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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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GCTU EXECUTIVE MEETS IN KYIV

A meeting of the Executive Committee of the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) was held in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, 27 October 2011.

Participants heard a report by GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov on the progress made since the last GCTU congress and on priorities in preparing for the next, 7th Congress of the Confederation. He stressed that the GCTU had focused on the fight for decent jobs, decent wages, decent living standards, and effective social guarantees. Commonwealth trade unions have managed to win a significant increase in the minimum wages and pensions, but the polarisation of income and wealth of different segments of the population was still unacceptable.

The Executive Committee reviewed the results of the joint campaign «For a Decent Pension!» waged by trade

unions in Commonwealth countries in 2010–2011. In the course of the campaign, trade unions had consistently demanded that the authorities and employers raise pensions. However, pensioners still remain the poorest part of the population. Therefore, the union solidarity action for decent pensions will be continued into 2012–14, till the sum of the pension is high enough to compensate at least for 40% of the lost income.

Summing up the results of the 2011 World Day for Decent Work (WDDW) in the region, the Executive noted that the massive participation of the region's workers in WDDW activities had been a fresh manifestation of their solidarity with trade unions around the world.

President of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) Vasyl Khara told participants of what had been done by Ukrainian trade unions to improve social dialogue in the country. The main and most effective

form of social dialogue in Ukraine is concluding collective agreements currently covering about 9 million workers. There are 92 sectoral and 27 regional agreements in effect now, with almost 100,000 collective agreements signed at workplaces, which embraces 82% of the workforce.

The Federation is involved in the legislative process on issues concerning social and labour relations. A National Tripartite Social and Economic Council has been established. Despite this, in the period 1996–2010 trade unions organised more than 10 all-Ukraine protest actions, 12 sectoral collective disputes, and 1660 collective disputes at enterprise level. The FPU itself entered into four collective labour disputes with the Cabinet of Ministers in connection with the government's violation of labour laws and failure to observe the general agreements signed.

In a special statement, the GCTU Executive Committee expressed its deep concern over the numerous facts of intervention by public authorities in FPU activities. Such actions against trade unions by leading functionaries of the state law enforcement agencies, the Statement stresses, run counter to the universally accepted principles of international law and the core ILO conventions, and impair the status of Ukraine as a democratic and law-governed social state. The GCTU insists

that the top leadership of Ukraine should carefully review the situation and take appropriate measures to stop the illegal actions. The Statement was sent to the President, the Prime Minister and the Prosecutor General of Ukraine, the International Confederation of Trade Unions, and the ILO.

TOWARDS 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF GCTU

As part of the preparations for its 20th anniversary, which falls on 16 April 2012, the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) called on its member organisations to strengthen their unity, develop comprehensive cooperation, and jointly meet the challenges of our time and economic globalisation.

«The unification of the national trade union centres and sectoral Trade Union Internationals in our region, says a special appeal by the GCTU Executive Committee, was claimed by life itself and met the fundamental needs and aspirations of workers and their trade unions. From the very beginning, the GCTU and its affiliates have raised their voice to say a resounding trade union «No!» to the pseudo-market reforms at the expense of ordinary citizens, and placed the social protection of employees at the centre of their activities.

«Over the past period, the GCTU-affiliated national trade union centres have upheld their indepen-

dence, occupied their solid niche in the political and social systems of their countries, and become influential institutions of civil society. They are involved in legislative activities, both nationally and internationally, and it is owing to their efforts that all CIS countries have adopted laws on trade unions and other legal acts that are important for the trade union movement.

«On behalf of the trade union movement in the region, the GCTU has formulated, and adheres to, the concept of social partnership at the interstate level. Today, the Confederation and its affiliates interact fruitfully with the interstate bodies of the CIS and the EurAsEC, representing and defending the trade union views on social and labour issues. The GCTU has been the initiator of, and a direct participant in, the development of socially oriented framework laws at the Inter-Parliamentary Assemblies of the CIS and the EurAsEC.

«The GCTU has been consistently advocating for the full integration of the CIS member states, with a strong social dimension being added to this process as an important means of developing the national economies and improving people's living standards.

Having received international recognition, the GCTU and its affiliates have actively engaged in the fight of the world trade union movement to protect the rights and interests of workers».

GCTU SUPPORTING CIS & INTEGRATION

At its meeting in Kyiv 27 October 2011, the Executive Committee of the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) adopted a Statement in anticipation of the 20th Anniversary of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which will be marked in December 2011.

The document reminds that since the creation of the CIS, the Confederation had been supporting the processes of integration and advocating the development of its social dimension. Business-like contacts have been established with interstate bodies of the Commonwealth. In 1994, the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly adopted the Charter of Social Rights and Guarantees of Citizens in the Newly Independent States. Since then, the Confederation has been an active participant in the formulation of interstate documents relating to socio-economic development.

Today, the CIS has a critical role to play in ensuring stability and security in Eurasia. Together, the countries of the Commonwealth address the most complex problems, including those resulting from the global financial and economic crisis.

However, the Statement says, the CIS countries are experiencing today a number of serious difficulties. Trade unions are particularly concerned about the state of labour

relations. A significant number of people, including many young persons, do not have a decent job. Attempts to reduce work security and liberalise labour legislation have become too often. There are unacceptably low levels of income and a huge differentiation in the distribution of wealth. The principles of social partnership are not always respected.

The GCTU believes that these negative effects can be eliminated through building in the countries of the region of a new model of development - economically viable, socially equitable and ecologically sustainable. The unions are confident that political decisions should proceed from the needs of people. The Commonwealth must respect the fundamental principles and rights at work. Decent work and observance of ILO standards should be the goal for all public and private institutions.

GCTU CONDEMNS ATTACKS ON UNIONS IN GEORGIA

On the 29th of November, 2011 the GCTU issued a statement on the developments in Georgia which, in particular, reads as follows:

«Together with the world trade union movement, the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) expresses its serious concern over the situation in Georgia where the state authorities and employers supported by the Government

keep harassing the trade unions and grossly violating workers' fundamental rights recognized around the world.

«Against the background of economic difficulties, the authorities have launched an offensive on the rights of workers. The new Labour Code, adopted amidst strong protests of trade unions, conflicts with the eight fundamental ILO conventions ratified by Georgia, and is considered to be one of the most reactionary in the world. In line with this Code, the Labour Inspectorate has been dismissed, the employer has received the right to sack workers on a whim, and the unemployment benefit has virtually been abolished. Almost a quarter of the population live below the poverty line.

«An undeclared war has been unleashed against the Georgian Trade Union Confederation, a GCTU affiliate. Discrimination against trade unions, interference in their internal affairs, and attempts to undermine their financial and material status have acquired a permanent nature. The Government and business, with the connivance of the courts, have actually rejected social dialogue. Trade union demands or proposals are either neglected or opposed adamantly, which adds to social tensions in the country. A dramatic manifestation of such tensions, which has had global repercussions, is provided by the recent developments around the strike of workers at the «Hercules» Metallurgical Plant in Kutaisi, uncer-

emoniously terminated by illegal police intervention.

«Today, the Georgian trade unions need wide international trade union solidarity and help from the world trade union centres, the International Labour Organisation, the EU institutions, etc. The GCTU shares the position taken by the International Trade Union Confederation and the European Trade Union Confederation who said they would seek withdrawal of trade preferences from Georgia, as long as it continues to violate the rights of trade unions.

We call, once again, on our member organisations to render friendly support and solidarity to the Georgian trade unions in their struggle to protect their rights and the legitimate interests of workers in their country».

GCTU CONCERNED OVER SITUATION IN KAZAKHSTAN

«The General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) representing 50 million workers is greatly concerned over the recent aggravation of developments in Kazakhstan», says a special GCTU statement issued 20 December 2011. «The protests by striking workers in Zhanaozen who demanded the payment of wage arrears escalated into street events which were used by incendiaries for their own extremist purposes. According to the latest data, dozens of protesters suffered, with 14 people killed

and 100 injured, as the police suppressed the unrest.

«The GCTU expresses its deep regret at the tragic loss of human life. We believe that peaceful solutions to the problem can only be found by joint efforts of workers, trade unions, employers and the government, through dialogue and negotiation, and within the framework of the opportunities offered by the Kazakhstan labour legislation.

«We call on the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan to intervene decisively in the protracted labour dispute, prevent its further growth, and take the necessary steps to resolve it in the interests of all the parties concerned».

AZERBAIJAN: COUNCIL TO PROTECT WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The Azerbaijan Trade Unions Confederation (AHIK) has established a Council whose purpose it is to protect the rights of women and render legal assistance to them.

«The Council will deal with complaints related to the problems of working women - said AHIK President Sattar Mehbaliev – and with the facts of discrimination they face. We have instructed our legal department to assist women faced with problems in the legal field. And it does not matter whether they are trade union members or not. Any woman can turn to us and get legal assistance».

AZERBAIJAN: UNIONS REJECT DISCRIMINATION AT WORK

In conjunction with the ILO, the Azerbaijan Trade Unions Confederation (AHIK) held in Baku a conference «The role of trade unions in the fight against discrimination at work» 23 November 2011. The event was attended by over 120 trade unionists, representatives of public agencies and employers, and experts of the ILO and other international organisations.

Speaking to its participants, AHIK President Sattar Mehbaliyev said the struggle for equality at work was a priority in the activities of trade unions, which is reflected in the Constitution and other documents of the Confederation. He urged the social partners to cooperate in this field. Participants were provided with an analysis of gender discrimination in the workplace prepared by trade unions.

The experts of the ILO Moscow Office presented recommendations for eliminating discrimination in the workplace and told participants how the application of ILO standards could help achieve this goal.

Azerbaijan's trade unions have launched a campaign to combat discrimination in the beginning of this year. Since that time they have held five «round tables» on this issue, involving over 400 trade unionists, and representatives of public authorities and employers. A large number of educational and promotional materials have been released.

BELARUS: FTUB INSISTING ON PENSION RECALCULATION

The Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FTUB), for the second time this year, addressed the Council of Ministers with a letter stressing the need to recalculate pensions payable to working retirees.

The gist of the question is as follows. Belarusians working in several occupations harmful to health go on a preferential pension at the age of 50, but the dire need forces them to continue working. Most remain usually on their old jobs in the same harmful environments, since to find any other employment in a small town is problematic. After the new law entered into force, beginning with August 2006, the additional length of service earned after preferential retirement is no longer set off. As a result, when the worker reaches the regular retirement age (60 for men and 55 for women), the amount of his/her pension will not be recalculated.

The FTUB has developed an amendment to the current legislation concerning recalculation of pensions to persons who continue their employment in unfavourable working conditions after the preferential retirement age.

BELARUS: FTUB LEADER MEETS IMF EXPERTS

FTUB President Leonid Kozik met with experts of an IMF mission of

technical assistance on social protection systems, which was on a visit in Belarus at the invitation of the country's government.

Participants discussed the possible social consequences of reforming public enterprises, improvement of social protection, and targeted support for vulnerable groups of the population. The IMF experts expressed interest in FTUB's initiatives aiming to prevent potential negative consequences for workers and the national economy of Belarus.

BELARUS: PRIVATISATION MUST NOT INFRINGE WORKERS' INTERESTS

The session of the Presidium of the FTUB Council held 24 November 2011 devoted much attention to the issue of privatisation. The question is particularly topical, as 245 large public enterprises are to be privatised, and another 134 will go corporate during 2011–12. On top of that, 600 unprofitable small and medium businesses will also be made private.

FTUB President Leonid Kozik told the meeting the unions were anxious to protect the workers from being hit by the privatisation process. «That's why we believe, he said, that compulsory preservation of jobs, the primary trade union organisation, and the collective agreement should be a sine qua non of privatisation».

The trade union organisations will monitor the process of preparing state-owned enterprises for privatization, and take preventive measures to protect workers' labour rights and socio-economic interests.

The Presidium also spoke out against the attempts by some individual employers to replace the social guarantees negotiated through collective bargaining with the so-called social package, as there is no clear-cut definition of what the «social package» must include. This gives scope for the employer's own interpretation of its contents. For this reason, the FTUB believes such substitution to be ruining the established system of labour relations

The FTUB intends to concentrate its further efforts on the conclusion of collective agreements in organisations and develop, together with employers, common social guarantees for the whole collective.

KAZAKHSTAN: WAYS OF PREVENTING INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES

As part of the country's Decent Work Agenda for 2010–12, the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FTURK), jointly with the ILO, held a round table on «Collective labour disputes and conflicts: the ways of prevention and regulation».

In addition to trade unionists of all levels, the seminar was attended

by senior officials of ministries, the General Prosecutor's Office, national companies, the Presidential Commission on Human Rights, the Republican employers' associations, and by independent experts.

Participants discussed the role of social partners in the prevention and management of collective labour disputes, their causes, the practice of their settlement, and the ways of achieving a consensus between the parties involved in labour disputes.

The main conclusion made at the debate was that at a time of socio-economic reform Kazakhstan was in need of a system of effective prevention and resolution of conflicts at work, based on the principles of social dialogue, the best consideration of the interests of the labour relation actors, the rule of law, and the promotion of social justice.

Following the discussion, participants adopted recommendations.

KAZAKHSTAN: UNION LEADER SENDS LETTER TO COUNTRY'S PRESIDENT

On the 26th of December 2011, the FTURK leader Siyazbek Mukashev sent a letter to President Nazarbayev in connection with the events in the city of Zhanaozen, where 14 people were killed and about 100 injured as police suppressed the unrest stirred up by protests of striking workers.

The FTURK believes that, contrary to the assertions, the management of the oil and gas companies have taken no steps to settle the labour dispute. With the huge profits coming from oil sales, the companies have done almost nothing to modernise the production, upgrade the outdated emergency equipment, improve the hard working conditions, or solve social problems. The relatively high wages of oil workers are devalued by the most expensive subsistence minimum in the country, particularly in what concerns the minimum consumer's basket, while the percentage of the region's population with incomes below the subsistence minimum level remains high. These and other factors have resulted in the labour dispute, which was used by provocative extremist elements to their own advantage. The Confederation is convinced that the protests were carefully planned rather than spontaneous.

The union leader called on the President not to leave the Mangistau region alone with their difficulties, and urged him to give a comprehensive consideration to the socio-economic problems of the region and develop a special program of assistance. Simultaneously, it was necessary to improve the legislation on trade unions, and expand their mandate to protect workers' rights, and participate in production management through collective agreements and accords.

KAZAKHSTAN: GENERAL AGREEMENT SIGNED

A General Agreement for 2012–2014 was signed in Kazakhstan in late December. A working team appointed by the Republican Tripartite Commission on Social Partnership and Regulation of Social and Labour Relations had worked on the document for several months. The General Agreement was drawn up in a new format, and contains the following seven sections:

1. Economic policies;
2. Labour market development, and promotion of effective employment;
3. Wages, incomes and living standards;
4. Social security and social protection, equal opportunities policy;
5. Health and safety, and industrial and environmental security;
6. Development of social partnership, and social responsibility;
7. Scope of the agreement and monitoring its implementation.

The Federation of Trade Unions has successfully insisted that issues of gender, youth, and wage indexation be included in the Agreement.

KYRGYZSTAN: UNIONS CONCERNED OVER LOW LIVING STANDARDS

26 December 2012, Bishkek hosted a roundtable discussion on «Trade unions of Kyrgyzstan today: the quest for the most effective ways of

development», which was attended by the leaders of regional trade union councils and primary trade union organisations. The discussion ended with the adoption of an Appeal of the Federation of Trade Unions of Kyrgyzstan to the President, Parliament and Government.

The Appeal points to an unacceptable drop in the living standards and a huge gap in the incomes of the population in today's Kyrgyzstan. As a result, the constitutional rights of individuals are realised in different ways. The fact that, according to union estimates, 75% of the population earn incomes below the subsistence minimum is scandalous. Employees' labour and social rights and guarantees are under constant attacks. The Kyrgyzstan Federation of Trade Unions (KFTU) believes the necessity of restoring social justice to be the main challenge now facing the country's authorities.

The Federation is worried about the virtual absence of social dialogue. The work of the Republican Tripartite Commission on Regulation of Social and Labour Relations and other tripartite bodies has also been practically frozen. In October, the Government disregarded the KFTU proposals on the draft General Agreement for 2012–14, and the supplement to the Labour Code prepared by the unions with the aim of enhancing workers' rights in the conditions of market-based production relations.

The unions believe that the strategic goal of national policy should be not

only securing sustainable economic development, but also strengthening social protection, raising the living standards, overcoming the excessive social stratification, resuming social dialogue, ensuring remunerative employment, and combating tax dodgers and corrupt officials'.

MOLDOVA: CNSM WARNS AGAINST ATTEMPTS TO DESTROY UNION STRUCTURE

The National Confederation of Trade Unions of Moldova (CNSM) issued a statement expressing concern about the smear campaign unleashed in Moldova to discredit and destroy the trade unions. «This is evident, the Statement says, from the news stories that have recently appeared in some media outlets furnishing the public with inaccurate data, forged information and all kinds of wild guesses about the activity of the trade union movement of Moldova. It is also known from reliable sources that other misinformation and institutional steps have been planned to dismantle the country's single trade union structure.»

In this connection, the CNSM said it would use all lawful ways and means to curb the attempts to undermine the strength of the country's trade unions, as it would be unacceptable to leave workers without genuine and just protection and support.

International trade union organisations, including the ITUC and the GCTU of which the CNSM is an af-

filiate, and also diplomatic missions were informed about the unprecedented campaign against the united trade union movement of Moldova.

Legal action will be taken against the media for any falsifications identified. The National Confederation of Trade Unions of Moldova called on its member organisations not to yield to provocations, close their ranks, and prevent the destruction of the single trade union movement.

MOLDOVA: UNIONS PRODUCE DRAFT LAW ON PRICING

In December 2011, CNSM experts developed a draft law on the formation and regulation of prices and rates, and the trade union centre intends to press for its early adoption. The document will shortly be submitted for consideration to the National Commission for Consultation and Collective Bargaining.

The bill establishes the uniform principles for pricing the essential goods and fixing public utilities rates, and specifies the regulations enabling state control over the processes. CNSM leaders believe that the seven chapters of the union-prepared paper provide protection for all categories of the population. In their opinion, the document also provides social guarantees for the low-income categories of the population against eventual price and rate rises.

CNSM President Oleg Budza believes that the policies of unbalanced

prices and rates will push a growing number of citizens down below the poverty line. «We need such a law as quickly as possible to end the chaos in the pricing and rate-setting policies,» said the union leader.

RUSSIA: FNPR DISCUSSES COOPERATION WITH GOVERNMENT, EMPLOYERS

The General Council of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) held a session 23 November 2012 in Moscow to discuss how to achieve a higher efficiency of interaction among trade unions, state authorities and employers in addressing social and labour issues. Among the guest participants were high government officials, MPs, and representatives of employers' associations.

The General Council members who took the floor expressed their concern over the persistent attempts by employers to change the current labour legislation with a view to reducing if not eliminating employees' social guarantees, and over the numerous violations of labour law. The unions are worried about the low responsibility of the social partners for violation of, or failure to respect, the collective agreements and accords, and about the eventual negative effects of Russia's accession to the WTO.

As they addressed the audience, Alexander Safonov, a Deputy Minister of Health Care and Social

Development, and Fyodor Prokopov, the Executive Vice President of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs spoke highly of the cooperation among the government, the employers' associations and the FNPR.

The General Council decided that the re-establishment of a Ministry of Labour, the provision of state guarantees for work remuneration in the budgetary sector, and the updating of the contents and cost calculation of the consumer basket should be regarded as current priorities for the trade unions.

The General Council elected Galina Kelekhsayeva a Vice President of the FNPR. Her previous occupation was a Vice President of the Federation of Trade Unions of St. Petersburg.

RUSSIA: LAW TO AMEND LABOUR CODE SIGNED

President Dmitry Medvedev signed the Law on the Amendments to the Labour Code of the Russian Federation that changes the procedures and the deadlines for consideration and settlement of collective labour disputes, including strikes.

The law provides for the establishment of a standing labour arbitration (within the framework of the Russian Tripartite Commission) to resolve collective labour disputes.

Article 412 of the Labour Code has been amended to exclude the pos-

sibility of declaring a strike illegal unless its organisers provide the minimum amount of work-related activities necessary to sustain the functioning of the enterprise.

Instead, the court shall have the right to suspend such a strike till the workers and their representatives comply with the relevant requirements.

RUSSIA: UNIONS REJECT AGENCY LABOUR

The International Conference «Trade Unions for Sustainable Employment. Agency and Contract Labour a Threat to Stability in Russia» was held in the town of Moskovsky (Moscow Region) 19–20 December 2011 by the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) and the Confederation of Labour of Russia (KTR) in conjunction with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), the ILO and the Centre for Social and Labour Rights.

FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov, KTR President Boris Kravchenko and Deputy of the State Duma Mikhail Tarasenko, who is also Chairperson of the Miners' and Metallurgical Workers' Union of Russia, held a joint press conference to announce the launch of an all-Russia trade union campaign in support of the bill to ban agency and contract labour.

The draft law, known as the Isayev-Tarasenko Bill, has successfully passed the first reading in Parliament (State Duma), which, however, has

not reduced the number of its opponents. The bitterest of them is the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RSPP). As a result of their lobbying, the parliamentary debate on the bill has slowed down, and attempts are being made to dilute the meaning and the spirit of the document in the second reading.

The unions insist that, today and in the future, sustainable and direct employment with no fixed term should remain the principal form of labour relations, which will provide protection for the worker and secure fair and decent pay, acceptable working conditions, health and safety at work, social insurance, and pension coverage.

The entrepreneurs, on the contrary, under the pretext of building a more flexible labour market, practice unsustainable forms of employment, such as agency labour that allows the employer to hide behind the backs of intermediaries in labour relations. Agency labour is used without constraint as a tool to suppress the trade union and labour rights, which undermines the democratic foundations of society.

The trade unions believe the spread of such forms of employment that have no grounds in the current labour legislation to be a threat to economic stability in Russia, and reject resolutely any attempts to legalise their actual use.

The FNPR and the KTR leaders said their organisations were ready

to launch a broad-based massive campaign to demand that the Isayev-Tarasenko Bill be adopted by the State Duma immediately.

RUSSIA: FNPR TO SUPPORT PUTIN

At its session in Moscow 21 December 2011, the FNPR Executive Committee decided to support Putin's candidacy for President of the Russian Federation, and convene the FNPR General Council 25 January 2012 to discuss the issue.

The session approved the Recommendations «On the Position of the FNPR in Connection with the Presidential Election in the Russian Federation».

When assessing the socio-political situation in the country, Executive Committee members stressed the importance for the FNPR and its affiliates to get involved in the All-Russia Popular Front (ONF) set up on Vladimir Putin's initiative to consolidate the civil society, and look for the optimal solutions to current problems on a single platform.

FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov urged trade union members to come to the polls 4 March 2012 and support Vladimir Putin, the candidate whose policy, he believed, would ensure a stable and progressive development of the country, and who was in constant pursuit of a constructive dialogue with the trade unions.

TAJIKISTAN: UNIONS WANT BETTER HEALTH AND SAFETY

Speaking to the enlarged session of the General Council of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Tajikistan (FITUT) 15 October 2012, FITUT President Murodali Salikhov called on all trade union leaders and technical inspectors to take urgent measures to enhance public control over the observance of workers' health and safety rights. Serious shortcomings in this field had been revealed by the General Prosecutor's Office of Tajikistan.

The General Council took a special decision on the follow-up to the discussion. The leaders of trade union organisations were instructed to strengthen control over the observance of laws on occupational safety and health. The unions will insist that employers allocate funds for these purposes and that the relevant items be included in the collective agreements. They will also actively defend workers' rights, and conduct inspections jointly with the prosecutor's offices, the State Service for Work Surveillance, and the trade unions' labour inspectorates

UKRAINE: GRASSROOTS DEMAND END TO ATTACKS ON UNIONS.

An all-Ukraine meeting of the chairpersons of primary trade union organisations took place in Kyiv 10 October 2011. Upon its completion, participants, who represented

over 500 trade union committees and enterprises in all industries across the country, adopted an appeal urging the supreme authorities of Ukraine to stop immediately the attack on workers' constitutional rights and the unlawful campaign against the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU), prevent further violations of trade union rights, and ensure the unconditional observance of laws and international treaties on citizens' rights and freedoms signed by Ukraine.

UKRAINE: UNIONS AGAINST POVERTY

Over 10,000 representatives of work collectives of companies, organisations, and institutions in leading industries from all regions of Ukraine took part in a national protest action «Trade Unions Against Poverty» organised by the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) in Kyiv 17 October 2011 to commemorate the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

Speaking to the rally in central Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, FPU President and MP Vasyl Khara recalled that in 2010 alone the number of poor in the country had increased by a million to reach 12 million people. Official data show that every eighth working Ukrainian family lives below the poverty line, and one in three families with children is considered poor. The number of official millionaires in the country had grown by nearly 20 per cent over the same period.

The wage arrears have not been settled, and at state-owned enterprises they have even risen by 20 per cent. Meanwhile, the Draft State Budget for 2012 does not improve the situation of the ordinary person; moreover, it provokes further widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. The FPU is strongly against such an anti-popular policy!

«We warn the authorities», the FPU leader said, «that trade unions will use all possible machinery to defend the rights of working families, including protests, picketing, collective labour disputes, law suits, and, as an extreme measure, strikes.»

Participants in the meeting adopted a resolution «Trade Unions Against Poverty» that contains demands to the authorities and employers, and constructive proposals for overcoming the poverty.

Trade union protest actions were held in all regions of Ukraine.

UKRAINE: FPU PRESIDIUM LETS VASYL KHARA GO

The FPU Presidium held a session 9 November 2011 to discuss topical issues of trade union life, such as:

- poverty in Ukraine and the actions by trade unions to overcome it;
- joint actions to be taken by the social partners in the course of drawing up the State Budget;

- results of the All-Ukraine Campaign «Trade Unions Against Poverty» organised by the FPU 17 October 2011.

The Presidium granted Vasyl Khara's request for resignation from his post as FPU President, and decided to take the matter to the FPU Council scheduled to meet 11 November 2011.

UKRAINE: FPU GETS NEW PRESIDENT

The session of the Council of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) held 11 November 2011, elected Yuri Kulyk FPU President by a majority vote. Yuri Kulyk was born 13 April 1949 in the city of Zaporizhyya. He has higher education, being a graduate from the Zaporizhyya State Teachers' Institute with a diploma of a teacher of the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian literature. From 1980 to 1993, he worked in trade unions, first as an Instructor of the Secretariat, then as an assistant to the President of the Ukrainian Republican Council of Trade Unions, and after that as Head of the FPU Press Centre.

Later he worked in the public service, and in 2005 returned to the trade unions as Head of the FPU Organising Department, then as a FPU Secretary, and finally as a counsellor to the President of the FPU.

In March 2009, he was elected a Vice President of the FPU, and in March 2011 First Vice President of the FPU.

UKRAINE: INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES ANALYSED

According to the FPU Socio-Economic Department, 1687 collective labour disputes were registered in Ukraine over the period of 1999–2010 and the first nine months of 2011, with the workers and trade unions having put forward 1756 demands.

Among the sectors of the economy accounting for the largest number of collective disputes were engineering (299 disputes, or 17.8 per cent), housing and public utilities – (297, or 17.6 per cent), education – (219, or 13.05 per cent), coal mining (187, or 11.1 per cent), and transportation – (174, or 10.3 per cent).

The dominant causes of labour disputes in enterprises, institutions and organisations are as follows:

- substantial wage arrears;
- mass violations of labour laws in regard to work remuneration and occupational health and safety;
- numerous violations of social rights and guarantees of employees in connection with the liquidation or bankruptcy of enterprises, and their restructuring or privatisation; and
- low wages in some sectors of the economy.

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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 AND UKRAINE, AND ALSO 30 INDUSTRIAL TRADE UNION INTERNATIONALS.

THE GCTU IS READY TO CO-OPERATE WITH ANY OTHER NATIONAL TRADE UNION FEDERATIONS, IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR AFFILIATION WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS.

THE CONFEDERATION ENJOYS OBSERVER STATUS WITH THE CIS AND EURASEC INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLIES, 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 , THE UN DPI AND THE ECOSOC.

THE GCTU SUPREME BODIES ARE THE CONGRESS, CONVENED 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