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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

No.60

April-June 2008

GCTU EXECUTIVE DISCUSSES MINIMUM PENSIONS

The regular session of the Executive Council of the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) held in the Palace of Labour, Moscow, 7 April 2008 examined the results of the 2007 solidarity campaign «Make the minimum pension equal to the subsistence minimum for the pensioner», and further actions to be taken by unions to improve the conditions for retired people. The discussion showed that the trade union action of solidarity had on the whole achieved its aim, as it helped to draw the attention of state authorities in the CIS countries to the plight of pensioners. Over the period, the minimum pensions had risen by 1.25 times in Azerbaijan, 1.6 times in Armenia, 1.23 times in Belarus, 1.1 times in Kyrgyzstan, 1.2 times in Moldova, 1.5 times in Russia, and by 1.24 times in Ukraine. In Az-

erbaijan, Kazakhstan and Ukraine the minimum pension has exceeded the subsistence minimum level, with Belarus being close to the target.

The GCTU Executive recommended that the national trade union centres in CIS countries and the industrial Trade Union Internationals proceed with the campaign in 2008.

As part of the monitoring initiative launched in 2006, the session reviewed the progress of ratification and observance by the New Independent States of the 11 ILO conventions that the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly had recommended for ratification responding to a GCTU request. The Executive noted that the unions had taken steps to incorporate the ratification issue into the texts of their collective agreements (Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Ukraine), raised the

problem at their meetings with government leaders (Kazakhstan, Moldova and Tajikistan), or put it on the agendas of the national tripartite commissions or state bodies dealing with labour relations, social policy and employment (Azerbaijan, Moldova and Ukraine).

However, the efforts made have not resulted in any of the above ILO conventions being ratified in 2007. Moreover, a number of earlier ratified labour standards, including fundamental ones, have not yet been embodied in national legislation, and, consequently, are not always observed in labour relation practice. The Executive Committee decided to continue the trade union monitoring of the process of ratification and compliance with the high priority ILO conventions in the CIS countries.

The Executive has also taken the decisions to build a single online database for the GCTU, and to call an international meeting of young trade union leaders from CIS countries in the last quarter of 2008. Several other pressing problems of GCTU activity were also considered by the session.

GCTU GETS TWO NEW AFFILIATES

At its session held in Moscow 8 April 2008, the GCTU Council

decided unanimously to admit the National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova (CNSM) into the General Confederation of Trade Union. Founded 7 July 2007 following the merger between the Confederation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Moldova and the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of the Republic of Moldova «Solidaritate», CNSM affiliates 32 national trade unions totaling approx. 584 thousand members. The Confederation's President is Leonid Manea.

Another application for affiliation approved by the GCTU Council came from the Trade Union International of Workers in the Radio-electronic Industry comprising five member organisations numbering almost 309 thousand members. President of the TUI is Valery Markov.

As a result, the GCTU now affiliates national trade union centres from 10 countries of the CIS, and 32 industrial Trade Union Internationals, with a total membership of about 50 million workers.

The Council session dwelt on the wage remuneration situation in the CIS countries, and on solidarity actions to be taken by trade unions to better protect workers' interests. The struggle for decent pay is currently a key task in the activity of trade unions in the Commonwealth states. They have

been promoting the growth of nominal and real wages, and demanding that the minimum pay be brought up to the level of subsistence minimum. However, the present-day system of work remuneration still has a great number of glaring gaps to fill.

The Council recommended that the industrial TUIs scrutinise the degree of trade union influence on the formulation of wage policies in transnational enterprises.

GCTU STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF LJUBLJANA PAY DEMONSTRATION

«On the 5th of April 2008, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), in collaboration with the Slovenian Confederation of Free Trade Unions, is organising a mass international demonstration in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, in the framework of the latter's Presidency of the European Union. Many thousands of workers from different countries of the European Union will take to the streets of the city on this day to demand higher pay. The demonstration, to be held in connection with the forthcoming meeting of the EU Economy and Finance Ministers and the leaders of the European Central Bank, will be the key event in the Europe-wide campaign for fair wages and salaries launched by the ETUC.

«European trade unions are campaigning against the falling shares of wages and salaries in the national incomes of most European countries, reject the repeated calls by European leaders for wage moderation by workers, with the rewards of corporate directors and other top managerial staff steadily increasing, and protest the gender inequalities in the sphere of work remuneration.

«They demand improvements in the purchasing power of their pay, decent minimum wages in all European countries, a narrower gap in pay among the countries of the European Union, between the corporate «boardroom and the shop floor», and between working men and women.

«The General Confederation of Trade Unions notes that the trade union movement in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States is concerned with basically the same unsolved problems as are facing the ETUC and its affiliated unions.

«In 2007, the average monthly wages ranged from US\$ 48 in Tajikistan to US\$ 529 in Russia. Most CIS countries are paying minimum wages below the subsistence minimum, with a sizeable percentage of workers getting less than two dollars a day, which, by international standards, hits

the poverty line. The vicious practice of pay delays has not yet been eradicated either.

«The GCTU affiliates are now waging a solidarity-based campaign to raise the minimum pay at least to the level of subsistence minimum. As they carry out the decisions taken by the GCTU 6th Congress, trade unions in the Commonwealth member states are building up their efforts to win fair work remuneration.

«In this context, the General Confederation of Trade Unions affiliating national trade union centres from nine CIS countries and 31 industrial trade Union Internationals of the region pledges its support of the struggle for decent wages and salaries being waged by European trade unions under the leadership of the ETUC, and expresses its fraternal solidarity with the demands put forward by fellow trade unionists who will participate in the Ljubljana march on 5 April. We call on our member organisations to give support to the protest by workers of the European Union countries in whatever form they find acceptable».

GCTU STATEMENT ON WORK SAFETY DAY

«Speaking for trade unions in the Commonwealth of Independent

States, the General Confederation of Trade Unions expresses its full support for the initiative to mark 28 April 2008 as World Day for Safety and Health at Work under the slogan «My life, my job, my safe work».

«The CIS trade union community regards its active involvement in the events related to this World Day as another important opportunity to draw the attention of the authorities and the public to the necessity of securing occupational safety and health.

«We believe that the joint voice of trade unions, experts and the public of many countries worldwide will be heeded by government bodies, employers, entrepreneurs and workers, and make them assess, once more, the environment in which people work, the immense material and moral losses incurred by neglectful attitudes towards the problems of occupational health and safety, observing the legislation in force and the established operational procedures.

«While supporting the initiative of the world trade union movement, trade unions in CIS countries, as in many other world states, observe the International Commemoration Day for Dead and Injured Workers as part of the World Day for Safety and Health at Work. According to statistics, production

takes an annual toll of five thousand people in the CIS countries. We grieve deeply over all who have died at work and express our sincere sympathy and condolences to their families.

«It is important that this year's World Day for Safety and Health at Work is observed under the theme «Managing occupational risks». In CIS countries, nearly a quarter of jobs do not meet the occupational safety and health requirements and standards. The severity of work-related accidents persists, and accident rates remain high.

«Commonwealth trade unions will use their legitimate rights to continue pressure for a higher responsibility of employers for health and safety, for more efficient steps to be taken in order to remove hazardous and harmful factors from the production, and prevent work-related injuries and diseases».

GCTU MOURNS OVER CHINA QUAKE VICTIMS

In connection with the destructive earthquake in China, GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov sent a message of sympathy and solidarity to the Chairman of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions Wang Zhaoguo that reads as follows:

«Dear Brother Wang Zhaoguo, We were deeply shocked at the reports about the ruinous earthquake in the Sichuan Province involving a loss of numerous human lives and heavy material damage. We share the anguish and sufferings with those who fell victim to this natural disaster. On behalf of the General Confederation of Trade Unions we convey our deep sympathy and sincere condolences to the workers and trade unions of China, and to the relatives and friends of those who died in the earthquake.»

AZERBAIJAN: MATURITY BORN IN STRUGGLES

Fifteen years have passed since the Azerbaijan Trade Union Confederation (ATUC) was founded in 1993 by the Republic's industrial trade unions. In 2003, the Confederation entered a new important stage in its history following its 2nd Congress that outlined the trade union strategy for the beginning of the third millennium, and confirmed the ATUC course for a strong social policy linked with economic and political struggles to protect workers' rights and interests. The ATUC's 3rd Congress in 2008 amended and complemented its Constitution, which made it possible to define more accurately the functions and role of industrial unions within the

Confederation. The Congress also approved the guidelines for trade union activity in the period to come, and specified the position of trade unions in the political and social structure of today's Azerbaijan.

Since its foundation, the ATUC has been building its activity on the principles of self-sufficiency and independence from state authorities, and on departure from strict centralisation. Today, despite all the ordeals, the Confederation has managed to remain a mass and representative organisation of employed workforce, with a weight and influence in society. It has strengthened its organisational structure, kept the unity and cohesion of its ranks, and remained a firm and consistent defender of its members' economic and social interests.

Over the last few years, the Confederation has been increasingly active in law-making. Practically all socially-oriented laws in the Republic, including such as the Law on Trade Unions, the Labour Code etc., were adopted by Parliament with due regard for the ATUC opinion and proposals.

The ATUC is integrated into the world trade union movement, maintaining constructive ties with 34 trade union organisations in 29 countries, and being affiliated

with the GCTU, the ITUC and the PERC.

KYRGYZSTAN: TRADE UNIONS CALL FOR COORDINATED RESISTANCE TO PRICE RISE

Trade union leaders, representatives of state authorities, employers' organisations and enterprises and industries took part in the Conference «Promotion of social partnership in mitigating the negative impact of growing prices for consumer goods and services», organised by the Kyrgyzstan Federation of Trade Unions (KFTU).

The participants had a thorough discussion of the ways and methods to be used in addressing the problems of tariff establishment and price rises, and worked out an agreed resolution.

In particular, the Conference resolution urged Parliament to improve the legislative and regulatory basis of the housing and public utilities as well as hold public hearings concerning the discussion of the national draft Housing Code and the programme for reforming the housing and public utilities up to 2010. The social partners were recommended to make maximum use of the tripartite mechanism in discussing the issues of improving the operation of the housing and public utilities,

transport, power engineering, tariff policy and social protection of the population.

The Conference proposed to establish a standing Tripartite inter-agency expert council comprising representatives of the Parliament, Government, local authorities, trade unions and employers, with the participation of independent specialists. The task of such a council would be to carry out analysis and provide expertise for the elaboration of agreed decisions on the issues of tariff policies and social protection of the population.

RUSSIA: MAY 1ST – THE DAY OF CONCERTED ACTIONS

The Executive of the Federation of Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) met 9 April 2008 to review the results of the FNPR's participation in the election campaigns 2007-2008. It was noted that due to coordinated actions by trade unions their position in the State Duma had been strengthened, which secured a good basis for forming a new inter-faction deputy group for coordination with the trade union movement «Solidarity». Trade union presence in regional parliaments has widened. The trade unions organised meetings with labour collectives in support of Dmitry Medvedev's nomination to the post of Russian

President. The experience and results of trade union involvement in the election campaign 2007-2008 were generally recognised as positive.

The FNPR Executive declared May 1st, 2008 the Day of Concerted Trade Union Actions. It was decided to hold the May Day event in the form of marches and rallies under the slogan «Outpacing wage increase to counter rising prices!» This was prompted by the fact that the recent rise of prices for basic goods was having a detrimental impact on the living standards of the population. The Executive noted that the unreasonably low share of wages in the GDP structure, lack of justice in the distribution of labour results were the source of social tension in society. Attempts to legally block strikes as the lawful means of resolving conflicts was highlighted. Measures were taken to ensure coordination of actions by regional trade unions in preparing and holding the May Day event.

The FNPR Executive passed the decision to start preparations for the Pan-Russian Trade Union Action to be held 7 October 2008 within the framework of the World Day for Decent Work declared by the International Trade Union Confederation.

The Executive reviewed the practical work of the FNPR and

regional trade union federations in the area of establishing the regional wage minimum. While noting the essential contribution by FNPR member-organisations to promote an increase of wages, the Executive decided to push for the ratification of the European Social Charter and the conclusion of regional agreements on the minimum wage not lower than the subsistence level throughout Russia.

The Executive approved the Plan for Practical Actions to implement the decisions of the All-Russia Youth Trade Union Forum «The Choice of the Youth – 2007».

MOSCOW: MEETING IN KREMLIN

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev met with FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov 22 April 2008 in the Kremlin to discuss the social dimension of the triennial budget and the issues of the trade unions' cooperation with the government.

It was with the trade unions that President Medvedev decided to discuss the social component of the budget as a matter of priority.

In the course of the meeting, President Medvedev also suggested that the employers and the trade unions be involved in

finalising the Labour Code. President noted that despite the fact that this document was new and rather modern it might nevertheless require some amendments. Mikhail Shmakov supported this suggestion. «It is a live document, – he said, – therefore the Code will need to be reviewed on a permanent basis.» However, M.Shmakov believed that such amendments should be agreed upon through the Tripartite Commission mechanism.

President highly appreciated the activity of the Tripartite Commission, noting that «the Commission mechanism has proved to be rather effective». He agreed with Shmakov's opinion that the level of government representation in this Commission was still «somewhat low». This tends to undermine decision-making. As a result it was agreed that the level of government representation should be raised.

President also said that the Tripartite Commission should work out appropriate decisions that would make it possible to raise the minimum wage up to the subsistence minimum in all the regions of Russia. «We understand that each region has its own resources. Our objective is to level out these resources in order to «tow them up» to the standards that have been attained in the

perspective territories having a sufficiently profitable basis», he said.

LABOUR INSPECTORATE IN RUSSIA IS 90 YEARS OLD

The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia issued a Statement 16 May 2008 in connection with the 90th anniversary of the Labour Inspectorate.

«90 years ago on 18 May 1918, – the Statement says, the Government adopted a decree on the establishment of the Labour Inspectorate in the country. The decree determined «the protection of the life, health and labour of all the persons engaged in any economic activity» as the major objective of the new body.»

The past nine decades have shown that at various stages of historic development, the shaping, establishment and improvement of the Labour Inspectorate's activity has been effected with an active involvement of the trade unions in cooperation with the State. Since the very beginning it was recognised as «immediate and indispensable», and on its part, the State encouraged workers' trade unions both legally and materially.

Despite the great difficulties experienced by the country and seri-

ous political and socio-economic changes, the protection of workers from occupational injuries and diseases remains a key task in Russia not only for the government but for the entire society as a whole. For this reason, the trade unions including their labour inspectorates cannot accept the situation when millions of people work in hazardous conditions while hundreds of thousands get injured and scores of thousands die at workplace or contract occupational diseases.

The trade unions will do their best to ensure that the issues of labour protection, occupational safety and health are given due priority in the State's socio-economic policy and government labour protection programmes at the industrial, regional and corporative levels.

The FNPR assures all workers and their families that in cooperation with the executive and legal authorities and other stakeholders it will promote joint efforts to make the prevention of occupational accidents and diseases a priority goal of society.

LEANING ON INTERNATIONAL PENSION SCHEME EXPERIENCE

In his interview to the Radio Station «Voice of Russia», FNPR

President Mikhail Shmakov commented on the results of the 97th International Labour Conference held in June 2008 in Geneva.

In particular, he said: «Our country is faced with the task of ratifying the ILO conventions that have been adopted earlier. The most important of them is Convention 102 that provides for the pension to replace no less than 40% of the lost income, and Convention 128 that raises this index up to 50%. It is essential for us to have these conventions ratified in Russia today so as to be able to build a pension system based on these principles.»

According to the FNPR leader, in order to make such a spurt, i.e. to progress from 27% replacement of the average wage by the average pension to at least 40% replacement with due regard for the earnings at every workplace, it is essential to rely on international experience and ILO conventions.

UKRAINE: UKRAINIAN PRESIDENT TAKES PART IN COUNCIL SESSION

The National Tripartite Social and Economic Council of Ukraine resumed its plenary sessions after a long period. It was for the first time in the past 15 years that President Victor Yushchenko took

part in its session held 21 April 2008 at the head-quarters of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FTUU).

The discussion focused on identifying priority objectives for the National Tripartite Social and Economic Council and strengthening the influence exerted by the social dialogue partners on the shaping and implementation of the country's socio-economic policy. Each of the parties submitted its vision of the main priorities in the Council's activity.

In his speech, the co-chairman of the Tripartite Council from the trade unions FTUU President Olexander Yurkin dwelt upon the following points:

- introduction of decent work principles and European social values in Ukraine, including in the area of work remuneration and the development of industrial standards to secure effective collective bargaining at the appropriate level;
- consolidation of efforts by state authorities, the employers and the trade unions in the area of occupational safety and health and the prevention of work-related injuries;
- improvement of social dialogue and the enhancement of the National Council's powers as a consultative body under President.

In his turn, Ukrainian President emphasised the need for resolving such urgent issues as the improvement of the citizens' quality of life, the need for reforming housing policy and implementing budget priorities.

The session approved the priority lines of the Council's activity for 2008.

To ensure their realisation, Ukrainian President will prepare appropriate orders.

BUILDERS' KEY OBJECTIVE – PROMOTION OF DECENT WORK

The Council of the International Confederation of Construction and Building Materials Industry Workers' Unions (TUI «Stroitel») met 22 May 2008 in Moscow to discuss the report on the Confederation's activity from June 2007 to May 2008 presented by Confederation President Guenady Arzhanov. The Council instructed the leadership of the Confederation and its member-organisations to go on with implementing the «Guidelines for the Activity of the International Confederation of Construction and Building Materials Industry Workers' Unions in 2007-2011» as adopted by the 6th Conference of the Confederation (20 November 2006).

The Council also decided to mainstream the Confederation's participation in the GCTU activity aimed at promoting trade union unity in the CIS countries. The leadership of the Confederation was encouraged to take practical steps to involve the TUI and its affiliates in implementing the decisions of the GCTU 6th Congress. In particular, active support was given to the initiative to continue the trade union solidarity-based action in 2008 under the general slogan «For Decent Pension». The Council members approved the GCTU decision to hold an international meeting of young trade union leaders of the CIS countries in autumn 2008.

Particular attention was paid to the situation in the area of work remuneration in the CIS states, and the common stand and actions by trade unions in defence of workers' interests. Natalia Podshibyakina, a GCTU Deputy General Secretary, presented a report on this subject.

The Council reviewed the progress made by the Confederation's affiliates in implementing the GCTU decision of 2 November 2005 «On the Attitude of the CIS Trade Unions towards Agency and Contract Labour» and the stand taken with respect to private employment agencies.

PUBLISHED BY
GCTU INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT AND
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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.

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DEAR READERS

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