

ENSU Trade Union Newsletter

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[ENSU public media policy](#)

In this issue

Welcome to the January 2024 issue of the trade union newsletter of the European Network for Solidarity with Ukraine (ENSU). In it we feature reactions to and analysis of Ukraine's draft new Labour Code (pages 2-9).

We also highlight the struggle against the threatened closure of the Tauride National University (TNU), the only tertiary institution that managed to survive the 2014 Russian occupation of Crimea and the only university teaching the Crimean Tatar language.

The plan to amalgamate the TNU with another university is the first move in a major plan of tertiary institution rationalisation and is accompanied by the threat of big cuts to the state

university
scholarships
(see page
24). The
student union
Priama Diia
(Direct
Action) is in
the front line
of the
struggle
against this
neo-liberal
offensive.



January 25 protest against the threatened closure of the Tauride National University (TNU)

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IMPORTANT: International trade union meeting set for Kyiv, February 22, 2024

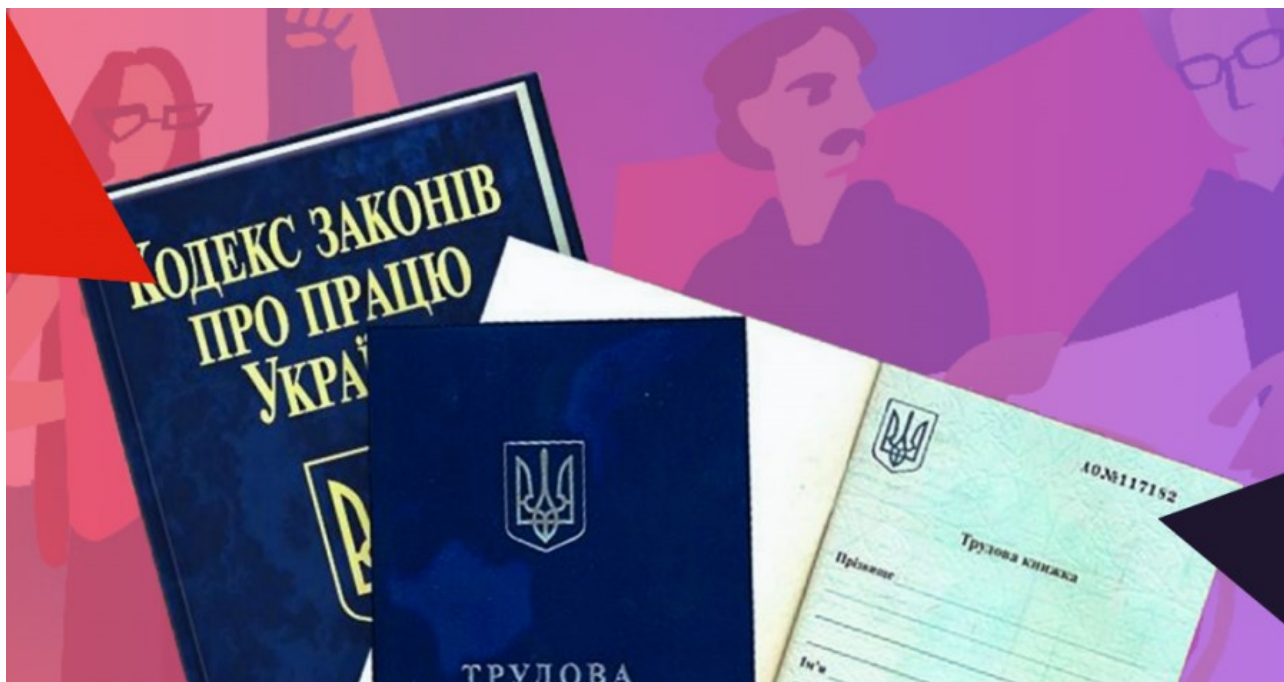
At a January 22 meeting of the Joint Representative Bodies (JRB) of Ukraine trade unions and employers, Grygorii Osovyi, president of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) informed about an international trade union meeting scheduled for February 22 this year, which will be attended by representatives of the FPU and the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (KVPU), which are affiliated organisations of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC).

Osovyi said: “The goal is to discuss wartime issues, our fight against the aggressor, and support for Ukraine by trade unions and civil society organisations from foreign countries.”

ENSU will keep affiliates and supporters up to date with information on this important meeting as it becomes available.

... *Alfons Bech (ENSU Trade Union Coordinator)*

Feature: What's behind Ukraine's new draft Labour Code?



The top five challenges of the new Labour Code

By Vitaliy Dudin

Source: [Social Movement website](#) Translation: Patrick Le Tréhondat

(January 18, 2024) The draft of the new Labour Code of Ukraine recently published by the government represents the greatest attack on workers' rights during the period of martial law. This comprehensive document of 264 Articles could undermine the implementation of many of the rights guaranteed to employees by the European Social Charter and European labour law. This is far from the first attempt to repeal the Ukrainian Labour Code in recent decades, but it is clearly one of the

boldest. It could cause deep resentment among workers who are trying to lead a normal life or serve in the armed forces.

Millions of people employed under labour contracts risk losing their protection against dismissal and their ability to resist the arbitrary actions of their employers. The authors seek to perpetuate the “temporary” restrictions on rights from the war period, offering Ukrainians the chance to endure injustice even after victory. Separate provisions will legalise shameful practices such as dismissal for divulging trade secrets, the 12-hour working day or the unexpected interruption of holidays. If the Code is adopted this year, it will come into force in 2025 (Article 1 of the Final and Transitional Provisions).

As far as is known, the draft was hastily drawn up by a small circle of authors under the direction of Economy Minister Yulia Svyridenko and People's Deputy Halyna Tretyakova [from Zelensky's party], without the participation of trade union representatives. The result is a law that is poor in form and antisocial in content.

1. Haphazard compilation

Based on neo-liberal approaches, the authors seek above all to make labour legislation practical for the capitalist and to turn the employee into the weakest party in the employment relationship, incapable of protecting himself or herself. The document contains the norms of Ukraine's draft laws “On Collective Agreements and Contracts”, “On Collective Labour Disputes” (Book 4), “On Safety and Health of Employees at Work” (Book 3) and, of course, the [Mylovaniv Draft](#) of the law “On Labour” [[see this comment](#)].

The length of the regulatory text can easily confuse the employee. But at the same time, many labour law institutions have not found their own regulations in it: this applies in particular to the examination of individual labour disputes, as only Article 192 is devoted to judicial remedies. The section “Rights and guarantees of activity” is not repealed, but its practical significance will be curtailed by the fact that the new code envisages the functions of trade unions in a very different way.

The provisions are inconsistent in places: Article 24 contains the employer's right to bring disciplinary action against the employee, but its design and application procedure are not disclosed. There is also a general prohibition on moral harassment at work, but the employer's obligation to combat this phenomenon is not included (as in the current Article 158 of the Labour Code). It should be noted that Article 18 of the draft allows employers to issue regulations in the manner they determine. They may extend the employee's duties (Article 22). There is no need to involve the unions in this process, so such “self-regulation” will lead to chaos.

2. Working until death

In accordance with Article 84, employees may not work more than 48 hours in any seven-day period, including overtime. The number of hours of overtime in a calendar year is limited to 360 hours (currently 120 hours). At the same time, the law provides employers with an extremely convenient opportunity to introduce a summary reorganisation of working time (Article 88), where it is permitted to work, for example, a year's worth of working time over a shorter period. In this case, work can last up to 12 hours a day. All that needs to be done is to “inform the workers' representatives”. In the area of working time, the employer decides on: the length of shifts (Article 84), working hours (Article 88), shift schedules (Article 90), etc. Such extensive powers for the employer to determine the duration of working time will lead to abuses and unjustified overtime.

3. Threatening flexibility

The authors' intention to give the parties excessive freedom in determining the terms of the employment contract gives rise to great concern. By accepting certain working conditions, the employee risks finding himself or herself in a disadvantaged position vis-à-vis the employer. For example, the employment contract may include: grounds for suspension of the contract without payment of wages (Article 60), grounds for compulsory overtime (Article 88), cases of recall during periods of leave (Article 96), division of annual leave into instalments (Article 96), paying out of leave (Article 104), etc.

Employees will be obliged to fulfil these obligations, and in the event of a flagrant breach they will be liable to immediate dismissal (Article 68). For example, this could be the case following the disclosure of a trade secret. Article 54 allows the employer, without any justification, to propose a change in working conditions and to introduce it within one week: the employer can thus dispense with “unnecessary” obligations without even changing the terms of the employment contract with an employee. Indeed, in the presence of “circumstances of *force majeure*”, the employer may suspend the obligations of collective agreements and (sectoral) collective agreements (Articles 176, 184).

4. Accelerated redundancy

The termination of the employment contract will be formalised by the conclusion of a supplementary agreement (Article 62). In particular, an employer may dismiss an employee for abstract “economic reasons” subject to 60 days' notice (if the employment contract is concluded for a period of up to four months, then five days' notice applies). Among the guarantees afforded to employees in the event of termination of the employment contract at the employer's initiative (Article 74), there is no prohibition on dismissal during holiday or sick leave. Workers with children over the age of one and a half may be dismissed on general grounds, which considerably lowers the level of guarantees compared to the current Article 184 of the Labour Code. The employer's obligation to take into account the overriding right to remain at work when dismissing employees has been removed (in particular, the level of qualification, seniority, family situation, etc. do not have to be taken into account). At the same time, it is not necessary to offer another vacant post!

All this will save the employee from having to prove a breach of the law in the event of unlawful dismissal. If an employee has a fixed-term employment contract of up to four months, he or she may be dismissed if he or she is absent due to illness for 15 consecutive working days (Article 69 of the draft). Set out in Article 73 of the draft, the procedure for agreeing the employee's dismissal with the union has virtually no effect: the employer has the right to inform the union six working days before the planned date of dismissal and may initiate consultations. Article 83 considerably weakens the incentives for timely final payment in the event of termination of employment. Instead of a penalty corresponding to the average daily wage for each day of delay, a penalty of 0.5% of the amount due for each day of delay is introduced.

5. Savings on health and safety

Compared to Article 4 of the current Holiday Act, Article 94 of the draft does not provide for holidays such as: additional holidays for work in adverse and difficult working conditions; additional leave for the particular nature of the work; sabbatical leave; holidays for preparation for and participation in [sporting] competitions. This will have a negative impact on the well-being and motivation of employees. The minimum amount of expenditure for industrial protection is

cancelled! Employers are only required to fund measures for the safety and health of employees at work up to the amount necessary for this purpose (Article 155 of the draft). There is no standard similar to that set out in Article 160 of the Labour Code, specifying that the employer is responsible for constantly monitoring employees' compliance with the requirements of regulatory acts on work protection. As a result, it will be more difficult to prove that industrial damage has occurred as a result of the employer's failure to fulfil his duties, and to obtain moral damages from him.

When the state demands a sacrifice from its citizens, it is infringing their right to earn a living and provide for their families. The approval of such a document by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and its subsequent transfer to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine is a sign of contempt for European standards and the role of Ukrainian trade unions. Ukraine's new Labour Code will help the most insolent employers to “fight back” against the growing demands of their employees, but it will not bring economic growth any closer. The current economic crisis is caused, among other things, by the shortage of labour, and such reforms will only make it worse. The owners of capital have chosen the most propitious moment to promote their reforms: when the Ukrainian people's attention is focused on the ongoing war and politicians are not held back by the prospect of elections or demonstrations.

We would like to believe that under the conditions of European integration, all these issues will be properly assessed by the international community and that Ukrainian workers will find a new incentive to unite in force to save their rights from the capitalist predators.

The KVPU is against the new draft Labour Code

Source: KVPU

(January 22, 2024)

*Excerpts from KVPU statement on the new draft Labour Code.
The KVPU's full statement is available [here](#).*



The Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine has reviewed the new draft of the Labour Code of Ukraine, developed by the Ministry of Economy of Ukraine (hereinafter referred to as the "draft Labour Code"), and has not approved it.

The explanatory note accompanying the draft Labour Code indicates that it was developed to fulfil the obligations defined in Annex XL of Chapter 21, “Cooperation in the Field of Employment, Social Policy, and Equal Opportunities”, which is part of the Title V, “Economic and Sectoral Cooperation”, in the Association Agreement between Ukraine, on one hand, and the European Union, the European Atomic Energy Community, and their member states, on the other hand (hereinafter referred to as the “Association Agreement”).

In accordance with the Association Agreement, Ukraine has committed to gradually align its legislation with the laws, standards, and practices of the European Union in the fields of employment, social policy, and equal opportunities [...]

The explanatory note to the draft Labour Code also states that it ensures further approximation of national legislation to international labour standards established by the International Labour Organisation.

Ukraine has been a member of the International Labour Organisation since May 12, 1954, and during this time it has ratified more than 60 of its conventions. And according to the Statute of the

ILO, the members of the Organisation undertake to apply the conventions ratified by them (Article 35), and not to engage in permanent “approximation” of the norms of national legislation to international standards.

Unfortunately, the draft Labour Code cannot be called fully compliant with both the norms of the International Labour Organisation conventions ratified by Ukraine and the norms of European legislation.

This was a consequence of the continuation of the shameful practice of ignoring social partners by the government during the preparation of the draft Labour Code and not involving experts from the trade union side in its development.

On December 14, 2023, the Council of Europe decided to start negotiations with Ukraine on its acquisition of EU membership. At this stage, our country will have to prove that it is worthy of taking its rightful place among equal members of the European community.

Clumsy attempts of the authorities develop the labour Code promptly by compiling the amendments already introduced in recent years to the current Labour Code—draft laws “On Labour” (of 2022, [which was commented on by the ILO in the relevant Memorandum of technical comments of experts of the International Labour Office](#)), “On Collective Labour Disputes” and “On the Safety and Health of Employees at Work”, which are at various stages of development, and the Law of Ukraine “On Collective Agreements and Contracts”, adopted in 2023, may in the future lead to serious issues in the form of the conflict between the norms of the Labour Code and relevant legislation.

Taking into account the limited time given by the legislation’s drafter to develop and approve the draft, several important, but not exhaustive reasons as to why the KVPU does not approve the draft Labour Code are outlined below ([see full text of KVPU position](#)).

Viewpoint of the FPU

Source: Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine

The leaders of the FPU member organisations have taken a position regarding the government's draft Labour Code.

On January 22, after conducting bilateral consultations between the leadership of the unions and representatives of the employers' side at the national level regarding the government draft of the Labour Code, a meeting of the leaders of FPU member organisations took place, where the proposals union associations and a draft decision on this issue were examined before the meeting of the union associations.



Speaking on this issue, FPU leader Grygorii Osovyi expressed his vision for further work on the bill, noting that based on the results of bilateral consultations held with employers, it is obvious that due to the lack of time and sufficiently prepared specialists for this work in ten days it is practically impossible to consider such a large-scale document, but it is possible to outline a common vision and a common attitude to work on the draft Labour Code with the help of employer bodies and unions. It is a question of what fundamental provisions this document should contain and a conceptual basis for guaranteeing the rights of Ukrainian workers taking into account the processes

of European integration and the need for appropriate implementation of the national legislation of the Ukraine, as well as the low supply of labour in the Ukrainian labour market.

Grygorii Osovyi stressed that any relaxation of rights and guarantees could discourage workers from working in Ukraine, especially if the negotiation process regarding Ukraine's accession to the EU intensifies and in addition to common markets goods, services and capital, a labour market appears, which will be synchronised with the European labour market. The flow of labour will then clearly be in favour of countries offering better working conditions and a higher level of remuneration. Such trends are already observed today. And the massive departure of labour abroad can lead the Ukrainian economy to a state of depression. [...]

We need to reach maximum agreement on this text, and only then recommend that the government submit it to the Verkhovna Rada and concentrate all this expert work so that it is carried out under the patronage of ILO and EU experts who can help us to do this work effectively. And, of course, this cannot be done in ten days.

In the discussion that followed, the trade union leaders examined and supported the trade unions' comments and proposals, as well as a draft decision on the government's draft Labour Code, which will be submitted to the joint trade union body at its meeting on January 22. A legal position on this document has been drawn up.

Unions and employers meet to discuss draft Labour Code

Source: FPU website, edited machine translation



(January 23, 2024) On January 22, 2024, a bilateral consultative meeting of the leadership of the Joint Representative Body (JRB) of Trade Unions and the JRB of Employers at the national level was held in Kyiv at the Trade Union House (pictured).

The parties discussed their positions on topical issues that require consolidation of efforts of trade unions and employers, figuratively speaking, there was a need to “synchronise watches” and identify ways of further cooperation.

In particular, it concerned:

- defining the positions of the parties and further joint work on the draft of the new Labour Code.
- progress in updating the legislation on social dialogue in Ukraine within the working group established at the NMCU.
- preserving the labour potential of Ukraine during martial law in the context of mobilisation and military service, and
- coordination of the parties' actions to aid employees and their families who suffered in the performance of their labour duties due to the armed aggression of Russia.

Opening the meeting, the Chairman of the JRB of Trade Unions, the Head of the FPU Grygorii Osovyi stressed that an important component of preserving the country's labour potential during martial law is the work related to the restoration of the health of employees who suffered in the performance of their duties as a result of rocket attacks and bombardments. He noted that there are many tragic cases and a joint algorithm of actions between the trade union and the employer needs to be developed. The JRB of Trade Unions and Employers also needs to adopt a decision on assistance to families and employees who have been injured or damaged to restore their health and enable them to continue working.

The parties discussed the government's draft Labour Code of Ukraine, developed by the Ministry of Economy and sent to the social partners for consideration, as required by the current legislation.

After a constructive discussion, it was concluded that this draft law needs to be substantially revised, both structurally and substantively, and adapted to EU legislation.

The new labour legislation should be developed in the format of a tripartite working group, which should include trade unions, employers and the government. The goal of such cooperation should be to create a system of labour relations in Ukraine that will be competitive in the EU's single labour market, so that we do not lose our labour potential.

According to the trade union side, the draft Labour Code needs to harmonise many of the terms it contains and bring them in line with the requirements of ILO Conventions and Directives. A wide range of experts, including foreign ones, should be involved in the work on the Code. This document also needs to be developed at the NTSEC.

As a result, it was decided to start a joint process of working on the draft Labour Code and prepare proposals for it from employers and trade unions. To determine a common position on certain innovations proposed in the draft Labour Code, the parties agreed to hold thematic meetings.

The FPU President informed his colleagues about the international trade union meeting scheduled for February 22 this year, which will be attended by representatives of the FPU and the KVPU, which are affiliated organisations of the ITUC and ETUC.

The goal is to discuss wartime issues, our fight against the aggressor, and support for Ukraine by trade unions and civil society organisations from foreign countries.

The discussion was attended by: Alexander Shubin, First Deputy Chairman of the JRB of Trade Unions, Deputy Chairman of the Trade Union of Ukraine, Mikhail Volynets, Deputy Chairman of the JRB of Trade Unions, Chairman of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine, and Chairman of the All-Ukrainian Trade Union of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Valerii Dobrovolskyi, Deputy Head of the Union of All-Ukrainian Trade Unions and Trade Associations "Unity", Halyna Kolosiuk, Deputy Chairman of the Trade Union of Railway and Transport Builders of Ukraine Oleksandr Mushenok.

On behalf of employers: Anatoliy Kinakh, First Deputy Chairman of the JRB of Employers, Serhiy Bilenkyi, Deputy Chairman of the JRB of Employers, Kostiantyn Marchuk, Deputy Chairman of the Association of Employers' Organisations of Ukraine.

Appeal of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine

To the Trade Unions, Parliaments, and Governments of Democratic Countries, International Partners, and International Organizations

(January 3, 2024) The new year of 2024 in Ukraine began with horrific massive Russian missile attacks on the sleeping, peaceful cities of Ukraine. In total, only during the holidays from December 29, 2023, to January 2, 2024, Russian forces killed 90 civilians during the missile attacks. In only five days, Russia launched 500 missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) at residential areas, businesses, hospitals, educational institutions, and cultural heritage sites in Ukraine. Every day, residents of our peaceful cities die at the hands of Russia, with hundreds of people injured and acquiring disabilities. We are forced to live and work in a state of permanent stress and anxiety. Today, Ukrainians are paying a high price for freedom and for peace in Europe.



KVPU Chairman Mikhail Volynets

The Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (KVPU), as the voice of Ukrainian workers – miners, metallurgists, energy workers, teachers, doctors, entrepreneurs, and others – draws attention to the need to take decisive measures to protect Ukraine and to deter the intentions of the aggressor country Russia from rewriting international law and redrawing the map of modern Europe.

We appeal to the governments of countries and the international community to speed up the provision of military aid to our country, including the provision of additional air defense systems, long-range missiles, drones, etc. International partners, by providing weapons, save thousands of lives during missile attacks by Russian troops.

We also call on international partners:

- To continue providing economic and humanitarian aid to Ukraine;
- To strengthen sanctions against the terrorist regime of Russia, as this can significantly limit the financial resources and export of technology necessary for the continuation of the bloody war;
- To ensure the possibility of using frozen Russian assets to direct them to help Ukraine;
- To isolate and remove from work in international organisations Russian political, public, and trade union figures, as representatives of a country that carries out terrorist activities against sovereign, independent Ukraine and its citizens.

We call on representatives of the international and European trade union community to call the governments of your countries to continue providing humanitarian aid and military aid to Ukraine.

We would like to thank everyone who supports and provides assistance to Ukraine in this difficult time for the Ukrainian people.

We believe that joint efforts will help stop Russian aggression, which is not only destroying Ukraine, but also undermining economic, energy, ecological, and food stability both in Europe and around the world.

Mykhailo Volynets

Chairperson of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine

Grygorii Osovyi (FPU): Full ratification of the European Social Charter is our demand

Source: Ukraine Solidarity Campaign (UK)

(January 12, 2023) The full-scale war has brought about changes not only within the country. It has significantly changed the work of our representatives at the international level. The Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) is no exception. We talk more about this with Grygorii Osovyi (pictured), the head of the FPU.

Grygorii Vasylovych, how has the position of the FPU at the international level changed during the war?



It changed quite a lot. If before, at the international level, we were mainly concerned with gaining experience in trade union activities and human rights work in the field of labour, then with the outbreak of a full-scale war, the main thing was to lobby the international trade union movement and the public of various countries to support Ukraine in its confrontation with the Russian aggressor. In other words, we used the opportunities available to us to use trade union diplomacy.

The FPU has consultative status with the UN Commission for Social Development and has long been a member organisation of the world-famous International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which operates in 165 countries and has more than 200 million trade union members. In October 2002, even before Ukraine was granted EU candidate status, the trade union confederation was admitted to the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), which is the only partner organisation of the EU institutions and operates in 42 countries on the continent.

At the same time, 24 all-Ukrainian trade unions that are members of the FPU are affiliated to global trade unions. This gives us great opportunities to represent Ukraine internationally through these institutions. These, in turn, are active at the level of the United Nations, the International Labour Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic and

Social Development, and have appropriate representation or accreditation at the G-7, G-20 summits, etc.

Incidentally, at the end of February we will be part of the ITUC delegation to the annual meeting of trade unions with the IMF and the World Bank to discuss the future of the labour sector, investment in jobs and human capital. Let me remind you that these are the financial institutions that lend to Ukraine. And finally, all this gives us the opportunity to tell them the truth about the situation in the country, about Russia's military aggression, about how we are defending our sovereignty, our freedom and our right to democratically choose independence.

Are most countries on our side, supporting Ukraine in its struggle?

The majority are. But not all of them. There are some, for example trade unions from African and Latin American countries, who do not have an objective view of what is happening in Ukraine. As a result, they do not have the political will to condemn Russian aggression. This is not because the official position of trade unionists in these countries has already been formed. The fact is that some of the leaders once studied in Moscow and live under illusions and memories. Another part has certain ideological convictions. Their logic is as follows: if the United States (which they see as an empire) is helping Ukraine, then we are supposedly under the influence of this imperialism. Russia is also seen as an empire, so they do not support it either. And against the background of these two counterbalanced forces, they are manoeuvring without taking a clear position on condemning Russia's armed aggression.

This cannot but be worrying...

Of course it is. And we present our resolutions at every international platform where possible, initiate public actions and rallies in solidarity with Ukraine, as we did during the [July 2023] International Labour Conference in Geneva. Because of our principled position, the [Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia](#) (which supported Putin in the war) was expelled from the ITUC. Of course, in this direction we are working primarily with unions from countries closer to us in terms of understanding and support. These are mainly the Nordic countries of Europe—Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway—and Belgium. And, of course, the Baltic states and Poland—we have a common vision of Russian aggression. We are now trying to involve Slovakia. We have the support of the Swiss, French and Italian trade unions. We have excellent relations with the federations of these countries, which make up the whole trade union movement there. Each of them has its own ideological messages and interaction with political parties.

By the way, in 2022 the Italians really wanted to hold a conference in Ukraine on how to secure peace. Unfortunately, we had to cancel it. At the time, there were no real grounds for it to be effective in terms of Ukraine's demands: complete withdrawal of troops from our territory, return of the damage caused, security guarantees, etc. And with the enemy's troops on Ukrainian territory, there is little or no prospect of peace negotiations.

Of course, we are paying special attention to developing cooperation with trade unions in the United States and the United Kingdom, whose governments are providing Ukraine with unprecedented military, financial and humanitarian aid. In June, Mykhail Volynets, who heads the KVPU, and I were in Philadelphia at the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), where US President Joe Biden gave a brilliant speech in support of trade unions and Ukraine. And our appearance on stage, showing a video of the Russians' terrorist actions in Irpin, Bucha and Mariupol, provoked unanimous condemnation of Russian aggression

and support for Ukraine. Although there were delegates from some states who still had doubts. We did something similar at the Trades Union Congress UK last year.

And you do outreach in such places, explaining why it is necessary to increase pressure on the aggressor?

Yes, we do. The good thing is that where there is a strong trade union movement, it is backed up by political forces. Because unions are voters. In the Scandinavian countries, for example, 85 to 90 per cent of all workers are members of trade unions, which protect them through collective agreements. And they all vote. This means that both Members of the European Parliament (MEP) and officials in the relevant European institutions are guided by the opinions of these people. Incidentally, the European Parliament elections will be held in May this year. And the fight for the votes of the voters, the same trade union members, is very important.

I recently took part in a conference in Brussels at the European Parliament organised by progressive socialists and social democrats on how to ensure a social Europe in the future. I gave a speech on reforms in Ukraine, because according to the Constitution we are also a welfare state. This is the second largest group in the European Parliament, which is very supportive of the trade union movement. If you look at the formula of Europe, progressive politicians and socialists always mean a “social Europe”, a social market economy. And there is a place for the trade union movement, its role and power and its participation in the management of companies. These politicians are worried about the growth of the radical right in Europe, which could harm workers’ rights and lead to a reduction in their social guarantees.

Do you have something similar in Ukraine now?

Yes, there is. We have to give an honest answer to the citizens of Ukraine about what kind of country we are building. Compared to what the Europeans say and prescribe in their resolutions, you will not find the words “social market economy” in the documents of the Ukrainian parliament or government. There is only “market”—“social” has been dropped. And it’s not just the vocabulary—a lot of practical things have been dropped along with the word “social”. If something is acceptable during martial law, it can become a brake on our European integration in the future.

For example?

Look, we ratified the European Social Charter in 2017. And this is thanks to the powerful strength and influence of the FPU, which has chosen the European Choice program as its course. This is a very strong implementation of European legislation. In particular, the EU Directives and the European Social Charter contain Article 1(4), which defines what the minimum subsistence level, minimum wage, state-guaranteed pension, etc. should be as a standard for countries that are members of the European Community. It must meet the needs of a person to buy food, clothing and other essential goods, and include the costs of medical treatment and housing. This means that Ukraine should take into account all these indicators. In fact, our law on the minimum subsistence level only includes food and some components of daily life. And paid services, such as health care and housing, are not included at all—only utility bills. But this is relevant for those who have a home. And who doesn’t? The Ukrainian state does not care whether a person can buy it or at least rent it with their earned income.

The sooner Ukraine implements the legislation and brings its own guarantees closer to EU standards, the sooner the dignity of representing our country in this community will be perceived. Full ratification of the European Social Charter is our demand and a condition for EU membership.

This means that we must apply the social component of this policy in all aspects: salaries, pensions and social guarantees must comply with this formula.

During the negotiations we will also talk about the European social security system. Based on the experience of other countries, we have created a system of such guarantees in Ukraine. Of course, during the war, during martial law, they were significantly “cut back”. The state liquidated the relevant fund, and the only guarantees left were for pension insurance. The system was destroyed, and not because of the war. It is due to the lack of understanding of the problem by certain officials. It is simply unacceptable to humiliate a worker’s guarantees in this way.

That is why in 2024 our team, under the auspices of the European trade unions, must learn how to work during the negotiation process on Ukraine’s accession to the EU. And secondly, this form of participation should be guaranteed for trade unions.

If we create motivating working conditions for Ukrainians, we will set a precedent for the return of our emigrants who went abroad for various reasons – either because of the war, unemployment, and disagreement with politics or living conditions. We have more than eight million of these people. Given Ukraine’s labour force needs, we need to bring Ukrainians back not with appeals, but with practical measures.

It is said that the international community has gone cold on Ukraine in the wake of the war in Israel?

That is true. But we are trying to revive interest in Ukraine on various platforms. Recently I signed a letter to the ITUC General Secretary and the ETUC General Secretary proposing to hold an international videoconference on 24 February, the anniversary of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This is a kind of renewed focus on Ukraine. It means further political, financial, military and humanitarian support. It also means support for the trade unions themselves, so that we can stay and continue to fulfil our representative and social function. Finally, we also need support to resist anti-social and anti-worker proposals that may appear in parliament or the government.

I understand that, as head of the FPU, you are also an ITUC Vice-President, a member of the ITUC General Council and a member of the ITUC Executive Board?

Yes, I am. I am also a member of the ITUC Executive Bureau and the ETUC Executive Committee. I don’t say this to boast, because 10 years ago my colleagues couldn’t even dream of such respect and trust in Ukrainian trade unions. This is a very high recognition, considering the number of member countries that are part of these organisations. It probably also takes into account the fact that the FPU is the largest trade union in Ukraine and that the FPU leader is also the chairman of the Joint Representative Body of representative trade unions at national level and co-chairman of the National Tripartite Social and Economic Council on the trade union side. So this is an opportunity to inform colleagues about the situation of the trade union movement in Ukraine, the observance of workers’ rights, and sometimes to ask directly for some support, etc.

Can this be put into practice?

Yes, for example, we have raised UAH 160 million (=US\$ 4.3 million) through various donor programs to help people and the trade unions themselves. As for Ukraine as a whole, we want to restore social dialogue in the country, as it is practised in the EU. The high-level missions that have visited us do not understand why there is such an attitude to social dialogue as a form of interaction and finding common goals, solving problems and consolidation. This is the norm in Europe. They do not understand why some officials do not accept it and resist it.

So it happened that while participating in trade union events in Brussels, where the ITUC and ETUC offices are located, I met several times with the European Commissioner for Employment and Social Policy, Nicolas Schmidt, who said that he was planning to visit Ukraine soon and would undoubtedly emphasise the importance of social dialogue during the meetings. It is clear that the ETUC has already used various instruments in this regard: it has contacted the President of the European Commission, informed the Council of Europe and sent letters to Ukrainian officials. European employers and trade unions propose to hold a summit of social partners in Kyiv on the eve of the EU-Ukraine summit. In Europe there is a rule that every six months representatives of the European Commission, the Council of Europe, European Commissioners and trade unions come to the people to report on their work and announce plans for the future. If we were to introduce such a format in Ukraine, people would understand what government, business and trade unions are doing for each of them.

The FPU Council met recently, what are the top priorities for this year?

Among the top priorities is the one related to shifting our organisational, financial and resource potential to helping the military and war-affected people who are returning to their reserved jobs or being employed.

We understand that demobilisation is now mainly among people with certain physical injuries, so we need to help them and their employers in the companies to which they will return.

As the owner of a spa, recreation and rehabilitation complex, we have decided to use it for this category of people. But this requires a synergy of efforts – from the government, trade unions and business. And, of course, the international community, where it would be possible to raise the funds that our country so desperately needs. So far, we have not seen any systematic work and feedback, so we are doing it on our own, within our means. As a result, around 9000 soldiers have been treated in our facilities. This includes psychological rehabilitation, recreation, and simply spending time with their families. Simple things that give our soldiers the strength and ability to take up arms again and defend the country. We have made this work a priority. The internal homework we discussed was the modernisation of the trade union movement and the FEU itself. After all, we are still far behind the European organisations, we still have many remnants of the former administrative and command system. Let's start with ourselves. My dream is to create a European federation, to bring the FPU into line with the rules and regulations that apply in European communities. Where there is transparency, democracy, mutual respect and codes of integrity. The European statutes contain very simple and direct rules of procedure. In our country, unfortunately, it is still possible to "talk up" any decision and fail to implement it.

Now we are already part of the line that works not only on national legislation but also on EU directives. We have to understand these directives very well, know and decipher them and add our own, in order to transpose all this into national legislation in a sensible way. I admit it is not easy. We have been doing this for more than six months. But if we don't propose a transformation model now, we could be in the same state for another five years. And if we do everything right, we will get new wings to feel confident in the European space.

Worker struggles in Ukraine

Backgrounder from *Jacobin*: [Ukraine's Trade Unions Face Russian Invasion and Homegrown Attacks on Labour Rights](#)

Delivery Drivers Fight Back! While Bolt Food Wants to Outlaw Strikes in Ukraine...

Source: *Bolt strike info*

(January 15, 2024) Bolt Food (an Estonian meal delivery company) has said that Ukraine “is not a country where you can strike”, but clearly it is a country where employers can exploit young casual workers to the hilt.



The “coordination committee” of Dnipro couriers issued the following statement today.

Bolt Food management has unleashed a premature fever with the new "General Conditions for Couriers". An interesting point 8.10 was hidden amongst a bunch of other nonsense, in which it is written:

In the event that the courier fails to make the delivery within the time period set out in Article 8.9, the courier agrees to pay 0.5% of the total amount due for each day that payment is late. The courier will reimburse Bolt for all reasonable costs (including costs charged by any debt collection agency) and all administrative, legal and other costs incurred in collecting any outstanding payment. The minimum compensation for these expenses is €10.

This is absolutely illegal!

You don't owe the boss anything!

‘Our union protects workers under martial law’

Interview with Volodymyr Kozelsky, President of the Free Trade Union of Ukrainian Railways (VPZU). Source: International Labour Network of Solidarity and Struggle



Evacuating the wounded (Credit: The Guardian)

(January 14, 2024) During the Russian Federation's armed aggression against Ukraine, *Ukrzaliznytsia* (Ukrainian Railways), as a critical infrastructure company, ensures the transport of passengers and goods 24 hours a day. Railway employees contribute to the state's defence capability through their heroic work during hostilities and rocket attacks.

Before the war, the VPZU trade union, along with other trade union organisations operating in the Ukrainian railway sector, constantly negotiated with the administration of *Ukrzaliznytsia* to improve the working conditions of railway workers and increase their wages. In addition, in order to regulate the legal and social protection of the labour rights of union members, the elected bodies of the VPZU formulated proposals for regulatory acts, which were then submitted to the relevant committees of the Supreme Council of Ukraine.

In addition, the VPZU is a member of the joint representative body of trade unions operating in *Ukrzaliznytsia* for the signing of a new (first) collective agreement for the enterprise, but at present, due to martial law in the country, the activities of this body have been suspended.

From 2014 to 2024, during Russia's armed aggression, relations with a number of VPZU union organisations in the Luhansk, Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia regions and in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea were severed.

Our union is a non-profit, autonomous public organisation that brings together citizens with common interests in the nature of their professional and working activities. The VPZU has the status of a Ukraine-wide public organisation/trade union, organised on a territorial basis.

The union's organisational units are as follows:

- basic union organisations are voluntary associations of trade union members who work in the same company;
- local and regional trade union organisations are united;
- rank-and-file trade union organisations in railway companies, institutions and organisations with distinct structural subdivisions of the railway;
- trade unions from transport, construction and metro companies, institutions or organisations;
- grassroots trade unions in the companies, institutions and other transport-related sectors.

The VPZU has confirmed its representativeness at sectoral level in accordance with Article 5 of the Ukrainian law “On Social Dialogue in Ukraine”. In addition, the VPZU includes employees of the municipal company Kyivpastrans (trolleybus depot and bus fleet workers) in Kyiv, at the municipal company Zhytomyr Tram and Trolleybus in Zhytomyr, in the City Trolleybus" in Kryvyi Rih, in Kamianske (Dnipropetrovsk region), in the municipal company Kharkiv Metro in Kharkiv where the workers are represented by the union organisations of the VPZU.



Kyiv railway maintenance workshop

The VPZU is a member organisation of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (KVPU) and cooperates in solidarity with the Independent Miners' Union of Ukraine (IMU), the Free Trade Union of Education and Science of Ukraine (VPONU), the Free Trade Union of Health Workers of Ukraine (VPMU), and

the Free Trade Union of Entrepreneurs [small vendors – editor’s note] of Ukraine (VPUU) and other organisations of the KVPU confederation. This cooperation takes the form of:

- exchange of information on the application of innovative methods;
- protection of trade union members' employment rights;
- joint union activities to defend members' rights;
- unions that have been violated by their respective employers;
- joint appeals to the public authorities and the mass media on labour relations in Ukraine.

Since February 24, 2022, the VPZU's trade union organisations have been operating under martial law, providing legal and public protection of workers' fundamental rights in accordance with current Ukrainian legislation.

The VPZU provides ongoing humanitarian assistance to union members or citizens affected by martial law and war. VPZU trade union organisations also provide assistance to the military, including food, warm clothing, various military munitions, etc.

This is currently the VPZU's main task.

In this respect, the VPZU would like to see the possibility of receiving any form of help from the international workers' movement, depending on its resources and budget, for the establishment of relations that could be built up in the future.

Those who died at work

Source: Vitaliy Dudin, Telegram channel

(January 9, 2024) At least 195 people died at work in 2023 due to Russian aggression. At one defense plant in Kyiv alone, 32 workers died in one day. Every accident is subject to investigation. The fact that the death is related to production will allow the family to receive an insurance payment from the Pension Fund. If the employer is found to have violated labour protection standards, it must also compensate the relatives for non-pecuniary damage.

The Pension Fund authorities sometimes refused to pay, not recognising the wife as a member of the deceased's family (including because the victim had a different address). But the refusals were successfully appealed. An example is the case of the lawsuit filed by the widow of the victim of a missile attack on the Amstor shopping centre in Kremenchuk.

It is much more difficult to recover non-pecuniary damage from the employer. He has the right to appeal to the fact that no persons whose actions/inactions contributed to the tragedy have been identified.

The government must oblige owners to do more to save lives and increase insurance payments for the families of those who are at greatest risk—workers in the defense industry, which is essential for victory

'Our union lost many members during the war'

By Volodymyr Fundovnyi (Independent Union of Education and Science of Ukraine, VPONU).

Source: International Labour Network of Solidarity and Struggle (ILNSS)

(January 4, 2024) The VPONU union lost many organisations and members during the war. In Crimea and Luhansk, Donetsk and Kherson regions the loss is total. There is also a partial loss in the regions of Zaporizhzhia, Lviv, Sumy, Kharkiv and Chernihiv.

Despite this, the union lives, works, continues to protect its members, helps the armed forces and carries out its work in accordance with the law of Ukraine (on trade unions, their rights and guarantees of activity), and with the statutes of the VPONU.

In recent years, a new law on general secondary education has been adopted. This law provides for changes in the organisation of the educational process, the appointment of directors of educational institutions and an increase in the educators' salaries. But the changes have only gotten worse.

Teachers' salaries have not been increased or raised to three minimum salaries, and the teachers' bonus is now determined only by the head of the institution, who can even be a person who has served a sentence for murder.

So there is no need to talk about improving the work of teachers, educators and educators in preschool institutions. During martial law, there were no reforms for educators.

During the war, many teachers went to the front and are serving in the armed forces. So there is a shortage of teachers and no one wants to work in preschools, especially for such an inadequate salary (\$170 to \$200 a month).



VPONU members with the ILNSS banner. Volodymyr Fundovnyi is on the left.

Such is the situation in [Kropyvnytskyi](#).

As for the students, they are trained under normal conditions, with the exception of the air alerts, when everyone goes down to, you know, the bomb shelters. . .

The independent union has always been committed to protecting its members and continues to do so. The only thing that has been added is the work with the soldiers, who are asking for help, and we, the trade unionists, must do everything to provide it.

This support includes food, equipment, cars, etc. *Victory* is the union's priority. And then we will figure things out.

Regarding cooperation, I can point out that almost all uranium miners [from the Kirovohrad region – editor's note] are fighting in the Ukrainian armed forces, and we, including me personally, have very close ties with them. We are trying to help miners who are engaged in mine clearance in the Kherson region, because the military personnel who clear the territory have clothing that does not protect them.

That is why I insist that today we need uniforms, helmets, shoes, drones and cars, preferably jeeps.

Of course, we may also have the money to buy it locally or abroad. But it would be better if we just passed it on to them, and that would be a good thing. After victory, we will take care of the social and economic protection of the members of the Union. As of today, *victory* is the main thing!

[See the history of the VPONU here](#)

Union canteen for soldiers

Source: French Committee of the European Network for Solidarity with Ukraine

The “Defenders' Way” canteen of the Western Donbass Regional Union of the Independent Miners' Trade Union of Ukraine (KVPU) in the Dnipro region provides free food to soldiers going to or returning from the front.



The canteen welcomes help with vegetables and fruit, home-made preparations and other products, which have been collected and supplied on several occasions by their union colleagues and local residents. The other day, a number of boxes were delivered to the canteen. According to one union activist, there were so many of them that we made a mistake counting them.

But the boxes contained exactly what the canteen needed: a multi-cooker, a cabbage grater and potato slicer, kitchen boards, crockery, as well as tea, coffee and much more. The canteen team is sincerely grateful for this generous donation to the initiator of this action, Olga Kucheruk, and to all those who helped.

Water crisis: Kryvyi Rih unionist Yuri Samoiloв explains community solution

Source: *Workers Aid to Ukraine*. [Video subtitled in English](#)

(December 2023) Good afternoon I am Yuri Samoiloв, chairman of the independent miners' trade union in the city of Kriviy Rih. I would like to talk about ecology. The [destruction of the Kakhovka hydroelectric power station](#) by the Russian occupiers made the provision of simple drinking water a big problem for workers. Drinking water in the city is actually not free, you can only buy it in stores.

In general, there was a problem with water before. In Kriviy Rih, water has always not been of very good quality, because active mining and mineral extraction are carried out here. The depth of the work that is currently being pumped is at a depth of about two kilometres, because all the other water has gone, pumped out and turned into some kind of chemical compounds.

Our solution

We see a solution to the problem in extracting water from deep wells. Capitalists are not very concerned about this matter; they look at water supply through the prism of their interests and profit. They make a business out of selling bottled water to those who can pay. It's their decision. They also want to turn drilling wells and water distribution into a business. They will turn any water

supply project into their profits. The position of the working class of Kriviy Rih, all ordinary people, is that water should not be turned into a commodity. Water is a common good.

It is necessary to start drilling wells, and they should belong to the people, not private individuals. This will determine the nature of the project.

There are several components to this project.

For example, the technical component is the purchase of equipment, namely raising funds for a drilling rig and components. To operate wells, a pump and stand-alone back-up electricity are required. There are a lot of such technical details, and we will think through them all.

There are also organisational issues. Who will drill, how the work itself will be carried out. We see that this will be a voluntary well-drilling team, which, through cooperation, should be grateful to extract clean water.

With proper organisation with one drilling rig, it is possible to drill and equip at least one or several wells at once. Clean water, like air, cannot be sold.

Clean water should be free and accessible to everyone. The project should work free of charge.

The mass consciousness problem will also be solved: we need to explain to people that not only air and water should be free.

Today, all basic products are produced in sufficient quantities for everyone. And providing people with food, clean water, heat, food products, and basic medicine is no longer a problem today.

Not only water, but all these basic goods can and should be free, as the right of any person.

The state, government and capitalists do not want to ensure this and, by their class nature, cannot.

They want water to be a commodity. They live by trading in all possible benefits. If this policy continues, our descendants will have to decide where to get oxygen, because it will be paid for.

Only the organised working class can provide everyone with basic goods.

There is also a legal issue here, because legislation covering production within the Ukrainian state makes it very problematic to take out water and drill wells. But the Constitution of Ukraine declares that the mineral resources belong to the people, and that everyone has the right to a decent life.

To support the Kryvyi Rih miners union initiative visit:

https://chuffed.org/project/workersaidtoulkraine?fbclid=IwAR1kehZ9YNTFBnnchh7whyBEz-nrV_HXMKY2xDm9bDjZWTvDEeBD5bj0cM

Student struggles in Ukraine

Student mobilisation against the closure of Tauride National University (Kyiv)

Source: Priama Diia (Direct Action) student union

(January 26, 2024) On January 25, 2024, students of Tauride National University staged a protest against the merger of their faculty with the university with the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. The protest took place during the higher education staff meeting attended by Deputy Minister of Education and Science Mykhailo Vynnytskyi

The protest, organized with the student union Direct Action, was supported by international student organisations, notably from Poland and Great Britain.

"We held an academic council with the students and they unanimously declared that they were against unification. The student body is preparing letters to senior officials of the Ministry of Education and Culture as well as other ministries and departments, including the President of Ukraine. Because they are against it. They want to study exclusively at Tauride University, because the University has today become their educational and scientific family for them. It is the only intellectual link with Crimea," said the university's rector, Valery Bortniak.

No to the closure of Tauride National University!

Source: Priama Diia (Direct Action) student union

(January 16, 2024) We recently learned that the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science is planning to "reorganise" [Tauride National University](#) (TNU), i.e. to merge it with Kyiv-Mohyla Academy National University (KMA). This means putting all the students and all the buildings at the disposal of the KMA administration, effectively destroying TNU. For students, it means losing their own autonomy, their subjectivity, their unique specialities and facing an uncertain future.

TNU is the only university in Crimea that has managed to move from Crimea to the territories controlled by Ukraine. Only here can students learn the Crimean Tatar language.



Centenary celebration at Tauride National University

The students who have joined the university find themselves in a situation where they will be forced to join another university with no guarantee that they will be able to keep their specialities, their old tuition fees and dormitory accommodation.

All the Ministry of Education and Science is proposing is that we “trust them”...?

The plans of the Ministry of Education and Science have provoked deep indignation among the university's student community: they are firmly opposed to the liquidation of their university, rightly emphasising its importance for the preservation of cultural diversity and the unique educational opportunities it offers.

This is not the first time that such “reorganisations” have taken place—it is a systemic problem. Last year, as a result of its merger with the University of Municipal Economics, the Kharkiv National University of Civil Engineering and Architecture ceased to exist. Similarly, the Ministry of Education and Science wanted to destroy the Ukrainian Academy of Printing by attaching it to the National University of Lviv. But thanks to the solidarity and mobilisation of the students, it was fortunately able to be defended. In the same year, the problem of "reorganisations" became increasingly important: it was already affecting not only the TNU, but also the [HS Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University](#) (KHNPU), the [Odesa State Environmental University](#) (ODEKU), the [Ukrainian Engineering Pedagogics Academy](#) (UIPA) and the [National Aviation University](#) (NAU), so this list does not just concern the TNU.

During Russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine, universities have become more important than ever: student dormitories have housed many forcibly displaced people, and high-quality specialist training is very important for the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine. In an Article by Oleksandr Kostiuk, a Doctor of Economics, the author points out that the state should take on the entire burden of education in order to create an effective system of advanced training for people who are already on the labour market or who will soon be entering it, among them young people.

Such investment in higher education alone could lead to growth in the country's GDP of between 1.8% and 2.1% by 2030. At the same time, the Ukrainian private sector currently offers lifelong learning to only 2% of its employees. By this measure, Ukraine is close to Ghana and Kenya. Reducing the number of universities runs counter to this vision, only exacerbates existing problems and does not offer a promising model of effective post-war education.

We are students who are directly affected by this criminal offensive by the Ministry of Education and Science. We, the students of the Tauride National University and the members of the independent student union Direct Action, have joined forces to draw attention to the problem and to fight against the outrageous initiative of the Ministry of Education and Science. The students of the educational establishments under threat now urgently need solidarity and cooperation, which is why we urge you to disseminate information about this unprecedented case by all possible means.

An international petition for individual signatories with links to the university world has been prepared. [Access the petition here](#), and return completed copies to tauride2024@gmail.com

Government prepares 'reform' that cancels scholarships

Source: Press release from Priama Diia (Direct action) student union

(January 10, 2024) The government has prepared a "reform" which provides for the partial cancellation of scholarships.

The main points of the "reform":

1. Partial elimination of the state-funded form of education. Only 25% of students in several priority specialties will be financed from the state budget, with the obligation to work after graduation.
2. It is planned to provide so-called "state subsidies" which will only partially cover the cost of education. At the same time, students who follow this form of study will not receive scholarships.
3. All other students will study at their own expense or with the help of a preferential long-term loan.

This "reform" has nothing to do with improving the situation of students during the war. Its real goal is to cut funding and social support for the state's youth.

This constitutes yet another anti-student initiative of the Ministry of Education and Science, which will stimulate an even greater exodus of Ukrainian youth to EU countries (where foreign students study at state expense).

2023, a year of student struggles

Source: Priama Diia –Direct Action)

(December 31, 2023) Last year we faced a number of difficult challenges. Amid the horrors and destruction of war, the student community came together powerfully around the desire to help the victims of the war, provide support, help the army and join its ranks.

It is on the basis of a large-scale social crisis that the new generation of the independent Direct Action union was born.

The new Direct Action arose from protests by students of the Ukrainian Academy of Printing, who managed to cancel the merger of their university with the Lviv National University;

Thanks to the union's efforts, student Karina Chmeliuk, who is now an active member of Direct Action, was returned from occupied Crimea to government-controlled territories.

The "Students – Academics!" campaign was launched to draw attention to the problem of publicly funded students taking academic leave.

The students organised an event called "Week Against Fascism", during which they reminded us that opposition to hateful ideologies is still relevant,.

We gathered for cleanups to show that environmental protection is an issue that should concern all social groups, including students.

Together with the student council of the psychology department of Karazin University, we have prepared a brochure on combating psychological violence by teachers.

We launched an action demanding the reorganisation of the empty Russian embassy into a publicly accessible youth centre.

Participation in demonstrations against the seizure of the Kyiv National I. K. Karpenko-Karyi University of Theatre, Cinema and Television (KNUKiT) building by looters, ended in a victory for the students.

We contributed to the creation of the "October 11 Student Committee" to inspect the installation of windows and doors at Lviv National University, and then we inspected shelters at universities.

We participated in protests against chauvinist Iryna Farion, demanding her dismissal from her professorship at the Lviv Polytechnic.

We organised a demonstration at the Kyiv International University (KyMU) against the administration's decision to charge students for their absences.

We spoke to you, we protested, we acted, we volunteered, we gave interviews, we attended conferences, we listened, we cared about you, and we don't intend to stop in 2024. We have a lot of work ahead of us and we can only meet the challenges ahead of us by joining forces.

In the coming year, we hope you do not forget the importance of your rights and remember that the most effective way to guarantee them is through direct action.

Honour and glory to those who defend us and give us the opportunity to spend this day in peace in an intimate circle.

Death to the Empire, Happy New Year!

Universities: a pure neo-liberal reform

Source: Direct Action student union media release

(December 28, 2023) The Direct Action student union denounces a reform project at the university and details its content in a long document. Extracts below on certain points of the "reform".

Recently, Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine Mykhailo Vynnytskyi gave new details about planned changes in the education system.

Once again, the general public learns about the features of structural reforms indirectly, through interviews, rather than by directly participating in a public debate. This situation is already worrying certain groups of concerned citizens: in particular, the Union of Education and Science Workers, the Higher Education Council and the Youth Council who are calling for a more transparent communication system and have declared ready to cooperate with the ministry.

Direct Action shares the concern regarding this "shadow" work of civil servants. What innovations did Mykhailo Vynnytskyi tell us about?

Mr. Vynnytskyi expressed the following opinion: "When a student pays for his education, the value of this education increases for him. He understands that he himself is investing in this project."

On scholarships

Mykhailo Vynnytskyi rightly points out that scholarships in Ukraine are extremely low and cannot meet the needs of students. The new system offers a solution to this problem by reducing the number of scholarship recipients to a select group whose education will be fully funded by the state. These mainly concern specialties of strategic importance, such as doctors, electrical engineers, teachers and workers in the transport sector, while "less important" specialties will not benefit from

any scholarships. In addition, according to the ministry, the solution consists of a system of scholarships which will cover tuition fees in proportion to the results obtained in the exams.

Education of teaching staff

Direct Action was surprised by the comments regarding the need for competition not only for students but also for teachers. According to the deputy minister, the low salaries of teachers are due to a kind of saturation of the market. In other words, there are too many teachers and not enough students - we need competition so that only good institutions and the best teachers remain in the job market.

“Teachers who do not demonstrate scientific and pedagogical success will be so poorly paid that it will no longer be profitable for them to work at the university for a simple salary.”

Instead of addressing teachers' working conditions and resolving the overtime problem, the government is once again unexpectedly proposing cuts.

The problems of the new education “reform” remain the same: lack of transparency, lack of specific information and a series of planned cuts.

Attempts to improve our education system must be supported, discussed publicly and with the participation of those who are interested, primarily students and teachers. As the meeting of the education and science workers' union and the activities of a number of student organisations, of which we are a part, show, the only question is whether the ministry is ready for this.

Reduce the number of universities

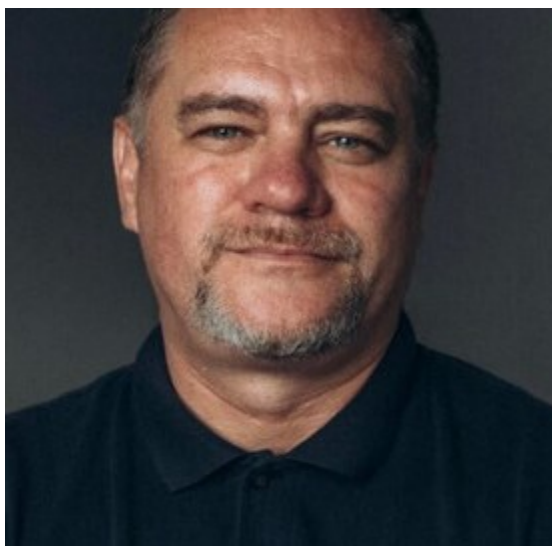
The deputy education minister welcomes the goal of reducing the number of public education institutions from 170 to 100, explaining that the number of students in the country is too low and that the educational infrastructure previously in place is no longer needed.

Other Ukraine labour news

Ukraine: who tried to intimidate prominent journalist Yurii Nikolov?

Source: *International Federation of Journalists*

(January 16, 2024) Ukrainian investigative journalist Yurii Nikolov said on Monday that he received a visit from unidentified people threatening him. The International and European Federations of Journalists (IFJ-EFJ) and their affiliates in Ukraine, NUJU and IMTUU, call on the Ukrainian authorities to identify the perpetrators of the threats and ensure the protection of the journalist.



Nikolov is a co-founder and an editor of the [Nashi Groshi](#) investigative media project. He is well known for his investigations exposing corruption in Ukraine's public procurement, including the Defense Ministry. Nikolov's investigations into inflated prices for food supplies and low-quality winter jackets for the military prompted the ousting of previous Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov.

Late on Sunday, two unidentified men approached Nikolov's apartment, in Kyiv, banging on his door and verbally attacking him, the journalist said on Facebook. He added that only his elderly mother was at home at the moment of this threatening visit.

According to the journalist, fifteen minutes later, a

post with footage from the scene appeared on the anonymous Telegram channel *Kartochnyy Ofis*, allegedly linked to the Presidential Office. The video shows a man knocking on a door pasted with papers with the words "traitor, (military service) dodger," and other verbal attacks, demanding that somebody open the door. The voice of another man, also knocking on the door and shouting aggressively, is heard in the video.

The police said they were ascertaining the details of the incident.

A post by an anonymous pro-Zelenskyy Telegram channel called "Office of Cards" said the intrusion had been conducted by soldiers who had come back from the front lines. The post heavily criticised Nikolov. Speaking on national television, Nikolov highlighted that this anonymous post suggested the incident was linked to disparaging comments he made about Ukraine's president.

IMTUU condemns the harassment, persecution and obstruction of the journalist. The union suspects the Ukrainian president's entourage of being behind the threats: "It seems that some government officials have decided to attack journalists through anonymous Telegram channels," said IMTUU President Serhiy Shturkhetsky. "After journalist Vladislav Sydorenko, in December, they're going after journalist Yurii Nikolov. If the Ukrainian authorities are truly not involved in these attacks, they must commission a swift investigation and punish the perpetrators and the masterminds."

“Intimidation of investigative journalists is unacceptable,” said NUJU President Sergiy Tomilenko. “When a prominent journalist is pressured that way, the result is a chilling effect on all journalists. We call on the police to investigate promptly this case and to protect Yurii Nikolov.”

Yaroslav Yurchyshyn, an opposition lawmaker who heads Ukraine’s parliamentary committee on freedom of speech, said he considered the incident met the legal definition for hindering the work of a journalist.

Are homemade drones the answer?

Source: Vitaliy Dudin, Telegram channel

(January 15, 2023) In Ukraine, the "People's Drone" project was launched by [Victory Drones belonging to the Dignitas technological assistance fund](#), within the framework of which Ukrainians can learn how to create FPV drones at home.



This was announced by Ukrainian Minister of Digital Transformation Mykhailo Fedorov.

He explained that “People's Drone” is an engineering course that will teach you how to assemble an FPV drone at home.

“During the training you will have access to lectures, there will be Zoom teleconferences with speakers, a list of components and a set of tools and materials to purchase, as well as access to the engineering community, where you will be able to consult and ask questions,” said the minister.

Here is Vitaliy Dudin's response to this project:

Following Mr. Fedorov's idea of assembling drones at home is a waste of an opportunity to build a military industry, which would provide many protected jobs.

Such decisions, detached from social priorities, represent a caricature of the war economy. Why doesn't the state coordinate the creation of large factories where the unemployed could be employed? This is what the British government did during the Second World War. Then, the mass of unions members increased from 4.5 million to 7.5 million members.

Hiring under an employment contract allows you to control the quality of work and allows you to pay taxes to the budget. But the minister believes in the miracle of the gig economy and suggests limiting oneself to the crowdsourcing model [outsourcing with individuals outside the company].

Allow me to remind you that the ultraliberal law on [DiyaCity](#) [tax exemption for high-tech industry], adopted at his insistence in 2021, did not eradicate hidden employment in IT. Only 1000 people work there under an employment contract.

Solidarity with Ukraine's workers and unions

Motion to affiliate to the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign Scotland

Agreed at the Dumfries and Galloway Trade Union Congress for submission to the Scottish Trade Union Congress (17-19 April, Dundee).

(January 22, 2024) Ukraine – Support for Ukrainian Trade Unions and Affiliation to the Ukrainian Solidarity Campaign Scotland



Congress reaffirms its support for the Ukrainian Free Trade Union Federations KVPU and FPU in their determination both to defend the Ukrainian people against the murderous attacks by Russian forces and to expel the Russian invaders from Ukrainian territory.

Congress regards the war in Ukraine as a struggle for national liberation.

Congress resolves to affiliate to the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign Scotland.

Swiss-Ukrainian Solidarity Committee project for Donetsk

Source: Comité Ukraine Suisse



(December 2023) At the end of the year, the Swiss-Ukrainian Solidarity Committee is launching a fundraising campaign for a project run by the NGO Base UA, which works with young people in the Donetsk region, close to the front line.

Base UA has been working with children and teenagers since April 2023. In particular, it organises painting, drawing and sculpture workshops in various towns and villages. The aim of these activities is to give young people in the region free time to think about something other than the war that has been taking place before their eyes and invading their lives for almost two years now.

Since September 2023, the Base UA cultural team has been setting up a centre called Terykon (literally: the slag heap, as the Donetsk region is a mining region and slag heaps are an essential part of its landscape), located in the town of Kramatorsk. The aim is to build a space that is both open and safe, literally and figuratively.

The association wants children to be able to go there to learn new activities (visual arts, photography, animation, theatre, foreign languages, etc.), meet friends, watch a film together, play games or just relax. It would also like to create a space that its users can call their own.

In order to equip the Terykon cultural centre, the NGO Base UA needs equipment to create a space in which it can run workshops and give lessons.

To help Base UA achieve this, we are launching a fundraising campaign to enable it to buy some of the equipment it needs (including mattresses, laptops, headphones, a projector and screen, speakers, a pottery kiln, electric heaters, an electric drill and screwdriver, a camera, watercolour and pastel paper, linoleum for linocuts, etc.).

Please make your donation via the Wemakeit fundraising campaign or directly to our bank account, mentioning "Christmas fundraising campaign".

To find out more about the Base UA association and its activities (website in English, German and Ukrainian): <https://baseua.org/>

Worker struggles in Belarus

Belarus: Women trade unionists in prison

Source: [Salidarnast](#)

(January 10, 2024) For almost three decades, Belarus has been a world champion in violating fundamental human rights, including the rights of workers for freedom of association. Belarus is mentioned among the ten worst countries for workers. During the mass uprising of Belarusians against Lukashenko and his regime in 2020, workers challenged the dictatorship with the threat of a general strike. The regime deployed outstanding repressions against the civil society, against the workers, against their unions.



Women's prison, Belarus

What's more, Lukashenko dragged Belarus into the war by backing another dictator, Putin against the people of Ukraine. And it was the democratic organisation of workers, the Belarusian Congress of Democratic trade unions which voiced the firm antiwar position of the Belarusian workers. The consequences were massive arrests and criminal accusations for trade union and workers' leaders in April 2022. Moreover, Belarus became a country without trade unions since July 2022 when all democratic trade unions were liquidated. The dictatorship in Belarus where any activity is labelled as extremism and terrorism does not stop its repression against civil society.



Trade unionists in jail

Forty-seven Belarusian comrades of ours are in prisons and penal colonies in Belarus, convicted of high treason, defamation of the state, participating and supporting extremist activities, with terms of up to 15 years in prison. Among them are well known trade union figures, such as Aliaksandr Yarashuk (pictured) – the President of BKDP, Vice-President of the ITUC and a member of the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization.

Among the imprisoned are women trade unionists and elderly people. And many of them are labelled extremists, some even terrorists. The

clothes of political prisoners are also labelled. Sadly, with yellow labels. Political prisoners constantly undergo torture, severe punishment by staying in closed solitary confinement in freezing cells. Forced labour of political prisoners without any trace of occupational health and safety, often in wood and textile industry, is widely used in penal colonies to convert the prisoners into law-abiding citizens, the state says.

Women trade unionist political prisoners



According to human rights organization Viasna, as of December 25, 2023, there were 1496 political prisoners in Belarus, of which 174 were women. Since 2020, at least 895 women have been prosecuted for political reasons.

Today, among those women political prisoners at least eight women activists and leaders of independent trade unions are kept in Belarusian prisons and penal colonies: Hanna Ablab (pictured), Zinaida Mikhniuk, Volha Brytsikava, Volha Barushka, Hanna Karneyenka, Sviatlana Sakovich, Palina Sharenda-Panasiuk, and Halina Smirnova.

They lost their freedom because of their activities.

Like many Belarusian women, they rebelled against injustice and dictatorship. In 2020 many women marched in the front row after the rigged elections during the protests against electoral fraud in the fight against the dictator, in the fight for freedom. They didn't demand free elections only, they also demanded liberation from authoritarian structures, liberation from a repressive masculinity that is part of Lukashenko's ideology and power base. Their protest was about equality, respect and self-determination.

They were sentenced to prison terms of between two and eleven years for their protest. Our solidarity and worldwide support is helping them and their families in this difficult time, when the regime is locking them away in prison and wants nothing less than for the world to forget them and their names.

We share the stories of our sisters here.

Palina Sharenda-Panasiuk

Palina is a public and trade union activist from Brest, who was detained on January 3, 2021. The mother of two minor sons was convicted under a number of Articles of the Criminal Code. At the end of February 2022, a criminal case was opened against her under Part 2 of Article 411 of the Criminal Code (malicious disobedience to the colony administration). On October 9, 2023 court found Palina guilty under Part 2 of Article 411 of the Criminal Code and sentenced her to one more year of the colony in addition to three years she got in 2021. At the first court hearing, she reported beatings in the Zarečanskaya penal colony: her face and internal organs were severely damaged.



Palina's family had to leave Belarus and had fled to Lithuania; they are fighting to make her case known to the public and aim at her sooner release.

There is evidence that female political prisoners are periodically placed in a penitentiary – a closed low temperature cell where they are deprived of correspondence, packages from the family, or personal things, warm clothes, and bed linen either. Although the exact details are not always known, and sometimes it is not possible to talk about it publicly such information finds its way outside of the prison. The status that Palina got—of “malevolent”—imposes additional restrictions on prisoners, the main of which is the reduction of the "in prison shopping" to two basic values (74 rubles or 20 euro per month). As prisoners note, it is very difficult to survive on this money without a salary and with the deprivation of parcels from family in the colony.

Hanna Karneyenka



Hanna is a member of the Free Trade Union of Metal Workers, a former accountant of the Minsk Electrotechnical Plant named after Vavilov. She was fired after protests at work place in 2020 and her union was suing the company for her illegal dismissal. Hanna had been sentenced for 5 years in penal colony allegedly for disclosing personal data of state agents. She was taken to custody when her newborn baby was three months old. Her husband is doing his best taking care of their two children on his

own. Hanna is in the list of terrorists.

Volha Brytsikava

Volha is the chairperson of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union of Miners and Chemical Workers at [Naftan oil-refinery](#). In 2022 with the beginning of war in Ukraine Volha has been arrested for her anti-war position and placed to jail. While she was in jail they sentenced her five times, 15 days each time. After Volha was released she continued helping her comrades. And with the liquidation of all independent trade unions she was one of few remaining union leaders who didn't leave the country. In August 2023, the regime arrested her and a couple of other comrades. Now she is under criminal investigation in a pre-trial jail of KGB in Minsk facing at least six years in jail. And there is not much information about her since. There are ongoing arrests of workers of Naftan, and the comrades of Volha link it to her case.



Hanna Ablab

Among our comrades Hanna is the one with the longest term —eleven years for high treason and defamation of the state. She worked for the Belarusian state railways, was part of the workers' initiative Rabochy Rukh. Hanna denied her guilt during the court hearing. The mother of three children, she has been recently transferred to one of the women penal colonies from the pre-trial prison.

Penal colonies or forced labour camps

The places where women political prisoners are kept are penal colonies where they are supposed to work. The labour of political prisoners should be qualified as nothing else but forced labour without health and safety regulations, without proper payment (often less than one euro per month), most often in textile industry. In the case of women prisoners, the working shift is eight hours in a sewing shop making uniforms for the military, most probably for the Russian army, or for the Belarusian police.

Trade union in exile

Many trade unionists had to flee from the dictatorial regime and continue their work in exile. Thus, in exile in the free city of Bremen in Germany they founded an association and called it Salidarnast – literary "solidarity" in Belarusian – to support trade unionists arrested and convicted by Lukashenko regime. "Union activism is not extremism" is their slogan. They are campaigning to release their comrades from jail, spread the news from Belarus, collect donations to a solidarity fund to help the families, children of Belarusian comrades, maintain networking and start providing union education.

Freedom is not something once gained then lasting forever. We need to constantly fight for it. The same goes with the Freedom of Association.

It is a big challenge for the Belarusians and the global workers' movement to act together with the employers and respective governments to put up pressure on the regime in Belarus. And the release of all political prisoners should be the precondition of any dialogue with Lukashenko.