



# *inform* **contact**

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

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### **GCTU SENDS PROTEST TO PRESIDENT OF GEORGIA**

The unlawful action by Georgian authorities against the President of the Georgian Trade Union Amalgamation (GTUA) Irakli Tugushi aroused general indignation in the national trade union centres of CIS countries and industrial Trade Union Internationals of the region.

In a letter to Georgia's President Mikhail Saakashvili, GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov said that "the leader of the national trade union centre affiliating most of the country's workers was seized in the street and forwarded by force to the General Procurator's Office where he was informed that criminal proceedings had been instituted against him for alleged misuse of union property.

"The mere fact that a legal action could be brought against a union leader on such grounds constitutes a flagrant violation of internationally accepted standards in the sphere of trade union rights and freedoms. The GTUA is an

officially registered self-governing nongovernmental organisation that has been functioning since Georgia gained independence. It has largely contributed to the regulation of social and labour relations in the country, based on the principles of social partnership. All issues relating to the use and efficiency of trade union property should be regarded as an internal affair of the unions".

The letter also expresses "our deep indignation at the totally unacceptable conduct of the law enforcement authorities. GTUA President Irakli Tugushi is a prominent figure in the trade union movement of the Commonwealth of Independent States whose positive role has been widely recognized in our countries and in the rest of the world".

The letter reminds that "the GTUA's rights to the possession, use and disposal of the trade union property have already been challenged by former leaders of the country. However, the court proceedings in 1997 and in 2003 ruled in favour of the unions thereby confirming their lawful right to the prop-

erty created by generations of organised workers”.

In this context, the attempt to reanimate the case that has no real perspective in court looks like a gross act of intimidation on the eve of the ordinary GTUA congress”.

The GCTU member organisations sent messages of solidarity with the Georgian trade unions and their leader Irakli Tugushi. They also called on President Saakashvili and all other state authorities of Georgia to ensure strict compliance with law, and prevent any limitations of trade union rights and freedoms and persecution of union leaders.

### **GCTU CONDEMNS TERRORIST ASSAULTS IN RUSSIA**

On behalf of its affiliates, the General Confederation of Trade Unions issued a statement on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 2004 expressing indignation at the wave of unprecedented cruel acts of terror committed against peaceful population in Russia.

“One cannot help recoiling in shock from the news of the brutal massacre of people, mostly children, who had been taken hostage at Beslan, North Ossetia, as they participated in a ceremony opening the new school year. Together with their relatives, the GCTU grieves deeply over the death of hundreds of innocent people who have fallen victim to this and other terrorist acts. We hope that the Government of the Russian Federation will immediately take the necessary measures to find and duly punish all those involved in

these crimes, prevent any such incidents in future, and ensure security for the civilian Russian population. The world community must close their ranks in the face of new challenges by terrorism”

The GCTU called on the trade unions in the CIS countries and on the entire world trade union movement to condemn harshly the architects and perpetrators of those terrorist acts, show solidarity with the people of Russia, and render fraternal support and assistance to the victims of terror.

### **WOMEN WORKERS IN GLOBALISING WORLD**

An international round table meeting “Legal and Socio-Economic Protection of Women in the Conditions of Globalisation” was held by the GCTU in Moscow 16 September 2004. Its participants represented the national trade union centres of CIS countries, the industrial Trade Union Internationals, the academic community, women’s organisations and the media.

In her opening address, GCTU Deputy General Secretary Natalia Podshibyakina stressed that trade unions in the CIS kept an attentive eye on the social dimension of the globalisation process. The status of women is part and parcel of the issue. The aim of the round table was to discuss the ways of solving the problems and identify the role to be played by the unions.

Participants reviewed, from different aspects, the situation of women in the world as a whole and in a number of

specific national contexts. They outlined the avenues of further struggle for women's rights. Some speakers proposed specific measures to improve the work of trade unions in transnational enterprises and small businesses, organise more women workers, and advance the most capable of them to leading trade union posts.

Another important theme for debate at the meeting was how to establish and maintain cooperation between the trade unions and women's nongovernmental organisations. That would facilitate holding joint actions for decent jobs and adequate work remuneration, social protection of women, enhancement of their political and public status, elimination of all forms of discrimination against them, etc. The round table participants were concerned over the growing negative tendencies in the CIS region, such as drug and people trafficking that hit women and children the hardest.

The recommendations for the GCTU affiliates adopted by the round table underline that the unions should insist that the legislative and executive authorities allocate resources sufficient for the solution of gender problems, and for the creation of a legal environment promoting gender equality and adequate social protection of women. The bargaining practices must be amended so as special chapters concerning better conditions for working women and protection of their rights could be included in the collective agreements. Particular attention should be devoted to women's problems in the context of growing migration in the region.

## **ARMENIA GETS LABOUR CODE**

Armenia's Parliament has approved a new Labour Code at its second reading.

The Code establishes the terms and procedures for concluding collective agreements and payment for work, and specifies the rights and obligations of trade unions and employers and their representatives. The unions will now be entitled to represent the workers' interests and protect their rights.

The Labour Code allows a trade union to call a strike provided two-thirds of its members have voted for the idea by secret ballot. Such categories as police and those employed in the armed forces (or similar services), public security bodies, organisations dealing with centralised electric, heat and gas supply, and first-aid stations are forbidden to strike.

Railway, municipal transport, civil aviation, communications, health service, food and water supply workers must serve 14-day notice on the strike.

A probation period has been introduced for workers, but it cannot last longer than three months if otherwise not stipulated by legislation. During the period, the worker shall be entitled to all the rights and obligations provided for by the Code and other standard acts and legal documents.

Some of the Code chapters deal with the types of labour agreement and the causes for its cancellation, while others are devoted to wages, working time, and leave with or without pay. The

document also stipulates a system of guarantees and compensation for workers, material liability of the parties involved in labour relations, and health and safety provisions.

The Code will become effective six months after its official publication.

### **BELARUS: UNIONS PREPARING FOR GENERAL ELECTIONS**

The Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, FTUB, has announced it will take part in the general elections due to be held in October 2004. FTUB President Leonid Kozik explained that the unions wanted to get their own representatives elected to the National Assembly in order to build a trade union faction in Parliament. The unions have so far been denied the right to legislative initiative. The FTUB was preparing proposals for the amendment of the National Law on Trade Unions of 1992 with the aim of creating a clear-cut system of trade union involvement in law-making. Apart from its own candidates, the Federation will also support others nominated by their work collectives and willing to endorse the FTUB election platform.

Leonid Kozik will also run for parliamentary elections together with 49 other candidates on the FTUB list.

### **BELARUS: FTUB FOR SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP**

Leonid Kozik told a press-conference in September that the rights and obligations of both trade unions and employers had to be formulated in a specific legislative act. "We'll insist that a

special law on social partnership be adopted in Belarus. Nowadays, such relations are regulated by two Presidential decrees, he said. The new law must stipulate not only for the rights, but also for the responsibility of either side for failing to meet their commitments".

The FTUB believes that, by and large, the General Tripartite Agreement for 2004-2005 is being implemented satisfactorily. However, quite a few provisions of the Agreement need to be enhanced. This concerns, for example, the pay raises in the budgetary sector, the old-age pensions and the subsistence minimum budget. The chapter prescribing that the employers should provide the trade unions with free premises, office equipment and transport facilities, and create other conditions necessary for the unions to carry out their activities has not been effected to the full extent.

### **GEORGIA: STOP ATTACK ON WORKERS' RIGHTS**

A hundred activists of the Georgian Trade Union Amalgamation, GTUA, picketed the House of Parliament in Tbilisi 10 August 2004 protesting against the amendments to the Labour Code adopted by the deputies. The amendments deprive downsized workers of their their right to social guarantees.

"The dismissal notice has been reduced from two months to one. Formerly, together with the notice the workers would get social assistance equal to a month's pay. Besides, they would remain on the payroll for a period of up to two months till they found new employ-

ment. Parliament has stripped the people of such a possibility, and this in a situation when the chances to get a job are almost nill”, said GTUA President Irakli Tugushi. He warned that the protest actions might become massive unless the union demands were met and the Labour Code revised.

### **GEORGIA: UNIONS STILL UNDER PRESSURE**

The Georgian Trade Union Amalgamation issued a statement 7 September 2004 saying that the pressure on the trade unions, including the GTUA and its leaders, had become even sterner. President of Georgia had explicitly demanded that, in a week's time, the unions should yield all their property to the government and threatened to initiate criminal proceedings against them should they refuse to obey.

The GTUA Board replied that “there is hardly any other civilized country in the world where they treat trade unions in such a manner. The union rights, including their proprietary interests, are recognized by the country's Constitution, Georgian legislation and international instruments.

The Georgian Trade Union Amalgamation has managed to protect and retain its property through all the harsh times, and it is the leaders of the trade union centre who must be accredited with this accomplishment.

“We are aware, the Statement reads, that the way the GTUA meets its statutory obligations is not always faultless. But we are also well aware that trade unions cannot be strong in a country

with rudimentary civil society where industry lies in ruins, where miserable wages are not paid for ages and a sizeable portion of the able-bodied population is jobless, where the rights of thousands of workers are systematically violated”.

The GTUA Board said they were ready for dialogue with all state authorities, and demanded a meeting with the President and Prime-Minister of Georgia.

### **KAZAKHSTAN: UNIONS GETTING READY FOR ELECTION**

The General Council of the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan, FTURK, gathered in June to approve the position to be taken by the unions in the elections to the Majilis, the country's Parliament 19 September 2004. They called on their members to vote for those candidates who share their goals and views. There are a lot of problems to solve in the country. The work remuneration system remains unfair, the pay arrears have not been settled for thousands of workers, while discriminatory employment and dismissal practices are not uncommon among the employers, especially in what concerns women workers. One in nine able-bodied citizens of the Republic is unemployed.

The FTURK has supported the programme of political modernisation of Kazakhstan announced by President Nazarbayev at the congress of *Otan* Party 15 June 2004. The programme provides for a greater role to be played by trade unions in protecting the workers' rights and in strengthening the social partnership institutions.

## **KAZAKHSTAN WORKERS HOLD CONGRESS**

The Second Congress of Workers of the Republic of Kazakhstan was convened by the Federation of Trade Unions from 26-27 August 2004. It gathered together over 300 delegates representing various categories of workers from all branches of the economy and the social sphere. Congress brought up such burning issues as the creation of new jobs, the improvement of occupational health and safety, and the enhancement of the unions' role played in society.

Speaking the Congress, FTURK President Siyazbek Mukashev said its aim was to raise the prestige of workers in society and highlight the need for their active involvement in the implementation of economic reform. He demanded an immediate settlement of all pay debts and a timely payment of wages in the future. The total pay arrears currently amount to 39 billion tenghes, or about USD 285 million. The unions argue that the favourable economic situation now emerging in the country provides the necessary prerequisites for overall wage rises. For that reason new normative documents concerning the system of work remuneration will be needed. The Federation also proposes that a general inspection be conducted to check whether the employers make their contributions to the pension funds, and call to account those who delay money transfers.

The Congress appealed to the country's workers and all electors to vote for those candidates for Parliament whose

election platforms and programmes would offer a specific national road towards a strong social state in Kazakhstan and suggest efficient ways of solving top-priority social and economic problems.

## **KYRGYZSTAN: SOCIAL EXPENSES ON THE RISE**

Over the last eight years, the average rate of social benefits has risen by six times to reach 367 Soms (8.7 dollars) a month.

According to a report on the socio-economic indices in 2003 issued by the Kyrgyzstan Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, 636.2 thousand families (54 per cent of the population, or one in two families) enjoy some kind of privilege, while over 11 per cent of the population get state allowances and free social services.

Last year, there were about 499 thousand people in the country who received the monthly low-income benefit. They included children under 16 years, university and college students, disabled persons and jobless pensioners.

In 2003, there were over 48 thousand welfare recipients. Those were inborn invalids, disabled workers, children without parent support, etc.

Compensation for public utilities and electricity bills accounted for the bulk of the sums allocated for financing the social benefits received by different categories of people, such as war veterans, invalids, families living in the highlands, etc.

## **MOLDOVA: UNIONS TO PROTECT CONSUMERS**

The Confederation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Moldova, CSRМ, has publicised its attitude to the draft Procedures and Regulations for the Adjustment of Rates proposed by the National Agency for Regulation and Control in the Energy Sector.

The CSRМ insists that the opinions of the trade unions and employers be taken into account when considering the rates and charges. The unions believe it would be reasonable that all problems concerning new electricity rates should first be considered by the Republican Tripartite Commission for Collective Bargaining. The National Agency must notify the local authorities, the central government, the trade unions and the employers' organisations about any decision to change the rates. Simultaneously, they must be informed about the measures to be taken to protect the consumers. Any plans to change the rates need more publicity, transparency and information.

## **MOLDOVA: EDUCATION WORKERS PROTEST**

An enlarged meeting of activists of the Education and Science Workers' Union of Moldova adopted a statement expressing deep alarm at the plight of employees in the sector whose average pay is less than half the minimum consumer budget.

Repeated appeals by the trade union to the government in 2003-2004 to raise the salaries by 100 per cent were left unheeded. Moreover, in spite of the

union's insistence, no negotiations have as yet taken place to discuss the issue.

Given the general situation in the country, participants of the meeting decided to withhold from calling a nationwide strike 1 September 2004. However they warned that this should not be interpreted as abandonment of their previous demands.

The statement says the decision was taken to resume the pay talks between the Government and the unions as from 1 October. If the workers' interests are further ignored the union will organise protest rallies and picket lines at the houses of the government and parliament.

## **RUSSIA: LAW ON BENEFITS IN FORCE**

A new law amending a number of federal and local legislative acts has taken effect in the Russian Federation. The law, initiated by the government, is meant to reform the system of social benefits, guarantees and compensation that citizens have enjoyed up to now.

Prior to the event, a wave of mass protests rolled over the country involving the population, political parties and trade unions in protest against the government scheme to change the system of benefit and compensation payment.

The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, FNPR, has sent its amendments to the draft law to the State Duma, and has succeeded in getting some of them approved.

For instance, the provision that the minimum work remuneration cannot be lower than the subsistence minimum and that it must be gradually increased has been kept in the new law. Article 135 of the Labour Code has been supplemented with the clause that each year, before the state budget is approved, the Russian Tripartite Commission for Regulating Social and Labour Disputes shall develop and submit their joint recommendations for the pay system for workers in the budgetary sphere.

Agreement has also been reached on the state-guaranteed “social package” that offers a “basket of social services”, such as additional free medical aid, free use of commuter service or a free return ticket for intercity transport to those who must travel a long way to the place of recuperation. The “social service basket” will from 2005 be available to all citizens that have a right to such services (except for the Chernobyl disaster liquidators). Starting from 2006, they will have a choice between free services and compensation in cash. In this way, one of the main FNPR demands, that of the possibility of choosing between the benefits and the cash payments, has been met. The main guarantees for workers living in the Extreme North regions have also been retained.

### **RUSSIA: UNIONS CRITICAL OF DRAFT BUDGET 2005**

FNPR leader Mikhail Shmakov told a session of the Russian Tripartite Commission in September 2004 that the budget proposals for the following year had been calculated based on an inad-

missibly low rate of minimum work remuneration. The proposals did not specify whether such a budget would meet the requirements of the amended laws on social benefits. Meanwhile, the information from trade unions in different parts of Russia shows that the tax revenues collected by local budgets are hardly sufficient to meet all the commitments stipulated by the law on the payment of benefits.

Considerable deficits have appeared in the Pension Fund and the Social Insurance Fund as a result of the government decision to reduce the single social tax. “After destroying the social insurance system, the State has laid hands on the social security scheme. Thus, defying common sense and the union protests, the executive power has deliberately undertaken the commitment to gap the deficits of the extra-budgetary funds and tax revenues that have nothing to do with the wages fund. Now the government will have to solve the puzzle”, said Mikhail Shmakov who is the trade union coordinator in the Tripartite Commission.

### **RUSSIA: COLLECTIVE ACTION ON AGENDA**

At its session 15 September 2004, the FNPR Executive Committee condemned any forms of terrorism and extremism. The Executive members stood in memory of the people who died in the recent terrorist attacks in Russia. A decision adopted at the session notes that “an anti-crisis system of state governance must be built within the framework of the Constitution whose aim it should be to make state authorities more efficient in solving socio-eco-



conomic issues, and strengthen the country's unity and integrity, all of which would help prevent and finally neutralise terrorist activity".

The Executive Committee called on the FNPR affiliates to keep ready for collective action. Should radical differences arise in the course of preparation of the General Tripartite Agreement, it might be necessary to consider organising the second stage of the All-Russia Trade Union Protest Action 'No to Attacks on Workers' Social Rights and Interests'.

### **TAJIKISTAN TO IMPROVE SOCIAL SPHERE**

In August 2004, the Tajikistan government approved an additional budget worth \$18.3 million for the second half of the year. Forty-four per cent of the sum will go for the development of the social sphere. The adoption of the additional budget was possible due to the overfulfilment by almost 12 per cent of the credit side of the main state budget for 2004.

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Finance stressed that the Tajikistan government treated the development of the social sphere as a top priority. Thus, the Head of State instructed the Minister of Finance to allocate a sum equal to \$440 thousand for the construction of the premises for the Institute of Gastroenterology

### **UKRAINE: GENERAL AGREEMENT OBSERVED**

As they met 5 July 2004, President of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine,

FTUU, Olexander Stoyan told Ukraine's President Leonid Kuchma that most of the provisions of the General Tripartite Agreement were being implemented. However, there still were unsettled wage debts in the coalmining industry and in the agro-industrial complex.

### **UKRAINE: SOCIAL CONTRACT SIGNED**

A social contract was signed 23 July 2004 between the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine, FTUU, and Prime-Minister Viktor Yanukovich who is also a candidate for President of Ukraine.

The expediency of supporting the nomination of Viktor Yanukovich had been widely discussed by the FTUU affiliates. The unions noted that during his tenure of Prime Minister he had consistently contributed to the solution of social and economic problems, and promoted the principles of social partnership. Under the contract, the FTUU has undertaken to campaign for his candidature for President and give him organisational assistance in the elections.

If elected, Viktor Yanukovich pledged himself to promote the adoption and implementation of an annual Programme for Social and Economic Development of Ukraine. That included creating at least 600 thousand new jobs every year, settling the wage arrears by the end of 2004, increasing the wages in the economic sphere by three times, and raising gradually the minimum wage to the subsistence minimum level. Apart from that, he promised to comply with the Law on Trade Unions, and accomplish the creation of an efficient national system of social insurance.

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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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