

collective bargaining

Issue 5/2009 May

This newsletter presents up-to-date information on collective bargaining developments across Europe since February 2008. It aims to facilitate information exchange between trade unions and to support the work of the ETUC's collective bargaining committee.



AMSTERDAM INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED LABOUR STUDIES
UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM



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Austria

University collective agreement signed

May 13, 2009

On May 5, the GÖD public service union has signed a new collective agreement covering all university employees from 1 October 2009. The agreement means that university workers will no longer be covered by the main public sector agreement and that university works councils will be able to negotiate certain changes to terms and conditions. The GÖD believes that the agreement establishes a decent minimum wage and provides job security and a good career structure as well as career progression based on merit.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/306#a5017>;

German: <http://www.goed.at/15219.html>

Belgium

New temporary unemployment arrangement for white-collar workers

May 13, 2009

Under the Belgian scheme of temporary unemployment for economic reasons, employees will receive unemployment payment for any days not worked, be it fully only for a maximum of 4 weeks. Currently, the scheme is only available to blue collar workers. In October 2008, employers' organisations launched a proposal to extend the system of temporary unemployment to specific types of white-collar workers. Trade unions reacted reluctantly, and wanted a compromise to be linked to the long-discussed issue of harmonising the employment status of blue-collar and white-collar workers. In early April, a deadlock seemed at hand when the trade unions withdrew from the negotiations after being handed an ultimatum by the employers. Yet, on 30 April an agreement between government, unions and employers' associations was reached concerning "exceptional and temporary measures to avoid mass lay-offs". One of three measures focused exclusively on white-collar workers and implied the collective suspension of labour contracts without affecting worker's rights. Statistics of the ABVV/FGTB union confederation suggest that the number of workers under the temporary unemployment scheme in January-April 2009 nearly doubled compared to the last four months of 2008.

English: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2009/04/articles/be0904019i.htm>

Dutch: <http://www.fgtb.be/CODE/nl/fram001.htm>; <http://www.fgtb.be/CODE/nl/fram004.htm>
French: <http://www.fgtb.be/code/fr/fram001.htm>; <http://www.fgtb.be/CODE/fr/fram004.htm>

New collective agreement in metal industry

May 7, 2009

On 7 May, a two-year collective agreement for the metal industry was reached, entering into force backdated from 1 January 2009 till 31 December 2010. In this agreement, the "Ecocheque" system introduced in the national Interprofessional Accord (IPA) has been followed. This cheque, intended to be spent to goods and services with a sustainable character is paid by the employer, but neither the employer nor the worker does have to pay taxes or social security contributions over this cheque. The agreement includes payment in Ecocheques of Euro 125 on 1 October 2009 and Euro 250 on 1 October 2010. The automatic price indexation is maintained, implying pay increases on 1 July 2009 and 1 July 2010 based on the real rate of inflation, as a rule to be paid in Ecocheques. Temporary employees have been granted the same rights as permanent employees. All early retirement formulas have been maintained.

English: information CCMB and ABVV-Metaal / FGTB-Metal, via EUCOBAN network of European Metalworkers' Federation (EMF);

Dutch: <http://www.abvvmetaal.be/page.asp?id=2164&langue=NL>

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Croatia

Public sector unions call off strikes

May 27, 2009

Public sector unions called off the strikes planned for 13 and 14 May and a national demonstration planned for 16 May. The unions secured a draft agreement on pay for 60,000 civil servants that will now be voted on by union members. If members reject the agreement, the unions will return to the negotiating table with the government. According to the agreement, civil servants' pay will be increased in line with inflation from 1 January 2010 and they will also get a 6% increase once the economy has registered two consecutive quarters of growth.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/307#a5110>;

Croatian: http://www.sssh.hr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1139

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Czech Republic

International support for Czech unions

May 16, 2009

On 16 May about 20,000 trade union members from the Czech Republic and other EU countries rallied in Prague to demand better protection for workers during the economic crisis and protested proposed measures against it. The participants in this demonstration, like others all over Europe organised by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), gathered outside Prague Castle. "We have to do the maximum, including staging demonstrations to prevent the economic crisis to be misused against those who are not responsible for it, that is common citizens," said Milan Štěch, chairman of CMKOS, the major trade union confederation. The Czech speakers targeted recently proposed changes to the country's labor code, and claimed they were not acceptable for them as this reform would make it easier for employers to fire workers (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 2 April 2009).

English: <http://www.etuc.org/a/6189>; <http://www.businessweek.com/ap/financialnews/D987C2K81.htm>

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Denmark

Union raises issue of pay link to private sector

May 13, 2009

The FOA public service union has criticised municipal employers for failing to ensure that pay increases are implemented for all workers in April in line with the three-year agreement that was signed last year. It says that workers in the education sector in particular may have to wait to see the 2009 pay increase in their salaries. The union will be approaching the LO union confederation to see what action should be taken on this. It has also criticised the municipal employers for the time taken in producing an updated collective agreement. The municipal sector like the central government sector has a wage adjustment mechanism that means wage increases may be

higher or lower than initially negotiated to keep them in line with developments in the private sector. FOA general secretary Dennis Kristensen raises the question of whether it is time to abandon the formula even if this means that from year to year public sector pay deals might be higher or lower than those in the private sector.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/306#a5017>;

Danish: <http://www.foa.dk/sw494771.asp>

Estonia

Joint trade union protest over Labour Contract Act

May 20, 2009

On 20 May, over 20 trade union organizations reached an agreement on organizing protest actions over the implementation of the Labour Contract Act. The chairman of the Estonian Confederation of Trade Unions, Harri Taliga, noted that all affirmed the actions to be organized in June. "All participants in the meeting agreed that the government's unilateral plan to change the three-party agreement and cut back on employees' guarantees is not acceptable," Taliga said. The unions see three options for solving the crisis that has emerged – to postpone the Labour Contract Act, to fully implement it or to change it equally in the interests of employers and employees.

English: <http://www.baltic-course.com/eng/analytics/?doc=13987>

via http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/show_news.pl?country=Estonia

Finland

Trade union movement divided over common minimum wage

May 29, 2009

Lauri Lyly, the newly elected President of the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK), recently proposed that the labour contracts of all SAK-affiliated unions should have a set minimum monthly pay level of Euro 1,500. As Lyly sees it, everyone should be able to survive on what one earns without having to resort to welfare benefits. Not all trade unions are enthusiastic about the idea of a common minimum wage for all. Actually, in Finland each profession has minimum pay levels set in their labour contracts. Mikko Mäenpää, President of the Finnish Confederation of Professionals (STTK) reacted that at first glance, Lyly's proposal sounds good, but is based on the false premise of "base level social security", and as such is akin to the idea of a citizen's wage or a guaranteed pension. Mäenpää said not to believe that raising the lowest wages would be possible without it being reflected on the whole pay scale.

English: <http://www.hs.fi/english/article/Split+in+labour+movement+over+call+for+legally-mandated+minimum+wage/1135246309929> via http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/show_news.pl?country=Finland

France

Unions prepare for next mobilisation

May 27, 2009

Public and private sector union federations are continuing their mass campaigns over government policy and responses to the crisis. The eight public sector union federations have again joined to support the national days of action on 26 May and 13 June and to re-affirm their main demands to the government. These include immediate negotiations to secure an increase in the index covering public sector pay and revision of the public sector salary structure. The unions also want an end to job cuts and closures as well as to transfers of services that are combining to undermine the quality of public services and the working conditions of public sector employees (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 2 March and April 2009).

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/307#a5110>;

French: <http://www.cgt.fr/spip.php?article36105>; http://www.force-ouvriere.fr/page_principal/semaine/index.asp?id=1811&2009/5/27/Emploi-et-pouvoir-d-achat-Les-syndicats-reaffirment-leurs-revendications; <http://www.cfdt.fr/rewrite/article/19860/actualites/-patronat-et-gouvernement-doivent-engager-negociations-et-concertation-sur-les-sujets-prioritaires.htm?idRubrique=6864>

Energy unions continue action

May 27, 2009

The four main federations in the energy sector – FNME-CGT, FNEM-FO, CFDT and CGC – are keeping up their various forms of action in support of their demands for salary increases in the sector and a stop to outsourcing and closures. Apart from strike action and demonstrations, the unions are also using targeted power cuts to get their message across. An industry day of action on 19 May was followed by the four federations joining the national cross-sectoral demonstrations on 26 May. The unions are frustrated by the employers' refusal to negotiate and called on president Nicolas Sarkozy to put pressure of the employers to break their "wall of silence".

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/307#a5110>;

French: <http://www.fnme-cgt.fr/pages/communiqu.php?id=10>; <http://www.fnem-fo.org/content/view/457/1/>

Germany

Social and childcare workers step up strike action

May 27, 2009

By 26 May an estimated 25,000 social and childcare workers had joined the national strike organised by service workers union ver.di, as part of the campaign to secure a new collective agreement that addresses the health concerns of the sector. The numbers joining the strike have steadily increased since the action began on 15 May. More responsibilities and heavier workloads have increased stress and health risks for many employees working in social services and early years' education; the union argues that action is needed to improve working conditions. The local government employers' association has yet to respond to demands for such an agreement.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/307#a5110>

German: <http://presse.verdi.de/pressemitteilungen/showNews?id=85637ff4-49df-11de-5455-0019b9e321cd>

New pay deal at hospital group

May 13, 2009

Services union ver.di has negotiated a new collective agreement covering 15,000 employees of the Helios group of hospitals. A pay increase of Euro 30 a month plus 3% is backdated to 1 March this year with a further 2.4% paid in March 2010. There is also a Euro 225 lump sum to be paid this year, and from 1 January 2010 pay rates in the East will be 100% of those in the West. The agreement runs until 31 December 2010 and ver.di believes this will bring pay at the company in line with pay in competing companies as well as with pay in the public sector.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/306#a5017>;

German: <http://presse.verdi.de/pressemitteilungen/showNews?id=f05ee896-3e27-11de-68ac-0019b9e321cd>

Unions call for change to procurement rules

May 27, 2009

Trade unions ver.di, Transnet and GDBA that organise transport workers have criticised rules covering procurement in regional public transport that require acceptance of the lowest price bids for contracts. The unions argue that this opens up the sector to unregulated competition and risks creating a downward spiral of wage dumping. They also say that organisations providing training and good social benefits along with collectively negotiated pay are at a disadvantage because of these rules. The unions quote the example of a bus driver in a private firm getting Euro 1560 a month for a 48-hour week while a driver covered by a negotiated collective agreement would get Euro 2042 monthly plus allowances for a 42-hour week. In the Saarland region, ver.di and Transnet have joined with the IG BAU construction union and the DGB union confederation in a petition campaign calling for a law to require employers to apply collective agreements when carrying out public contracts.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/307>;

German: https://www.verdi.de/kampagnen_projekte/tariftreue

Government extends time limit in short-time scheme

May 26, 2009

The federal government has decided to extend the time limit of the official short time scheme (*Kurzarbeit*) from 18 to 24 months, a spokesperson declared. She explained that with the new arrangement, the government wants to offer firms more security for planning as well as a stimulus for firms not to dismiss workers even if the crisis might

continue. Also companies that already took refuge to short time, can make use of the new time limit. Minister of Labour Olaf Scholz praised the short time arrangement as the primary instrument through which work can be secured in the crisis. According to the Federal Labour Agency, from October 2008 on 96,000 companies with nearly 2.8 million employees have registered for short time. The Agency noted that the high point of short time requests seems to have been passed, with the number of employees covered by new requests falling from 460,000 in April to 270-290,000 in May (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 1 No. 10 and Year 2 January).

German: <http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/kurzarbeitergeld102.html>;
<http://www.tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/arbeitsmarkt194.html>;
<http://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/deutschland/kurzarbeit-schont-kasse-der-arbeitsagentur;2304547>

Greece

Public sector strike grounds flights and shuts ministries

May 14, 2009

On 14 May, flights to and from Greece were grounded for several hours after air-traffic controllers joined a nationwide public sector strike to protest against the government's response to the financial crisis. The 24-hour strike, which also shut down ministries and public services, was called by public sector unions representing more than half a million workers. They are fighting a public sector wage freeze and pension reforms. "We paid for their profits, we must not pay for their crisis," the ADEDY union stated. Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis's government launched a Euro 28 billion bank support package in January but a huge debt and fiscal problems have prevented the government from giving substantial relief to the poor, Reuters reports.

English: <http://www.reuters.com/article/marketsNews/idUSLE64875420090514> via
http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/show_news.pl?country=Greece

Ireland

Union warns about conflict in health sector

May 13, 2009

The IMPACT public services union has warned the Health Service Executive (HSE) that it needs to negotiate with the union to resolve conflicts over jobs, pay and pensions if it wants to avoid a major conflict. Longstanding dissatisfaction over HSE top management's treatment of staff and services could quickly lead to conflict unless an agreement can be reached to protect jobs, incomes and the value of pensions, according to the union's national secretary for health and welfare, Kevin Callinan. IMPACT has called on members not to co-operate with any HSE demands to freeze recruitment or cut allowances. It has already backed workers in ballots for industrial action in three hospitals.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/306#a5017>;
http://www.impact.ie/iopen24/newsdesk_info.php?newsdesk_id=229

Unions to continue talks with government

May 27, 2009

National talks between trade unions and the government over how to respond to the crisis will resume following a letter to the unions from the prime minister indicating a willingness to discuss a number of key issues. The unions have set out a 10-point recovery plan that includes negotiations over public sector jobs and the 7.5% "pensions levy" that has been imposed on workers across the public sector. The government says that it will discuss these matters although it has indicated that it wants to see greater flexibility in the delivery of public services (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 2 March and April).

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/307>;
<http://www.siptu.ie/PressRoom/NewsReleases/2009/Name,10846,en.html>

Italy

Three unions sign public health agreement

May 27, 2009

The three public service federations – FP-CGIL, FPS-CSIL and UIL-FPL – have all signed the latest two-year pay agreement covering 600,000 workers in the public health sector. The agreement includes an average increase of Euro 72 per month with the possibility that workers will also get a further Euro 20 on the basis of productivity improvements. The three federations have welcomed the deal as providing a good balance between national and

local bargaining and providing the health service with flexibility in its human resources policies.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/307>;

Italian: <http://www.fpcgil.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/10487>;

http://www.fp.cisl.it/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=626:ccnl-sanita-conferenza-stampa-unitaria&catid=5:news-sanita&Itemid=19; <http://www.uilfpl.it/news/newscomun345.html>

Malta

School teachers' strike followed by work-to-rule

April 30, 2009

For 30 April John Bencini, president of the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT), requested his members working in primary and secondary state schools to strike in protest against inadequate working conditions. A strike in church-run schools scheduled for the same date was called off after on 28 April MUT and the church authorities signed a new collective agreement. The basis for its dispute with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport is to be found in the implementation of the educational reform agreement that MUT had signed with the government in 2007. Media reports stated that the strike was a success, with almost no teachers, assistant heads or head teachers turning up to work. Following inconclusive meetings in May between MUT and the Ministry, the union ordered all teachers in state schools to confirm to a work-to-rule directive from 1 June on, doing no more than the minimum required by their job description.

English: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2009/05/articles/mt0905019i.htm>;

<http://www.mut.org.mt/index.htm>

Netherlands

Negotiations with Dutch Railways suspended

May 27, 2009

In mid-May, the FNV Bondgenoten union walked away from negotiations for a new collective agreement for Dutch Railways (NS, Nederlandse Spoorwegen) after the employer delegation offered a 1% wage increase in reply to the union demand of 3.5%. In a feedback meeting, union militants stuck to the earlier demand and supported union negotiator, Roel Berghuis. They also emphasized the need for clearer employment security prospects than the employer had offered thus far. Berghuis said, "My constituency sends me back with a very clear message, that is keeping all 15,000 NS staff on board with a fair wage".

Dutch: http://www.fnvbondgenoten.nl/nieuws/actueel/ns_moet_over_brug_komen_met/

Provincial government negotiations begin

May 13, 2009

After its first round of negotiations with provincial government employers, public service trade union ABVAKABO FNV says that two issues have been settled – the agreement will run for 12 months and arrangements for reducing working time for older workers have been clarified. However, the next bargaining rounds could be more difficult. The union says that it might make concessions on pay if job security can be guaranteed as well as improvements in training and career development opportunities. In contrast, it appears that the employers are looking for a pay freeze, a few minor technical changes to conditions and the possibility of a 40-hour week.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/306#a5017>;

Dutch: http://www.abvakabofnv.nl/cao/bericht/eerste_onderhandeling_cao_provincies/

Debates on terms of supplementary part-time unemployment payments

May 26, 2009

In publishing the new part-time unemployment scheme in the Official Gazette, Minister of Social Affairs Jan-Hein Donner suggested that the scheme was not meant to agree upon additional wage payments up to 100%. This provoked a strong reaction of the FNV union confederation, pointing out that during the negotiations on the new scheme government and social partners had agreed that specific arrangements at company level would be subject to decentral negotiations. The Minister has reacted in announcing to re-formulate the settlement for complaints on the application of the scheme in the direction indicated by the union confederation. According to Anja Jongbloed, collective bargaining co-ordinator of the largest private sector union, FNV Bondgenoten, in 87% of all company

agreements in which her union participates 100% additional payments have been laid down (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 2 January, February, March and April).

Dutch: http://www.fnvbondgenoten.nl/nieuws/actueel/klachtregeling_deeltijdww/;
http://www.fnvbondgenoten.nl/nieuws/actueel/bij_deeltijd_ww_vak_goede/

Romania

Railway workers stage protest over job cuts

May 13, 2009

On 29 April, thousands of railway workers marched through Bucharest in protest over proposals on job cuts. The workers, represented by a number of unions, were protesting outside the ministry of transport building. The government had announced that some 12,000 workers' jobs in the state railways would be axed, although officials later claimed only 4,000 jobs would be affected. It has been reported that the cuts are part of restructuring backed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The trade unionists were also calling for salary levels to be raised to levels comparable with those in other European countries, job security and better working conditions.

English: <http://www.itfglobal.org/news-online/index.cfm/newsdetail/3300>

Slovenia

Union confederation opposes minimum wage cut

May 8, 2009

Responding to a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which suggests that Slovenia should reduce its minimum wage, the largest trade union confederation, ZSSS, stated it would never agree to such a step. In a session of the Economic and Social Council, Andreja Poje, ZSSS economic adviser, said that the current minimum wage was not a threat to economic stability and that its influence on employment was positive. ZSSS executive secretary Ladislav Rozic commented on the OECD's proposal for a cut in social security contributions, saying that in Slovenia these were among the lowest in the EU. He noted that workers contribute 15% to the social security purse, while employers contribute 8.85%.

English: http://www.ukom.gov.si/en/news/news_from_slovenia/news/browse/7/article/88/144/bf65c770a6/

Spain

Confederations want to resume crisis talks

May 27, 2009

The CCOO and UGT trade union confederations have called on the government to re-open the social dialogue on the crisis. The unions want to see reforms to the tax and benefits system with higher and longer payment of unemployment benefits as well as an end to rules on age that restrict payments. They also want to talk about increasing taxes on the higher paid. They argue that trade unions, employers and government need to get together to mobilise the resources of the economy and to agree measures to generate jobs and economic growth.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/307#a5110>;

Spanish: <http://www.fsap.ccoo.es/webfsap/menu.do?Actualidad:Sindical:Actualidad:58928>;

<http://www.ugt.es/actualidad/2009/mayo/a20052009.html>

Sweden

Unions prepare for bargaining round

May 27, 2009

Municipal workers trade union Kommunal was one of a number of unions affiliated to the LO confederation taking part in a conference on 26 May to discuss collective bargaining priorities and equal pay. Pay negotiations are set to begin in autumn and Kommunal wants to keep its focus on equal pay and what more can be done to close the gender pay gap. Other key bargaining issues include the right to full-time employment and reductions in temporary employment. The conference provided a forum in which unions in the LO confederation could discuss co-ordination of their collective bargaining aims.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/307>;

United Kingdom

Strike threat secures pay deal for hospital contract workers

May 13, 2009

Some 60 private-contracted workers at Durham hospital in the North East of England will be paid in line with National Health Service (NHS) pay rates, after their ballot of UNISON members for strike action helped persuade the employer to agree to the new rates. In 2006 health unions negotiated a nationwide deal that was aimed at ensuring that all private contractors working for the NHS would pay their employees in line with NHS rates. However, it has been a challenge to guarantee that this happens at local level, UNISON regional organiser Ian Daley said.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/306#a5017>; http://www.unison.org.uk/news/news_view.asp?did=5331

Higher education unions reject pay offer

May 20, 2009

On 20 May, the five unions involved – EIS, GMB, UCU, UNISON and Unite – said that the UK higher education employers' organisation, the Universities, Colleges and Employers Association (UCEA), had made the worst pay offer in the public sector by increasing their offer from 0.3% to 0.4%. Besides rejecting this offer, the unions also expressed frustration at the unwillingness of the employers to jointly produce national materials on redundancy avoidance. Concerning the negotiations, UNISON head of higher education Jon Richards said: "We have made a few small steps but not enough for us to feel as if we are making significant progress."

English: http://www.unison.org.uk/news/news_view.asp?did=5355

National minimum wage to rise

May 12, 2009

On 11 May, the government announced that the national minimum wage is to rise by 7 pennies (cents) to UKP 5.80 an hour in October 2009. The rate for 18 to 21-year-olds will increase by 6 pennies to UKP4.83 and, for 16 and 17-year-olds, it will rise by 4 pennies to UKP 3.57. It was also announced that, from October 2010, 21-year-olds will be covered by the adult minimum wage. Trade union leaders showed mixed feelings about this long-awaited decision. UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis said: "I am pleased that the government hasn't listened to the CBI (the employers' association, ed.) and others who wanted a zero-pence increase (.....) But we believe that the minimum wage should be higher – an extra 7 pennies an hour won't go far to help pay the rising costs of essential items such as food, fuel and housing (....) A minimum wage of UKP 7.45 an hour would give many more workers a decent living and go some way to helping the government hit its eradication of poverty pledge."

English: http://www.unison.org.uk/news/news_view.asp?did=5336; <http://www.minimumwage.org.uk/news.asp>

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