



# *inform* **contact**

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

No.45

April-June 2004

### **GCTU WORRIED ABOUT ATTEMPT TO CURB DEMOCRACY IN RUSSIA**

In a statement issued 14 April 2004, the General Confederation of Trade Unions expressed its concern over the draft federal law "On Assemblies, Rallies, Demonstrations, Marches and Picketing" elaborated by the State Duma (Parliament) of Russia.

The Statement warns that this law, as approved in its first reading, will encroach on citizens' constitutional rights, primarily on the right of free and public expression of opinions.

The world trade union movement has for decades resorted to organising various mass events, such as marches, rallies and picket lines, to make the authorities aware of the unions' views on the problems of social and economic development.

If adopted, the bill under review will only raise additional bureaucratic barriers preventing working people from expressing freely their own will, make them actually evade the law, and cre-

ate unjustified tensions in society, the Statement says. This will result in violating the universally accepted human rights and freedoms of trade unions and other public organisations.

Moreover, the emergence of such a law in Russia may offer a negative orientation for the ongoing process of harmonising the legislation systems of CIS states,

### **CIS UNIONS OBSERVE MAY DAY**

The GCTU issued a May Day message stressing that the political and economic processes currently underway in the CIS countries had not led to any substantial improvement in workers' living standards. The work remuneration rates of most employees remain low, the scale of unemployment is still high, while the social guarantees have grown feebler.

The General Confederation of Trade Unions expressed the belief that, as the economies of the Commonwealth countries grew stronger, the responsi-

bility of the states and employers for pursuing a strong social policy would also increase.

The GCTU called on its affiliates to focus their attention on the struggles for social justice, full and efficient employment, decent working conditions, protection of trade union rights and freedoms, and building a single social space in the CIS.

The May Day was observed in all the CIS countries by trade union demonstrations and actions.

In Belarus, over 30 thousand people attended a rally held in central Minsk. FTUB President Leonid Kozik stressed that the Federation "would do its utmost to ensure that people receive decent pay, work in normal conditions and have adequate housing". The number of participants in the union actions organised in the Republic exceeded 100 thousand.

In the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, the rally called by the Georgian Trade Union Amalgamation adopted an appeal to the President, Chair of Parliament and Prime-Minister. The unions demanded speedier solutions to urgent socio-economic problems that had hit the country. Their primary concern was about the unemployment that had acquired nation-wide proportions, the poverty that engulfed even the working population, and the negligible minimum wages and pensions whose payment was regularly delayed. The unions believe the continual social humiliation of the population and disrespect for the dignity of entire society were the main rea-

sons behind the replacement of the country's political leadership.

A rally held by the Union Confederation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Moldova, CSRM, in Chisinau on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May stressed the need to defend the rights and freedoms of workers and trade unions and put an end to all interference by authorities in the internal affairs of the Confederation and its member-organisations. The trade unions warned against attempts to split the CSRM, and called for wage raises, restoration of social guarantees to workers in the budgetary sector and the agro-industrial complex, and more effective measures to reduce unemployment.

Marches and rallies calling for "Decent Wages As the Way to Eliminating Poverty" were among the most common events organised on May Day all over Russia. Such actions were taken in 77 Republican, territorial and provincial capitals, and in about 1000 other cities and towns. The total number of their participants exceeded 2.2 million. Addressing the rally in Moscow, FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov said the Federation would insist on the convocation of the Tripartite Commission for Regulating Social and Labour Relations to consider the "recent harsh laws that may dismantle the fringe benefits by replacing them with inadequate monetary compensation. In fact, these laws may cancel all that we have gained over the hard past decade."

Participants in the collective actions in the Russian regions supported the union claims and demanded that the authorities of all levels take strict measures to prevent enterprise bank-

ruptcies and ensure the implementation by the employers of the labour and pension laws. Unless their demands are met, the unions said they would be ready to take further decisive action.

### **GCTU BACKS MOLDOVAN COMPLAINT**

GCTU President Mikhail Shmakov and General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov sent a letter to ILO Director-General Juan Somavia. They said the GCTU associated itself with the complaint presented to the ILO by the Confederation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Moldova in connection with the violations of Conventions 87 and 98 by state authorities.

The facts contained in the complaint indicate that the state authorities violate flagrantly Articles 3 and 11 of Convention 87 and Articles 1 and 2 of Convention 98. That such violations occur is obvious from the facts of interference by authorities' representatives in the internal affairs of a number of industrial unions.

The GCTU hopes that the complaint will be immediately accepted for consideration by the relevant ILO bodies.

### **BELARUS: FTUB MARKS WORLD H&S DAY**

The Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, FTUB, has approached the country's government with a proposal to declare 28 April the National Day for Safety and Health at Work. As is known,

the World Day for Safety and Health at Work is marked annually on the same day on the ILO's initiative.

The FTUB pays particular attention to occupational safety and health. Its member organisations exercise public control over the observance of labour protection legislation.

According to the State Labour Inspection Service, 6544 people suffered from occupational accidents in Belarus in 2003, with the number of killed amounting to 233, and the number of seriously injured to 717.

The FTUB's own health and safety inspectors conducted 837 workplace surveys in 2003. The Federation's affiliates have nearly 43 thousand safety inspectors who filed over 10 000 notices for the elimination of safety and health violations at workplaces. The unions organise special seminars and workshops to train their inspectors.

### **BELARUS: FTUB DEMANDS MET**

FTUB leader Leonid Kozik drew the attention of the country's President Alexander Lukashenko to the gross and frequent violations of current legislation committed in the process of transferring workers to the contractual scheme of employment.

Contracts are often concluded for a minimum term, they do not provide for any extra conditions, such as pay rate increases, additional leave or other measures meant to motivate the employees.

President Lukashenko instructed the Council of Ministers and the Presidential Administration to look into the situation and examine all aspects of the transfer of public employees to the contractual employment scheme.

The inspections revealed violations of Presidential decrees and the Labour Code. In line with the FTUB demands, the decision was taken that contracts with employees should be normally concluded for a five-year period, and with workers of pre-retirement age – till they become entitled to a pension. Should a woman's contract expire during her pregnancy, maternity or child-care leave, it shall be prolonged until the child is three years old. In addition, it was considered expedient that a trade union representative should be present when the provisions of the contract are discussed with an employee.

President Lukashenko gave orders that the heads of national government agencies take the necessary measures to remove the negative social effects of the transfer to the contractual scheme of employment.

### **FTUB READY TO GO TO POLLS**

The FTUB has decided to take an active part in the parliamentary election due in October 2004.

Leonid Kozik told a press conference on 2 June 2004 that the FTUB "will be participating throughout the campaign, from monitoring the election process to nominating candidates in every electoral district." The Federation has set up a coordinating committee to deal

with election campaign matters. "Our objective is at the least to get a group of deputies registered in Parliament who would promote FTUB ideas and proposals", said Leonid Kozik.

It is not infrequent that the Parliament adopts legal acts that ignore not only the trade union views but the actual workers' situation as well. There are many problems that necessitate certain amendments to be introduced into the legislation, whereas now the FTUB has no right to initiate consideration of bills in Parliament.

### **GEORGIA: GTUA SCRUTINISES CURRENT PROBLEMS**

The Council of the Georgian Trade Union Amalgamation, GTUA, met on 28 May 2004 to discuss the ways to raise the efficiency of the Tripartite Commission, improve co-operation between the Government, the trade unions and the employers, and enhance the effectiveness of the General Agreement. The issues of unemployment, occupational health and safety, and work remuneration are still acute, while the wage arrears have not been settled.

The Council also addressed the problem of reforming and strengthening the structure of the Republic's trade unions. Georgia's trade unions are now going through a period of mergers and structure simplification. Young people are being actively recruited to join the union ranks and promoted to leading posts in union organisations.

The GTUA youth forum held last April brought together 650 young militants

from all over the country. The GTUA set up a Youth Committee comprising 37 union activists aged under 40 years.

The Council approved the agenda of the 6<sup>th</sup> GTUA Congress due in November 2004.

### **KAZAKHSTAN: FTURK PROMOTING UNION CANDIDATES**

The Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan, FTURK, approved, on 2 June 2004, the stand to be taken by the country's trade unions in the election to the Majilis (Parliament) to be held in 2004.

Despite the stable situation in the country, the irregular wage payments remain an outstanding problem, with the wage arrears far from being settled. The employers' debts to the pension accumulation funds amount to 14 billion tenghes (US \$ 103 million).

The FTURK believes the position of workers in the labour market humiliating. Almost everywhere, employers hire and dismiss workers arbitrarily, women workers are subjected to discrimination, and every ninth able-bodied citizen is jobless. A worrying situation has evolved in the sphere of safety and health at work, with the number of accidents, including fatal ones, growing.

The Federation calls on workers to vote for those candidates who share the unions' aims and objectives in what concerns protecting workers' vital interests. The FTURK believes the voters must support the candidates nominated by

the now active "Enbek" parliamentary group who have been consistently working to build a legal basis for citizens' social guarantees.

### **KAZAKHSTAN: UNIONS CRITICAL OF NEW CODE**

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June, 2004, the Minister of Labour and Social Protection, Ms G.Karagusova, visited the FTURK Headquarters in Astana to present the Government's version of the draft Labour Code to the leaders of the country's industrial and regional trade union organisations.

The trade unionists subjected the Government's draft to criticism. They thought the paper did not practically contain any standards protecting the rights of unionised workers and ignored the basic provisions of ILO conventions ratified by Kazakhstan. The Labour Code must fix the rights of trade unions as the workers' authorised representatives. The union activists insist that the new Code should do away with the drawbacks inherent in the current Labour Code. Specifically, it should envisage wider social guarantees and better compensation for some categories of workers, particularly for women, and reflect in more detail the relations between the employer and the employee.

### **MOLDOVA: UNIONS HAPPY WITH LABOUR CODE**

The Council of the Confederation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Moldova, CSRМ, met on 22 April

2004 to discuss the role trade unions have to play in protecting workers' socio-economic and labour rights in the light of the newly adopted Labour Code.

According to CSRM President Petru Chiriac, the new Code provides the unions with a real chance to prove they can protect the rights and interests of their members. It takes into account the international standards of labour law.

A particularly important novelty is that the Code recognises the social partnership institution. However, neither the central and local authorities nor the employers have so far taken any effective and consistent steps to build a full-fledged and viable system of social partnership.

As early as at the conceptual stage, the trade unions had insisted that the Labour Code should stipulate the establishment of a socio-economic council as the supreme social partnership body. However, the Government had rejected the proposal.

The unions believe that the Republican Tripartite Commission for Collective Bargaining has become an impotent structure that, with the adoption of the new Labour Code, no longer fits into the present-day situation. The trade unions representatives had left the session of the Commission on 7 April 2004 in response to the Government delegation's refusal to discuss the CSRM's minimal wage proposals and the complaint it had lodged with the ILO about the violations of trade union rights in the Republic.

Trade unions, particularly at the level of enterprises and territories, must examine every attempt by the authorities and employers to dodge collective bargaining or signing collective agreements.

The CSRM will closely follow the process of bringing current legislation in line with the new Labour Code and developing fresh statutory acts necessary for its implementation.

### **RUSSIA: FNPR AGAINST DISMANTLING OF SOCIAL GUARANTEES**

In April 2004, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, FNPR, issued a statement warning that the planned reduction of the single social tax from 35.6 per cent to 26 per cent will increase deficits in the social funds to hundreds of billions of roubles, aggravate the problems connected with the payment of pensions and benefits and financing medical assistance, and hamper the realisation of social programmes.

The FNPR holds the opinion that the state authorities, who have already aggravated workers' conditions by having introduced the "single social tax", have not abandoned their inadmissible experiments on the social sphere.

"In addition to their low wages, the working citizens have already been stripped of the obligatory insurance for unemployment; they draw poverty-level pensions and benefits, and stand no chance of getting facilities at a health resort at a reduced price".

The unions proceed from the conviction that any cuts in social guarantees must result from higher wages and enhanced corporate responsibility, accompanied by a reform of obligatory social insurance schemes.

The FNPR expresses its disagreement with the curtailment of social guarantees and insists that the proposed changes be brought up for a broad public discussion. The social partners should be provided with well-grounded calculations and the specific decisions on the compensatory measures to be taken.

### **UNIONS ORGANISE ALL-RUSSIA PROTEST**

A wave of rallies, marches, workplace union meetings, and picket lines at the houses of executive and legislative authorities swept through Russia 10 June 2004. Trade unions were protesting against the encroachment on workers' social rights and interests. Over 230 thousand people took place in the mass actions all over the country.

FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov addressed a rally organized by Moscow trade unions in front of the Government House of the Russian Federation. He said that the new legislative initiatives coming from the Government were actually an attempt at the Constitution of Russia, and they were part and parcel of the creeping revolution now evolving in the country. The Government intend to amend over 150 laws securing "the rights and guarantees essential for our lives, our jobs, our wages". He called for a struggle to retain such

a category as "minimum pay" in national legislation and get it raised to reach the subsistence minimum level. "In the future, he said, we'll have to take steps to make every job highly paid".

The General Confederation of Trade Unions has supported the demands put forth by the FNPR affiliates in the course of the nationwide protest action on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2004.

"It is alarming that the trade union demand for minimum pay equal to the subsistence minimum has been ignored, a GCTU statement says. The shameful practice of wage non-payment persists. The process of negotiation between the social partners within the Russian Tripartite Commission has been blocked through the Government's fault. On the whole, the large-scale offensive on the rights of workers and trade unions continues". The GCTU called on its member organisations to display solidarity with the Russian trade unions and support their actions.

### **RUSSIA: FNPR GETS ITS OWN WAY**

Yielding to union pressure, the Russian Government have withdrawn their proposal to revoke such an important social standard as the statutory minimum pay. As a result, the new Labour Code will not only keep the standard, but also include the provision that the sum of minimum work remuneration cannot be smaller than the subsistence minimum for an able-bodied person.

The Government proposal to annul the minimum wage standard had met with

bitter union opposition. Moreover, quite a few deputies of the State Duma spoke against it.

The agreement to retain the minimum work remuneration was reached at the session of the Russian Tripartite Commission for Regulating Labour Disputes held 28 June 2004.

In addition to retaining the established minimum pay, it was decided to develop a mechanism for bringing it up to the subsistence minimum level. The Commission also agreed with the unions that the forthcoming reform of the central Government's structure should not lead to the reduction of wages and salaries in the budgetary sector.

### **TAJIKISTAN: UNIONS CONCERNED OVER MIGRANT WORKERS**

The problem of labour migration that affects many countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States is particularly acute in Tajikistan. The country has gone through a civil war, and its economic and social situation has just started stabilizing, with the population growing at a fast rate. Nevertheless, the economy of the republic is a far cry from being sound.

Thousands of Tajik citizens are forced to look for a job outside their homeland, most of them as illegal migrants.

The Tajikistan Federation of Trade Unions, TFTU, considers the problem of external labour migration to be a priority in its activity. The unions keep raising the issue with the Government urging it to take the necessary steps

to alleviate the plight of migrant workers. To achieve the goal, the Federation also makes use of its links and cooperation with fraternal unions in the neighbouring countries. For instance, a special agreement was lately reached between the building workers' unions of Tajikistan and Russia.

The ways to improve the situation of migrant workers, enhance the legislation and comply fully with the ILO Conventions were the theme of the discussions at the presentation of the sociological research paper on the social status of workers from Tajikistan in the construction industry of Russia held in the main office of the TFTU. The paper was prepared by the Institute for Comparative Labour Relation Studies on behalf of the International Labour Organisation.

### **UKRAINE'S PRESIDENT ADVOCATING STRONGER UNIONS**

In his annual address to Parliament, Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma stressed that Ukraine would have to make considerable efforts to improve its system of social and labour relations and bring it into line with the EU and ILO standards. This, first of all, concerns the mechanism of dialogue between the Government and the trade unions, as such a dialogue is crucial in the period of social and economic reform. "Without a strong and well-developed trade union movement, without an enhanced role to be played by the unions, the development of civil society in Ukraine will hardly be possible".



President Kuchma believes the current stage of social and labour relations calls for a closer cooperation between the Government and the trade unions, and for their more active involvement in the expert appraisal of governmental decisions on socio-economic matters. He said he was worried over the fact that the trade union membership had been shrinking, which indicated that the unions had not yet become an efficient social institution.

The leader of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine, FTUU, Olexander Stoyan said he appreciated the President's statement in a positive way and took it as evidence that the state authorities are intent on a civilized and constructive dialogue. Moreover, Olexander Stoyan thought that the President's remarks sounded self-critical, as he admitted that the Government and the employers had not succeeded in resolving the core problem, that of eradicating poverty among working population.

### **UKRAINE: GENERAL AGREEMENT SIGNED**

A General Agreement for 2004-2005 was signed 19 April 2004 by the Cabinet of Ministers and the federations of trade unions and employers of Ukraine, following four months' negotiations.

The differences over the Agreement, whose text was based on the draft prepared by the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine, FTUU, were included in a separate protocol.

The union representatives are satisfied that the Agreement has a provision pro-

moting the development of national producers. The FTUU has successfully insisted that a number of enterprises now described as being "of strategic importance to the country's economy and security" should be removed from the list of objects liable to privatisation. The unions regard these enterprises as efficient and see no reason why they should be restored to private ownership.

The General Agreement devotes particular attention to measures that must be taken to prevent eventual negative consequences of Ukraine's entry into the World Trade Organisation, especially in the sphere of employment. The number of the unemployed is planned to be reduced by 500 thousands people annually. The minimum pay is expected to be raised, while the pension system will be reformed. The Agreement provides for yearly wage increases by at least 25 per cent. Moreover, the document makes it a point that wages will grow twice as fast as the GDP.

It is also planned to settle all wage arrears in 2004, and increase the funding of occupational health and safety.

According to Olexander Stoyan, the parties have failed to come to a compromise over the dates when a single pay scale would be put into effect in the budgetary sector. Neither could they agree on the proposal that the enterprise owners allocate 40 million hryvnias to the trade unions for them to be able to carry out cultural and health improvement activities for the workers.

PUBLISHED BY

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

**42 LENINSKY PROSPEKT  
119119 MOSCOW, RUSSIA  
TELEFAX +7(095) 938-2155  
PHONE +7(095)952-2782  
+7(095)938-8649  
Web site: [www.vkp.ru](http://www.vkp.ru);  
E-mail: [inter@vkp.ru](mailto: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 22 SEPTEMBER 1993, THE THIRD CONGRESS OF THE GCTU 18 SEPTEMBER 1997, AND THE FIFTH (EXTRAORDINARY) CONGRESS OF THE GCTU 26 MARCH 2004.**

**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 33 BRANCH TRADE UNION INTERNATIONALS. BESIDES, BILATERAL AGREEMENT 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 COUNCIL AND THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.**

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

**PRESIDENT OF THE GCTU IS MIKHAIL SHMAKOV,  
GENERAL SECRETARY 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](http://www.vkp.ru)