



inform **contact**

NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

No.67

January-March 2010

GCTU COMMISSION SCRUTINISES CIS LABOUR LEGISLATIONS

The GCTU Commission for the Protection of Workers' Social and Economic Interests and for Legal Issues held a meeting in Moscow 26 February 2010, chaired by Melik Mirzoyev, General Secretary of the International Confederation of Trade Unions of Workers in the Oil and Gas Industries, and Construction Workers in the Oil and Gas Complex.

Commission members, who represent GCTU-affiliated national trade union centres and industry-based Trade Union Internationals, reviewed a comparative analysis of labour legislations in CIS countries, particularly in what concerns the procedures of signing, amending and terminating labour contracts, prepared by the GCTU Legal Department.

The Commission recommended that the paper be given another brush with due consideration of the discussion held at the session, and circulated to the GCTU affiliates for eventual use in their activities. Participants also proposed that a framework labour

agreement be developed, based on labour laws of the CIS countries to be submitted for approval at the next session.

The session heard information on the economic and social situation in the CIS member-states.

The discussion was summed up by Natalia Podshibyakina, a GCTU Deputy General Secretary.

GCTU LEADER VISITS UKRAINE

From 24-25 February 2010, the General Secretary of the GCTU, Vladimir Scherbakov, stayed on a working visit in Ukraine. He met with a delegation of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FTUU) headed by FTUU President Vasyl Khara to discuss current questions of strengthening the links between the GCTU and the FTUU and the cooperation among the trade union centres of CIS countries in implementing solidarity programmes. Participants exchanged views on a wide range of issues concerning trade union actions to protect work-

ers' interests in the conditions of economic recession, unemployment growth, falling incomes of the population, and rising prices and inflation.

Vladimir Scherbakov took part in the inaugural ceremonies of Ukraine's new President Viktor Yanukovich that were held in Kyiv.

AZERBAIJAN: UNIONISING TRANSNATIONALS

In an interview to the National News Agency in January 2010, President of the Azerbaijan Trade Union Confederation (ATUC), Sattar Mekhbalyev, said "the process of building trade union organisations at overseas-based transnational enterprises in the private sector is gaining momentum".

The process is not a short-lived campaign as the trade unions have been addressing the problem in a systematic and purposeful way. The trade union centre receives information on the number of trade union bodies set up and registered almost every day.

It is noteworthy that the heads of some overseas-based transnational companies who previously obstructed the process now confess to the ATUC that they wish they had not done so. They say the unions should have been built some 3-5 years ago, with the first transnational coming to stay in the country.

"All this goes to show that Azerbaijan unions are turning into a well organised force on guard of workers' rights and interests", concluded the union leader.

ARMENIA: UNIONS WORRIED ABOUT PRICE RISES

The Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia (CTUA) issued a statement in mid-March expressing its concern over the continued rises in prices of consumer goods and services. The Confederation has no doubt this will have a harsh effect on the quality of life of the population, with the social crisis growing deeper, the standards of living sinking, and the number of low-income families increasing.

The new price rises would not have affected the living standards so dramatically, had a number of essential laws been adopted in good time. As the country still lacks a wage indexation law, the purchasing power of wages has not been normalised accordingly. The cost of the minimum consumer goods basket, which serves as the basis for calculating the minimum wage, pensions benefits and other welfare payments, has not been estimated either.

The CTUA expressed the hope that the state authorities would take strong measures to alleviate the hard social situation of the population and thus prevent additional tensions in society.

BELARUS: UNIONS GET HIGHER MINIMUM WAGE IN PLACE

The Belarus government decreed that as from 1 January 2010 the minimum wage in the republic be raised to reach 258.6 thousand local rubles a month, a sum equivalent to US\$ 91.

The decision to raise the minimum wage came following an initiative advanced by the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FTUB). The trade union proposal was supported by the country's President, Alexander Lukashenko, and, as a result, Belarus emerged as one of the CIS states with the minimum wages exceeding the subsistence minimum budget.

The unions have long been struggling persistently to achieve this aim within the framework of the solidarity campaign "Minimum Wages Not Lower Than the Subsistence Minimum!" launched by the GCTU some years ago.

GEORGIA: TRADE UNIONS PROTEST IN CENTRAL TBILISI

The Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) organised a march in central Tbilisi 1 March 2010 to demand that the authorities provide decent working conditions for teachers, medical workers and small entrepreneurs.

About five thousand marchers protested vigorously against the unceasing deterioration of social situation in Georgia, growing unemployment, almost daily rises in utility bills, and violation of workers' rights.

Despite the attempts to intimidate people out of participating in the protest action, workers came to Tbilisi even from remote areas.

Their demands included also a retirement pension equal to US\$100, as promised by the government.

The official subsistence minimum in the country amounts currently to 120 laris (about US\$78), whereas the old age pension is a mere 85 laris.

GTUC Representatives warned that if their demands were left unheeded they will take more massive protest actions.

KAZAKHSTAN: WORKERS TO GET STRONGER SOCIAL SUPPORT

Starting from 1 January 2010, a number of new social support measures have been carried out in Kazakhstan.

In keeping with the law "On obligatory social insurance", the government raised the compensation for temporary disability and the survivors' benefit by 9 per cent. Besides, old age pensions have been raised by 25 per cent.

It was also decided to establish, as from 1 January 2010:

- the minimum wage at 14,952 tenges (equivalent to US\$101);
- the minimum pension at 12,344 tenges (US\$83); and
- the subsistence minimum at 14,952 tenges (equivalent to US\$101)

As follows from above, the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FTURK) has succeeded in its efforts to bring the minimum wage up to the level of the subsistence minimum.

The average monthly pay in Kazakhstan was US\$ 442 at the end of 2009, one of the highest figures among the CIS countries.

MOLDOVA: TRADE UNION DEMANDS MET

The National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova (CNSM), the Moldovan Government and the National Confederation of Employers' Organisations adopted a Joint Convention on the Guaranteed Minimum Wage 5 February 2010. The minimum wage in the country will now be 1,100 lei (about US\$ 88) a month.

Although the employers have got the right to implement it step by step, the innovation must take full effect not later than 1 May 2010.

According to an earlier statement of CNSM President Oleg Budza, the hourly pay in Moldova was the lowest in Europe and amounted to 0.25 euro.

The official Moldovan press service has also reported that the statement by the CNSM in connection with rate increases for electricity, gas and heating had been considered by the government, and the machinery for granting appropriate compensation to the socially vulnerable groups of population would be made public in the near future.

RUSSIA: PRESIDENT MEETS WITH FNPR LEADER

President of the Russian Federation Dmitry Medvedev had a regular working meeting with the FNPR leader Mikhail Shmakov in the Kremlin 11 January 2010 to discuss problems, such as the labour market situation, measures to cut down unemployment, and the wage arrears dynamics.

The President said the state authorities jointly with trade unions had been

taking energetic steps to remove, or at least alleviate, the negative impact of the financial and economic crisis on the labour market. For this purpose, a whole series of economic and social measures had been developed and carried out.

Mikhail Shmakov agreed that the state measures to ease the pressure of the crisis on the labour market and workers had produced some effect, but failed to increase employment in the country. At the end of 2009, there were 2.05 million officially unemployed, and, if calculated according to ILO methods, the total number of jobless people would amount to 7.7 million.

In this connection the union leader emphasised the importance of speedy ratification of ILO conventions that are most in demand in everyday life today, in particular Convention No. 135 concerning Protection and Facilities to be afforded to Workers' Representatives in the Undertaking.

President Medvedev noted that the labour market was the slowest to recover after the crisis, but that could not excuse inactivity on the part of both the government and the social partners. What concerns the ILO conventions, all the necessary instructions had been given and the government was presently thrashing them out. Part of the conventions are ready to be signed and forwarded to the State Duma for ratification.

RUSSIA: WAGE ARREARS SOARING

In early March 2010, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia

(FNPR) published data on the growth of wage arrears.

“Whereas at the end of 2009 the wage debts went down to 4.6 billion rubles, already in January-February 2010 they went up again and returned to 4.8-5 billion rubles”, a FNPR statement said.

“Labour conflicts are taking place practically every week in Russia, many of them unreported in the media. Different regions of the Russian Federation register up to five such conflicts a week”.

FNPR statistics show that the average period of wage nonpayment is currently almost three months. This is first of all typical for industrial enterprises in the sphere of engineering, agriculture and radio-electronics.

Thus, according to FNPR estimates, the wage arrears have risen by 9 per cent in Russia since the beginning of the year.

Meanwhile, the Russian Committee for Labour and Wages reported that 200 thousand workers had not received their wages in time by the beginning of 2010.

RUSSIA: MIKHAIL SHMAKOV PERSON OF THE YEAR 2009

The International Awards “Person of the Year 2009” were presented to the winners at an official ceremony in the Moscow Kremlin 25 February 2010.

The award is granted for a remarkable contribution to the development of the nation and for strengthening the stand of Russia in the international

arena. President of the GCTU and the FNPR Mikhail Shmakov won the nomination “Leader of Nongovernmental Organisation” for his contribution to the improvement of the country’s social policy and labour legislation.

Established in 2001, the Person of the Year Award is now widely acclaimed. Its aim is to help achieve unity and mutual understanding among society, business and state power, draw popular attention to persons exerting noticeable influence on the country’s development, promote the formulation of a public consent atmosphere, and encourage activity for good of the nation.

The decision on awarding the prize is taken by a panel of experts comprising outstanding public figures, representatives of state administration, company managers and influential mass media.

Speaking at the gala ceremony, Mikhail Shmakov said “I believe the hard times will soon be over, and all of us will come to certain conclusions that will help us in the future”.

RUSSIA: FNPR GENERAL COUNCIL SUMS UP FOR 2009

A regular session of the General Council of the Federation of Independent trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) was held in Moscow 17 February 2010. Among its participants were representatives of the Presidential Administration, the government, and the State Duma, and leaders of the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU).

Following the debates on the report about trade union activities in the

present-day economic situation presented by FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov, the General Council approved of the contribution by trade unions to the government's anti-crisis policy. Its realisation has not only helped escape a deeper recession, but also placed the economy, rather quickly, in a trajectory of growth. Owing to the implementation of regional programmes of reducing labour market tensions, the country managed to escape mass dismissals of personnel, and reduce part-time employment.

In the meantime, the situation in the country is characterised by an unstable economic recovery tendency, with the labour market lagging behind the economy in what concerns surmounting the crisis.

The General Council proposed that the package of bailout measures should be supplemented with the establishment of a minimum wage on a par with the minimum consumer basket, index-linked wages and salaries in the budget sector, increased payment periods and amounts of the unemployment benefits, and compulsory insurance against joblessness.

In his address to the session, Deputy Minister of Health and Social Development Alexander Safonov spoke favourably both of the cooperation between the government and the FNPR, and the performance of the Russian Tripartite Commission in 2009. He said a whole number of ILO conventions proposed by the FNPR for ratification had gone through all stages of consultation, and would be ratified in the near future. Among them was Convention No. 135 providing the necessary toolkit for protecting elected trade unionists.

As the term of the General Agreement expires in 2010, the General Council approved the concept of a new agreement, with due regard for the priorities in social partnership.

UKRAINE: TRADE UNIONISTS MEET WITH COUNTRY'S PRESIDENT

19 March 2010 President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich met with the leaders of the national trade union organisations in the House of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FTUU).

Participants of the meeting discussed problems topical for the trade unions and entire Ukrainian society, such as overcoming the crisis, reactivating domestic enterprises, providing people with secure jobs and decent pay, and raising the efficiency of social protection for workers.

The Head of State made an exhaustive analysis of the economic and social situation in country, specified the priorities for economic and political development, and dwelled on the signs of the crisis in the Ukrainian economy and financial system, in particular, on the decline in production, unemployment and low wages.

The President also spoke of the ways to improve social dialogue, ensure the fulfillment of collective agreements, and raise workers' social protection to a maximum possible degree. He assured those present that the authorities will in future consult trade unions on all issues relating to the socio-economic situation of workers.

In his contribution to the discussion, FTUU President Vasyl Khara stressed

the need to enhance the role of trade unions in the building of civil society in Ukraine. Simultaneously, society must pay the most careful attention to the protection of rights of nongovernmental organisations and, in particular, their right to exercise public control over state authorities and employers, adoption and observance of main labour standards in conformity with ILO conventions, and promotion of social dialogue.

The Head of State was given trade union proposals concerning further development of socio-economic and labour relations entitled The National Trade Union Report "Work in Ukraine: Need for Quality Change for the Sake of Public Efficiency and Decent Life", together with proposals for updating the social dialogue.

Participating in the debates were representatives of all-Ukraine trade unions and trade union centres that are members of the Joint Representative Body of Trade Unions headed by FTUU President Vasyl Khara.

TUI OF PUBLIC UTILITIES, LOCAL INDUSTRY AND SERVICES WORKERS HOLDS CONGRESS

The 5th regular congress of the International Trade Union Alliance of Public Utilities, Local Industry and Services Workers was held in Moscow 18 February 2010.

The event gathered leaders of the industrial trade unions from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Russia. Delegates of the affiliates in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova could not attend for a variety of reasons.

The General Confederation of Trade Unions was represented by its General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov and Deputy General Secretary Albert Potapov who featured as congress guests.

The activity report for the period under review had been circulated among the delegates in written form as part of the congress documentation kit.

GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov addressed the congress with a report on the activities of the GCTU and its member organisations in the current conditions. He focused particularly on the pressing necessity for a more integrated industry-based trade union movement through mergers of allied national unions and TUIs.

The Congress passed a resolution concerning the plight of the housing and public utilities sectors in CIS countries proposing specific measures to develop their infrastructures. New versions of the Alliance's Constitution and Regulations for the Control and Auditing Commission were approved.

Chairman of the Belarussian affiliate Nikolay Suschenya was elected President of the TUI for a term of one year with consecutive rotation. A vice chair of the Russian Trade Union of Life Support Workers, Nina Filippova, was elected General Secretary, for a five-year term of office.

The Congress appointed the TUI Council out of the leaders of the affiliated organisations, and elected the Control and Audit Commission.

PUBLISHED BY

**INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT AND
DEPARTMENT FOR HUMANITARIAN PROBLEMS AND INFORMATION**

OF THE GCTU

42 LENINSKY PROSPEKT
117199 MOSCOW, RUSSIA
TELEFAX +7(095) 938-2155
PHONE +7(095)938-7215
+7(095)938-8274
TELEX 411 010

Web site: www.vkp.ru; E-mail: 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 ON 22 SEPTEMBER 1993, AND THE THIRD CONGRESS OF THE GCTU ON 18 SEPTEMBER 1997

THE BASIC OBJECTIVES OF THE GCTU ARE:

- CO-ORDINATION OF ITS AFFILIATES' ACTIVITIES ON THE PROTECTION OF SOCIAL RIGHTS OF WORKERS, STUDENTS AND PENSIONERS;*
- ASSISTANCE IN THEIR PROTECTION OF TRADE UNION RIGHTS AND GUARANTEES;*
- AND*
- ORGANISING TRADE UNION SOLIDARITY AND CO-ORDINATION OF ITS AFFILIATES' INTERNATIONAL POLICIES.*

THE GCTU BUILDS ITS ACTIVITIES IN CONFORMITY WITH THE UNIVERSALLY RECOGNISED STANDARDS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW, WITH FULL RESPECT FOR ITS AFFILIATES' COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE AND THE EQUALITY OF THEIR RIGHTS AND DUTIES.

THE GCTU AFFILIATES NATIONAL TRADE UNION CENTRES OF ARMENIA, BELARUS, GEORGIA, KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGHYZSTAN, MOLDOVA, RUSSIA, TAJIKISTAN, UZBEKISTAN, AND UKRAINE, AS WELL AS 37 BRANCH TRADE UNION INTERNATIONALS. BESIDES BILATERAL AGREEMENTS ON CO-OPERATION WAS SIGNED WITH THE TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION OF AZERBAIJAN .

THE GCTU IS READY TO CO-OPERATE WITH ANY OTHER NATIONAL TRADE UNION FEDERATIONS, IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR BEING MEMBERS OF OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THEIR PARTICIPATION IN GCTU ACTIVITIES DOES NOT IN ANY WAY RESTRICT THE INDEPENDENCE OF ITS AFFILIATES.

THE CONFEDERATION ENJOYS OBSERVER STATUS WITH THE CIS INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY, THE CIS COUNCIL OF HEADS OF STATE, THE CIS COUNCIL OF HEADS OF GOVERNMENT, THE CIS INTERSTATE ECONOMIC COMMITTEE, ETC.

INTERNATIONALLY, IT IS IN CONSULTATIVE RELATIONS WITH THE ILO , UN DPI AND ECOSOC.

THE GCTU SUPREME BODIES ARE THE CONGRESS, CONVENED ONCE EVERY FIVE YEARS, AND, IN THE INTERVALS BETWEEN THE CONGRESSES, THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

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

PRESIDENT OF THE GCTU IS VLADIMIR SCHERBAKOV

DEAR READERS

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
