



**ICFTU ONLINE...**

**Spotlight interview with Sergiy Budianskiy (Atomprofspilka, Ukraine) 24/4/2006**

**“Poor salaries and insufficient compensation for workers in the Chernobyl zone”**

Brussels, 24 April 2006 (ICFTU OnLine): In the past, a job in the nuclear sector was synonymous with prestige and good working conditions.

Nowadays, the salaries are poor and the compensation and bonuses are either insufficient or unpaid. Sergiy Budianskiy, president of territorial Trade Union of Chernobyl, affiliated to the Energy and Electrical Industry Workers' Union of Ukraine (Atomprofspilka), also denounces the alarming lack of resources for of health and safety, and the failure to compensate for the job losses linked to the closure of the plant.

**Have the jobs in the nuclear sector been spared the social shocks affecting Ukraine over recent months?**

“No. The Ukrainian trade union movement's demands concerning the right to decent work, to decent wages - paid on time - to a satisfactory system of social protection, apply to us in the same way they do the rest of Ukraine's workers. The operations being carried out in Chernobyl by the State enterprises are financed by the Ministry for Emergency Situations and must comply with the official liquidation programmes concerning the exclusion zone. In 2006, the budget allocated was just over 80 million hryvnias (€13 million). Sixty-million is allocated to wages and bonuses. The average salary is 1050 hryvnias a month (€170). It's ridiculous. According to Ukrainian law, the workers in the zone should receive bonuses equal to at least three minimum wages per month. In practice, over the last ten years, these bonuses have never exceeded 118 hryvnias (€19), and since the beginning of 2006, they have not been paid at all. It's a totally arbitrary decision. Meanwhile, outside the exclusion zone, the inhabitants of the contaminated regions continue to receive indemnities. They are ridiculously low (4 hryvnias a month, less than €1), but they still exist.”

**What are the standards regarding radiation exposure? Are they respected?**

“The standards are stricter than those provided for by law. The external rate of radioactivity is constantly measured in the exclusion zone. The workers all wear individual dosimeters. The information registered on them is logged and examined every month. During the annual medical check up, internal radioactivity levels are also measured. The level of Caesium 137 in the body is measured.”

**But recent studies tend to show that ongoing contact with even minimal levels of radioactivity appears to have negative health repercussions. What is your view on this?**

“It's true. That's why we need to improve the radioprotection measures. We are also demanding that the workers benefit from better quality meals, which is far from the case at the moment. They should be provided with food with radioprotective properties. Rest is also very important, and should be better organised.”

**Many workers sleep in the town of Chernobyl, in other words, inside the exclusion zone, which, in principle, is forbidden. Is their health not at risk?**

"They have no alternative. The shift system is designed in such a way that while they are working (usually for one or two weeks), they have to live and sleep in the community lodgings and eat in the nearby canteens. The levels of radioactivity in the premises, the linen, the crockery and the food are regularly checked. Any excess readings are usually linked to negligence on the part of a worker (insufficient deactivation of work shoes and clothes, etc)."

**But you also criticise the alarming lack of resources allocated to health and safety...**

"Yes, these items only account for 0.2 per cent of the salaries. The price of the special equipment and clothing is forever rising, and, as a result, the amounts supplied are totally insufficient. The hygiene conditions are just as bad: there's a lack of sanitary facilities, changing rooms, and even soap!"

**Have the massive job losses over recent years, mainly owing to the closure of the last reactor, been compensated for with the creation of new jobs? A special economic zone has been set up with this aim in mind. Does it represent an acceptable solution?**

"According to the government programme of 2001, the plant closure was to be compensated for with the creation of 3750 new jobs between now and 2008. A budget of 15 million hryvnias (€2.43 million) per year was anticipated. But this funding has not been transferred over the last four years. The Slavoutich processing zone has only created 700 jobs and the wages are much lower than in the exclusion zone."

Interview by Jacky Delorme.

- See Trade Union World Briefing, entitled "The Chernobyl catastrophe - 20 years on and still a killer"

- See Spotlight interview with Alexander Yaroshuk (BCDTU- Belarus), entitled "Propaganda is pushing people to work in the contaminated areas"

- See Spotlight interview with Vladimir Naoumov (Chernobyl Union – Russia), entitled "The mortality rate among the liquidators from Tula is 25%"

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For more information, please contact the ICFTU Press Department on +32 2 224 0204 or +32 474 621 018.

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