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

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## **AZERBAIJAN: UNION LEADER WORRIED OVER WORKERS' RIGHTS VIOLATIONS**

According to President of the Azerbaijan Trade Union Confederation, Sattar Mehbaliyev, 185 new trade union organisations have been set up in the country since the beginning of 2006. "Ten out of the newly built unions, he said, are in the oil industry, and the number of unions in construction have also increased over the last few months". In the meantime, it is in the construction sector that workers' rights are violated in a most brutal way. Sometimes no labour contract is signed between the employee and the employer, nor special pay rates are set for work on holidays or for night shifts, though at least two times as many industrial accidents occur at night than in the daytime.

After heavy trucks have been banned from entering the city of Baku by day, most construction work is carried out at night, which has

resulted in the growing number of occupational accident victims.

Sattar Mehbaliyev said the unions considered calling on the Government to take most serious measures to solve the problem and provide safer working conditions for domestic building workers.

## **BELARUS: FTUB TO SUPPORT HARVESTERS**

The Presidium of the Council of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FTUB) held a meeting 29 June 2006 to consider participation of trade union organisations in this year's harvest.

The Federation set up a special provisional body (the so called "Organising Staff") to coordinate all activities associated with trade union involvement in the harvest campaign.

The FTUB will make a major contribution to the 2006 harvest, focusing

its traditional attention on the strict observance of the health and safety regulations. The Federation's President Leonid Kozik said the active FTUB involvement in the previous harvest campaign had been appreciated by the people. He believes even more must be done this year, particularly in what concerns the information support of the campaign. Simultaneously, the Federation will do its utmost for the work done by corn-producers to receive due public appraisal.

### **EMPLOYMENT SITUATION IN GEORGIA**

Almost 14.6 per cent of the Georgia's economically active population were unemployed in the first quarter of 2006, which is 0.1 per cent less than in the same period of the previous year.

According to the Statistics Department of Georgia, in January-March last year the number of economically active population was over 1,999 thousand people, whereas in January-March of the current year the figure went down to 1,925 thousand, i.e. 74 thousand less.

The number of unemployed in the same period amounted to 282 thousand, which is a decrease by 12.3 thousand, or 4.2 per cent as against the same period in 2005 (294.3 thousand). The number of employed people in January-March 2006 amounted to 1,643 thousand, of

whom 36 per cent were wage-and-salary-earning workers, and 64 per cent self-employed population

The average monthly wages in 2005 were 204.2 laris, or 47.4 laris higher than in 2004 (156.8 laris).

### **KAZAKHSTAN: LABOUR RIGHTS ON AGENDA**

The Human Rights Commission under President of the Republic of Kazakhstan discussed the problems of respecting the constitutional right to decent work conditions.

Commission pointed to the low wage rates in Kazakhstan. The wages-GDP ratio was 33 per cent last year, as compared with 40 per cent in Armenia, 43 in Russia, 44 in Belarus, and 46 per cent in Ukraine. In economically developed countries this ratio ranges between 60 and 70 per cent.

Infringements on the health and safety laws account for 55 per cent of all the violations revealed in enterprises by the state labour inspection. Last year the number of occupational injuries increased by 8 per cent as compared with 2004, with most of them being in the iron and steel and the coal-mining industries. Seventy-five fatal accidents were registered last year in the construction sector.

Vice President of the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FTURK) Leonid

Martynov complained that the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection were obstructing the unions in exercising public control over health and safety. Trade union representatives are not allowed to visit workplaces or participate in the work of accident investigation commissions.

The wage arrears in the private sector of the economy amounts to 57 billion tenghes, while the legal sanctions against employers who delay wage payment are too liberal.

The pay gap is extremely wide. The lowest paid are employees in education, the public health service, and agriculture who earn respectively 38.7, 45.8 and 60 per cent less than the country's average. The highest paid are those employed in the sphere of financial agency and in the oil- and gas-extracting industry. Their wages and salaries are 2.6 times higher than the country's average.

### **RUSSIA: MINIMUM WAGES NOT ENOUGH TO SURVIVE**

In an interview given to the *Mayak* Radio Company, President of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) Mikhail Shmakov said over 2.5 million workers had participated in the mass marches, rallies and demonstrations organised by trade unions on this year's May Day in more than 700 Russian cities and towns. "The main task of the May Day events was to

demonstrate our solidarity and cohesion", he added.

We have to admit, he went on to say, that in many CIS countries, including Russia, the real eight-hour working day is still an aim to achieve. This shameful fact contradicts the Russian Constitution.

The legally guaranteed minimum wage is below the subsistence minimum. The minimal consumer basket in the Russian Federation costs about three thousand roubles a month, whereas the minimum work remuneration has lately been a mere 800 roubles (approximately \$30) a month.

Yielding to union pressure, the Government has taken a decision to raise the minimum wages to 1,100 roubles a month as from 1 May 2006. However, the tree-time gap between the subsistence minimum and the minimum wages guaranteed for 8 hours' work makes physiological survival of the worker problematic.

### **RUSSIA: LABOUR CODE IMPROVED**

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of May, 2006 the State Duma approved amendments to the Labour Code aiming to improve the situation in the labour market.

One novelty is the stricter responsibility of the employer for delaying the payment of wages and salaries. The workers will be entitled to compen-

sation for arrears of wages. When carrying out staff reductions, the employer will have to offer the redundant worker all vacant jobs available in the enterprise.

The amendments adopted will entitle the unions, in case of workers' rights violations, to sue not only the enterprise manager, but also the shop superintendents or leaders of any other enterprise units involved.

The procedure of strike ballot has been simplified. From now on the decision to call a strike shall be taken by a simple majority, rather than by two-thirds, of the work collective. In enterprises where strikes are legally prohibited the disputes between the workers and the management shall be settled through the industrial courts.

### **TAJIKISTAN: EMPLOYERS CHALLENGE LABOUR CODE**

The Tajikistan Federation of Trade Unions, TFTU, is worried over the extent to which the Labour Code is observed in the country's private sector, said TFTU President Murodali Salikhov.

He believes that, in the context of economic reform and a growing private sector, the trade unions of the Republic should keep a closer eye on what is happening in the private sector, and monitor the way the country's Labour Code is observed there.

The union leader stressed that citizens must be employed and dismissed in strict accordance with the current laws. Workers of the private sector often do not get their wages in due time, and they even lack work record cards as prescribed by law. However, when they reach the pension age, they will be expected to submit their wage statements. The worker and the employer often conclude one-time employment contracts that are not executed in a proper legal way.

The Federation follows the developments in the field attentively.

### **UKRAINE: MASSES TAKE TO STREETS**

An all-Ukraine action of protest against increased gas and electricity prices was held in Kiev 24 May 2006. Participants marched from six assembling points to Independence Place in the centre of the city where a rally took place involving 50 thousand participants.

The speakers demanded that the Government cancel its decision to raise the gas and electricity rates for the population, and were indignant at the unbridled rise in the prices of essential goods and services.

Participants in the rally adopted a resolution demanding that the Government start immediate talks with the unions, and adopt a package of social protection measures aiming to

ensure the population due compensation for the loss caused by the increased prices and rates.

The General Confederation of Trade Unions, GCTU, and its affiliates have strongly supported the actions taken by the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine, FTUU.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of June, 2006, the FTUU organized new mass actions all over the country protesting against the rising prices of electricity, gas and public and housing services. Over 200 thousand people took part in the demonstrations, with mass rallies held in all provincial centres and major cities of Ukraine. The demands voiced by more than 40 thousand protesters in Kiev 27 June were supported by several political parties and nongovernmental organisations.

The FTUU insisted that the Cabinet of Ministers annul its decision to raise the gas and electricity prices and to double the electrical energy rates. The unions also demanded that the housing and public utility expenses should not exceed 10 per cent of the aggregate family income.

#### **UKRAINE: UNIONS APPEAL TO ILO WORKERS' GROUP**

At the 95<sup>th</sup> session of the International Labour Conference held in Geneva in June 2006, the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine,

FTUU, called on the ILO Workers' Group to respond to the attempts by the Ukrainian state authorities to undermine the foundation of social dialogue in the country and infringe upon the workers' rights.

The Government, a FTUU statement says, ignores the agreement reached with the unions at the All-Ukraine Trade Union Conference last February. None of them has been carried out so far, including such as the settlement of many months' long arrears of wages, the establishment of minimum wages at least equal to the subsistence minimum, and others.

The FTUU Statement reminds that "the Government of Ukraine, without any consultation with the trade unions, has unilaterally taken several decisions concerning the centralised increase in the prices of natural gas and electrical energy for the population by 25 per cent as from 1 May 2006, which violates the General Agreement signed by the Government, the trade unions and the employers. In addition to that, the prices of natural gas doubled from 1 June 2006".

At a time when the incomes of 58 per cent of the population and the wages of 26 per cent of the workers in Ukraine persist below the subsistence minimum line, such a jump in the gas and electricity prices is regarded by trade unions as a gross violation of citizens' constitutional right to adequate living standards.



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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 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, AZERBAIJAN, BELARUS, GEORGIA, KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN, MOLDOVA, RUSSIA, TAJIKISTAN, UZBEKISTAN, AND UKRAINE, AS WELL AS 32 BRANCH TRADE UNION INTERNATIONALS.*

*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**

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