting workers' labour and socio-economic rights". This judgement was formulated in a statement by the FTURK following President Nazarbayev's message "National and International Policy Guidelines for 2004". The unions believe it is high time to amend the current labour and collective bargaining acts, to develop a new Labour Code and improve the law on trade unions.

## **MOLDOVA**

The Medical Workers' Union of Moldova, "Santatea", is gravely concerned about the social and economic situation in the industry caused by inadequate funding of the medical service system. The living standard of most of the employees has fallen below the poverty level. There is no programme in place to provide social and economic protection for the medical personnel. The state budget for 2003 pays no heed to the demands submitted by the Medical Workers' Union to the government and local authorities. Insufficient funding of medical establishments has resulted in higher pay arrears and poorer care for labour

protection issues. In its statement the Santatea Council urged union members to manifest unity and rally their ranks in defending their lawful rights and interests.

At its session on 24 April the Executive Committee of the Union Confederation of the Republic of Moldova, UCRM, noted a growth in membership by 6391 persons compared to the year 2001. As of 1 January 2003, the UCRM organised 455 880 members in 6 285 locals. The expansion of the union ranks and the increase in the number of workplace union organizations came as a result of the appropriate policy pursued by industrial unions, their leaders and activists. A most prominent success in this respect has been achieved by the Educational and Scientific Workers' Union, the Federation of Agro-Industrial Complex Unions "Agroindsind" and the Medical Workers' Union "Santatea". A mass meeting was organized by the UCRM on 1 May in Chisinau under the slogan "Social Dimension to the Policy of Reform". Its leader Petru Chiriac and other speakers attacked the national reforms which eventually serve to enrich but a handful of persons. The majority of population have found themselves thrown below the poverty line and deprived of social guarantees, while many have to look for jobs abroad. The key demands by the UCRM rally included a pay increase, actions to secure subsistence minimum, put an end to the policy of price and tariff rises and safeguard and enhance the national economic potential.

## **RUSSIA**

Workers and trade unions across Russia protested against unjustified increases in electricity and communal services rates. Protest actions took place in Saransk, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk, Samara and many other cities. Light was switched off at many enterprises and dwelling houses in Barnaul following an appeal by the Trade Union Council of the Altai Republic. Work stoppages swept through six major enterprises in Barnaul and Biysk. Everywhere, workers' collectives and the population came out with the key demand: impose a five-year moratorium on any price rise for natural monopoly services and communal services, as well as for energy sources. Numerous protest cables were dispatched to local and central authorities.

The union-sponsored May Day marches and rallies brought together over 2 mln participants across the country. The main demands voiced during these events were aimed at recovering pay arrears, increasing wages and pensions, restoring a reliable social security system, retaining sanatoria and health resort facilities for workers, and creating new jobs. "We demand that respect for workers' rights become a daily practice rather than a slogan", said FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov at a rally in Moscow. He called upon trade unions to continue working towards two major objectives – abolition of the Single Social Tax and the reforming of the pay system in the budget sector.

Today's protest actions are primarily notable for the growing share of youths and students taking part in them. They accounted for over 200 thousand participants in the May Day manifestations. Solidarity with the Russian workers' struggle for "a social state" was expressed at a mass meeting on 1 May in Moscow by ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder who was on an official visit in Russia at the invitation of the FNPR, the All-Russia Confederation of Labour and the Labour Confederation of Russia.

President of the Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Unions of Russia (FATCU) Serguei Kovalev said that air controllers throughout the country demand from the RF Ministry of Transport a pay increase of 30% in 2003. At present, the controllers' average monthly pay comes to a mere seven thousand roubles (US\$230) in Central and Southern regions of Russia and to 20 thousand roubles (US\$ 660) in Siberia and the Far East. Despite the employers' promises to raise wages by 10.5% as of 1 June, no pay increase whatsoever is envisaged in many Southern regions. The situation is not acceptable for the FATCU, Kovalev said, and the Federation will seek a country-wide pay increase through bargaining or by organizing protest actions.

Journalists' vulnerability to authorities and media owners was the focal issue taken up by the Russian Union of Journalists. The problem was highlighted by its General Secretary I.Yakovenko in his address at the Union's 7th Congress on 16 May in

Moscow. The Union intends to establish a Journalists' Legal Assistance Centre to protect their labour and professional rights, as well as set up its affiliates in seven federal areas. The Union will monitor labour conflicts within the media and promote collective agreements between media owners and employees.

The legal action brought in by medical workers' trade unions in Volgograd against the city administration for pay arrears was a success. The Volgograd Mayor has ruled to provide 24 mln roubles (US\$790 thousand) to pay medical workers. As of 3 June, the total pay debt to medical personnel in the city reached 39 mln roubles (US\$ 1,280 thousand). It is envisaged to pay off all the arrears in wages not only to the medical workers but also to other budget sector employees. The city and regional authorities provided 150 mln roubles (US\$5 mln) for this purpose.

## UKRAINE

The Ukrainian Metal and Mining Workers' Union demanded that special parliamentary hearings be held to discuss the situation in the mining and metal complex of the country. The issue involves the privatisation results in the industry. By 2003 some 88% of enterprises had been denationalised. However, the rushness of the privatisation has led to bankruptcies and the curtailing of metal works including major plants and productions critical to social stability in the regions. The new owners are reluctant to make investment in upgrading enterprises while choosing to indulge in financial

manoeuvres. Such a policy has resulted in non-compliance with collective agreements, lower wages, neglect for the social component of the enterprise development. For example, 75% of corporatised enterprises in the Dnepropetrovsk region operate at a loss. The new owners are set to do away with trade union organizations and put direct pressure upon employees and trade unionists in an attempt to encourage them to quit the union. All the regional committees of the Metal and Mining Workers' Union demand selective reprivatisation which should be used to take due account of the enterprise's current cost-effectiveness, check the compliance by the new owners with their investment and social obligations, and identify violations of legislation in force.

The Ukrainian Federation of Trade Unions, FTUU, has proposed to introduce amendments into the Ukrainian Law on Remuneration to include a 100% increase of the average pay. This was made public by FTUU President Olexander Stoyan at a press-conference held on 6 May. He emphasized that according to the Federation's estimates the average pay essential to secure a decent standard of living in Ukraine should be at least US\$300-350. However, the current pay for 70% of workers is below the subsistence minimum.

The national unions of education and science, public health and culture workers have so far decided to abstain from staging joint protest actions of employees in the humanitarian sphere. The Parliament (Supreme Rada) has

endorsed the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers' amendments to the state budget envisaging allocations to cover increases in salary and hourly pay rates for some budgetary sectors as of 1 May and 1 July 2003. Nevertheless, this does not imply that all the problems of the budgetary sector workers are solved. The trade unions intend to continue promoting workers' lawful demands, specifically to raise wages in the budgetary sector to at least the level prevailing in the industrial sector, as required by the Constitution and Ukrainian legislation.

At its meeting, the FTUU Council noted that the latest sociological surveys indicated growing confidence in trade unions among workers. Their activity ranks even higher than that of political parties. However, this fact is no cause for complacency. The trade unions face serious challenges. So far 2.4 mln of hired labour in the country are not covered by collective agreements. Only 77 thousand out of 113 thousand local unions have negotiated bilateral obligations. No collective agreements exist at the absolute majority of newly established enterprises, and those with unorganized labour. Unions must seek to make collective agreements work efficiently everywhere, exert pressure on social partners and create new local trade union organizations – such are the objectives set out by the FTUU Council. The FTUU decided to submit a proposal to the Cabinet of Ministers and the Employers' Federation to hold an All-Ukraine tripartite meeting in December 2003 to discuss the effectiveness of collective agreements.

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***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**

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