

collective bargaining

Issue 3/2009 March

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
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Austria

Union gets 3.55% increase for health workers

March 27, 2009

The VIDA services union has negotiated a 3.55% pay increase for employees at the Josefstadt and Döbling private clinics. VIDA's federal secretary for the sector, Rudolf Wagner, said that it had been important for the union to secure a pay rise for the 530 workers that was in line with pay awards in the rest of the sector. The main health and social services sectoral agreement was negotiated at the end of 2008 and included a 3.6% pay increase from 1 January 2009.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/302>;

German:

http://www.vida.at/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=SO3/Page/Index&n=SO3_0.a&cid=1237936219190

Minimum wage rise of 3.5% in fur and tanning

March 20, 2009

The GTMN union succeeded to negotiate a collective agreement for workers in the fur and tanning industries, including an increase of the collectively agreed minimum wage of 3.5% and the same increase of the apprenticeship allowance. The agreement will enter into force 1 March 2009 and has a duration of 12 months.

English: <http://www.eucoban.eu/ETUF-TCL/Reports/Collective-agreement-in-the-fur-and-tanning-sectors>

Belgium

Union confederation and women's movement celebrate equal pay day

March 27, 2009

On March 27, the FGTB union confederation and zij-kant, the progressive women's movement, celebrated the fifth edition of Equal Pay Day. March 27 is the date up to which Belgian women on average had to work in 2009 - on top of their 2008 salary - to equal the 2008 salary wage of their male counterparts. The organisers emphasize that, unless small improvements, the gender wage gap is far from being closed. They demand improvements in child care facilities; more attention for gender in education; upgrading of so-called female occupations and sectors; gender-neutral job classification systems, and a statutory social

dialogue at company level concerning wage transparency and personnel policies.

Dutch: <http://www.fgtb.be/code/nl/framoo4.htm>

Croatia

Unions announce lawsuits against government decision

March 26, 2009

Instead of cancelling collective contracts, the government has decided to bring a law that reduces the basic salaries for 180,000 public servants by 6%, and in that way also avoid entering a conflict with the unions as these are supposed to have no legal reason for a strike. The public services unions will most probably answer this decision with a lawsuit. They claim that the government can only reduce the basic salary by cancelling the collective contracts. "We will certainly win the lawsuits", says the president of the Independent Union of Science and High Education, Vilim Ribic. The unions of employees in healthcare, education, welfare and culture had already announced not to accept reduced salaries.

English: http://www.javno.com/en-croatia/croatian-unions-announce-lawsuits_245940
via http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/show_news.pl?country=Croatia

Czech Republic

Employers try to evade partial unemployment arrangements

March 12, 2009

The labour legislation of the Czech Republic allows partial unemployment arrangements in which the employer pays wage compensation for the time employees on their payroll do not work, conditioned by agreement between employers and trade unions. The OZ KOVO (Odborový zväz KOVO) metal trade union reports the widespread use of this possibility, but points at the same time at many employers trying to press individual workers to take up their holidays outside the frame of collective bargaining; to agree with individual contracts on short-time with corresponding wage cuts; to take unpaid time-off, and to leave on early retirement.

English: information OZ KOVO for ETUC

Finland

Union calls on government to negotiate over retirement age

March 10, 2009

The Finnish government has announced plans to increase the minimum retirement age from 63 to 65. The JHL public service union has called for the proposals to be withdrawn and for the government to open proper negotiations over the retirement issue. If the change were implemented it would be the third major change for municipal and state workers since their specific retirement rules were changed in 1995. Currently workers can retire any time between 63 and 68. The union argues that keeping employees at work longer can best be achieved through policies that take account of the needs and capabilities of older workers. Unions have set up an online petition as part of their campaign to get the government to withdraw the plans.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/298>; <http://www.jhl.fi/uutinen/4566>

Severance deals gain ground

March 24, 2009

An increasing number of workers at large Finnish companies get severance packages when being laid off, according to the MOT TV programme. Terminating staff in Finland has been relatively inexpensive and easy in comparison to practices in other western European states, and companies are not legally required to offer special severance pay. Yet, recently large companies such as Alma Media, Elisa, Nokia, Kemira, Metso, Perlos, TeliaSonera, UPM and YLE have offered severance pay for dismissed employees. On the other hand, Cargotec, Finnair and Metsä-Botnia do not have special severance pay policies in place.

English: http://www.yle.fi/uutiset/news/2009/03/severance_deals_gaining_ground_in_finland_633503.html
via http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/show_news.pl?country=Finland

France

Government fails to respond to union demands

March 27, 2009

The eight public sector trade union federations (CFDT, CFTC, CFE-CGC, CGT, FO, FSE, Solidaires, and UNSA) have joined together to condemn the government's failure to respond to any of their demands. The federations met with public service minister Eric Woerth on 3 March and called for a moratorium on job cuts, negotiations on an increase in pay in view of the decline of real pay since 2000 and a reform of the public sector pay system. Woerth simply restated government policy, failing to take account of the impact on citizens and service quality. As a consequence, the eight federations organized a second nationwide day of action on 19 March. The response was even better than on 29 January: around three million workers are estimated to have taken part in over 200 demonstrations around the country. The federations meet again on 30 March to decide about the next steps in their campaign.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/302>;

French: [http://www.force-ouvriere.fr/page_principal/communiqu/index.asp?fl=&id=1621&nbre](http://www.force-ouvriere.fr/page_principal/communiqu/index.asp?fl=&id=1621&nbre;);

<http://www.cgt.fr/spip.php?article35857>;

<http://www.cfdt.fr/rewrite/article/18551/actualites/le-19-mars,-une—journee-reussie—de-mobilisation.htm?idRubrique=6864>

Germany

Regional government workers get 5.8% increase

March 27, 2009

The fourth round of negotiations in regional government produced a two-year agreement with a pay increase of Euro 40 plus 3% in 2009 and a further 1.2% in 2010. With the Euro 40 increase worth around 1.6%, this produces a 5.8% increase over the two years from 1 March 2009. A lump sum of Euro 40 is also being paid to the 700,000 workers in regional government to cover the two-month period between the previous agreement and the new agreement. The ver.di services union has surveyed its membership to get their response to the deal. Overall just under 69% of those voting supported the agreement but this figure rose to 80% in the East.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/302>;

German: http://presse.verdi.de/aktuelle-themen/tarifrunde_2009_laender;

<http://presse.verdi.de/pressemitteilungen/showNews?id=2893abca-ofe3-11de-6723-0019b9e321e1>

Difficult negotiations in energy sector

March 27, 2009

No progress has been made after the third round of bargaining at the Thüga energy company where the employer is insisting on a two-hour increase of the working week. The ver.di services union wants a 5.6% pay increase just to pay for the increase in working time and has rejected the employer's offer of 1.2% plus a Euro 500 lump sum. Meanwhile at AVEU, ver.di and the employers have agreed to set up a working group to try to make progress on this year's negotiations. The union has rejected proposals for an increase in working time and has said that any employer plans for "modernization" must not be at the expense of workers. Better news comes from the MVV company, where ver.di has secured a 4.1% pay increase backdated to 1 January 2009.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/302>;

German: <http://energie-bergbau.ver-und-entsorgung.verdi.de/energie/tarifarbeit>

Women stage wage-gap protests nationwide

March 20, 2009

Women's groups across Germany protested on Friday March 20 to highlight the yawning pay gap between the sexes in the country. The date has not been chosen by chance. According to the protest organisers, this is the date up to which German women on average had to work this year - on top of last year's salary - to earn as much as their male counterparts did in 2008. On average, women in Germany earn nearly a quarter less than men, compared to an average of 17% in the EU, with several factors specific to Germany making it hard for women to bridge the gap. "The tax system in Germany encourages women to take a part-time job when their husband earns more than them," Astrid Ziegler, a researcher at the WSI in Düsseldorf, said. A scarcity of places at German day care facilities, as well as the fact that schools are not open all day, also make it difficult to combine a job with family life, she added.

English: <http://www.thelocal.de/national/20090320-18131.html>

Hungary

Small increase of minimum wage

March 1, 2009

After fierce debates, the government decided that as of 1 January 2009 the statutory minimum wage was increased to HUF 71,500 (Euro 282) per month, lifting it 2.3% compared to the former HUF 69,900 but representing an immediate fall of 1.4% in real terms. In an earlier stage, union confederations had demanded increases of 16 to 45%. In February, the social partners represented on the tripartite National Interest Coordination Council (OET) have agreed to recommend a general wage increase of 3-5% in 2009 (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 1 No.'s 7 and 8).

English: Watson Wyatt Data Services, *EMEA Employment & Benefits Roundup*, No. 1, February 2009

Ireland

Unions get government back to negotiating table

March 27, 2009

The ICTU union confederation has postponed a planned day of action on 30 March in order to take part in talks with government and employers about how to deal with the country's economic and financial crisis. National negotiations broke down earlier this year, following which the government went ahead with legislation to implement a "pensions levy". This is effectively a pay cut for all public servants and represents a reduction of 7.5% from the public sector pay bill. The ICTU has drawn up a 10-point action plan as the basis of negotiations on a strategy in response to the crisis and it has made clear that talks with the government must involve a re-negotiation of the "pensions levy". In a letter to ICTU general secretary David Begg, Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Brian Cowen wrote: "I see considerable merit in many aspects of the 10-point plan" (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 2 February 2009).

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/302>;

http://www.impact.ie/iopen24/newsdesk_info.php?newsdesk_id=211

Italy

Federation continues campaign over precarious work

March 10, 2009

Following its joint demonstration against precarious work with the metalworkers' federation FIOM-CGIL, on 6 March the FP CGIL public sector federation organised a sit-in protest in Rome. The federation is particularly concerned about government proposals to slash temporary work in the public sector. This could mean up to 60,000 jobs going from July this year and the federation claims that up to 200,000 jobs are under threat over the next three years (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 2 January and February 2009).

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/298>;

Italian: <http://www.fpcgil.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/9783>

Large amount of metal workers temporary unemployed

March 11, 2009

The crisis has hit the metal industry severely. In February 2009, about 200,000 metal workers have been included in the Cassa integrazione, the country's temporary unemployment system. The Cassa integrazione provides about 60% of former wages for maximum 12 months. Benefits used to be 80%, but the first Berlusconi government reduced them to 60% with a maximum amount of Euro 750 per month. Currently metalworkers' federation FIOM-CGIL's bargaining policies are aiming at, among other things, blocking dismissals, notably of precarious workers; rotating use by workers of the Cassa integrazione; extension of the Cassa integrazione period till 18 months, and lifting its payments to 80%. In the tripartite table, the latter demands have also been extended to government, including the demand to expand the system to the precarious workers.

English: information Sabina Petrucci, Europe Secretary FIOM-CGIL for ETUC

Netherlands

Cleaners no longer invisible

March 27, 2009

On January 16, 250 cleaners held a protest action at Schiphol, the international airport of Amsterdam. Jointly with their union, FNV Bondgenoten, they were demanding to be treated with respect by their employers and by the airport operator. In particular, they were asking for a travel allowance to enable them to get to work, as well as clean and comfortable amenities in the workplace. The demonstrators marched over the airport, with drums, megaphones and placards, ensuring that their demands were seen and heard by the airport management, passengers, shoppers and other passers-by. Yet, FNV Bondgenoten says to be disappointed by the employers' reaction and to prepare for further industrial action.

English: http://www.uniglobalunion.org/Apps/iportal.nsf/pages/sec_20081016_gbg7En

Dutch: http://www.fnvbondgenoten.nl/branches_bedrijven/branches/dienstverlening/schoonmaak/1272681/

Health care unions refuse wage freeze

March 26, 2009

Public servants union ABVAKABO FNV has said that a government plan that public sector workers' pay should be frozen is unacceptable. The union points out that a statement from the joint union and employer Labour Foundation proposes negotiating agreements on pay, employment and training. Notably with a view to bargaining the new one-year collective agreement for general hospitals and mental health care, ABVAKABO FNV, now joined by health care union NU '91, emphasized to refuse a wage freeze and to stick to a 3% wage demand for this sector. ABVAKABO FNV president, Edith Snoey, said: "The idea that there is no room for wage increase cannot be explained to our constituency, struggling with labour shortages and high work pressure". Both unions are also opposed to lifting the pension age from 65 to 67 as far as it concerns the mentally and physically demanding occupations in health care.

Dutch: http://www.volkskrant.nl/economie/article1170949.ece/Bonden_lonen_in_de_zorg_niet_beveezen;
http://www.abvakabofnv.nl/cao/bericht/abvakabo_fnv_wil_gelijke_loonontwikkeling_in_publieke_en_marktsector/

Unions accept lower wages in exchange for no dismissals clause

March 9, 2009

Four public sector unions, ABVAKABO FNV, BVPP, CNV Publieke Zaak and VPP, have reached a basic collective agreement with TNT in which they accept a wage decline of gross 15% for postal workers in grades 1 to 4, in exchange for an employment guarantee by which forced dismissals will be excluded for the next three years. A transition period has been agreed during which TNT pays 95%, ranging from two years for those under 35 of age till five years for those over 50. The agreement is subject to membership ballot till April 29. Union officials emphasize that these results have to be projected against the backdrop of the full liberalisation of the Dutch postal market, on April 1. Main ABVAKABO FNV negotiator, Peter Wiechmann, said: "We stood with our backs against the wall. The alternative was the dismissal of 11,000 workers, and that's impossible."

Dutch: NRC-Handelsblad, March 10, 2009;

http://www.abvakabofnv.nl/cao/bericht/verslechterde_cao_voor_postbodes_tnt

Part-time unemployment scheme replaces short-time support

March 26, 2009

As of 1 April, all companies troubled by the current crisis can apply for part-time unemployment benefits for (parts of) their staff, provided that workers' representatives –mostly the Works Council– give their approval and a training plan has been drawn up. The new scheme replaces the special short-time support arrangement, which from 30 November 2008 to 20 March has been used by 770 companies. The condition in this arrangement that companies should show a 30% decline in turnover within two months, has been removed, and it is expected that a larger number of companies will qualify for the new scheme. Companies can apply for part-time unemployment benefits for maximum 15 months: initially for three months, with possibilities for prolongation for twice six months. Jointly with some smaller labour market measures, the government budget foreseen for the new scheme is Euro 375 million (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 1 No. 10 and Year 2 January and February).

Dutch: De Volkskrant, March 25 and 26, 2009; information Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment

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Norway

New bargaining round to start

March 20, 2009

On 20 March, the new national bargaining round between the Norwegian Confederations of Trade Unions (LO) and the NHO employers' association started. As the main national bargaining round was in 2008 and the national agreement as of that year has a validity of two years, the actual round focuses on wages. The basis is the current economic situation and price and wages outcomes in the first year. As directives for the new round, LO's General Council has adopted: general improvement of purchasing power; better compliance with equal pay at various levels, and guarantee arrangements leading to increased collectively agreed wage rates and special additions for the lowest-paid. "We want an increase in purchasing power for everyone, but we will also take into account the special situation in Norway when it comes to the international financial crisis, especially the employment situation," LO president Roar Flåthen stated.

English: information Fellesforbundet (private sector union) for ETUC;
<http://www.forbes.com/feeds/afx/2009/03/20/afx6193137.html>

Poland

Miners heading towards strike

March 23, 2009

Miners at Europe's largest coal company, Poland's Kompania Weglowa, are taking measures that could lead to an early April strike following a 19 March mediation session. That session produced little movement in efforts to resolve 2009 wage negotiations. The state-run company's 65,000 miners at 16 collieries are led by NSZZ Solidarność, Kadra, and the Polish Miners' Trade Union, with smaller unions also involved. Miners engaged in a two-hour warning strike on 12 March, but during the 19 March talks management's 4.6% wage offer still fell several %-points short of miners' demands. Also locked in wage talks are 40,000 miners at two other state-owned coal servicing and production companies, Jastrzebska Spolka Weglowa and Katowicki Holding Weglowy. Management of both companies is seeking to impose a wage freeze on miners this year.

English: <http://www.icem.org/en/78-ICEM-InBrief/3088-Polish-Miners-Now-Ready-for-April-Strike-After-Mediation-Fails>

Portugal

Government sticks to statutory minimum wage increase

March 24, 2009

According to the tripartite agreement signed in 2006, the statutory minimum wage should increase at an annual rate of about 5.3% during the period 2007–2011. The agreement allowed for a substantial increase of 5.6% in 2009 as to reach Euro 450 a month. In October 2008 the Prime Minister, José Sócrates, confirmed that the government was going to respect this intention. Though the employer organizations were strongly opposing this plan, the union confederations were equally strongly in favour. The Prime Minister argued that "the situation of economic crisis is a stimulus for the accomplishment of the agreement", and finally the government laid down the 5.6% increase as of 1 January 2009. According to official sources, the statutory minimum wage currently applies to 4.5% of the labour force.

English: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2008/11/articles/pt0811039i.htm>

Spain

Federation wants new agreement on gender equality

March 27, 2009

The FSP-UGT public service federation has called for a new agreement in the general public administration that would require action to uncover the main reasons for continuing inequality between men and women. The union says it wants to work with the equality units that should have been set up in each Ministry according to recent legislation, although so far only two are up and running. The federation argues that if it is possible to identify the main factors that contribute to inequality, it will be possible to draw up a plan of action to deal with them.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/302>;

Spanish: <http://www.fspugt.es/index.php/mod.noticias/mem.detalle/idnoticia.8246/cat.1029>

Sweden

Metal union reaches additional temporary lay-off deal

March 23, 2009

The IF Metall union has reached an agreement with employers aimed at preventing massive job losses. The agreement was signed between IF Metall and three employers' federations covering metal, engineering, chemical, textiles and other manufacturing sectors. The one-year deal allows employers and plant-level unions to agree special arrangements, such as reduced working time or educational leave, in order to avoid making workers redundant. Under the scheme workers are able to keep their jobs and receive 80% of their regular wages, because of the additional compensation paid by employers on top of official unemployment benefits. The agreement was reached at national level but arrangements must be negotiated at local level.

English: <http://www.itglwf.org/DisplayDocument.aspx?idarticle=15716&langue=2>;
<http://www.eucoban.eu/ETUF-TCL/Reports/IF-Metall-Agree-Crisis-Deal-in-Bid-to-Prevent-Massive-Job-Losses>; <http://www.emcef.org/news/list2.asp?jobid=100>

Switzerland

Union confederation rejects wage lowering

March 14, 2009

The SGB union confederation has reported pay increases for 2008-2009 in the private sector varying from 2.4% (construction industry) to 3.25% (retailing – Co-op) and 3.6% (electricians – craftsmen), and in the public and semi-public sectors from 1.5% (call centres) to 3.5% (Swisscom). Collective bargaining coverage rose from 49% in 2006 to 52% in 2009. For 2009-2010, the bargaining agenda of SGB includes: no wage lowering during the crisis; income maintenance and preservation of purchasing power; a halt to gender discrimination in wages, and the extension of collective agreements to groups of precarious workers.

English: information Vasco Pedrina, USB confederation, for ETUC

United Kingdom

Local government pay dispute resolved

March 10, 2009

The 2008 pay increase for local government workers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland will be 2.75% following a process of binding arbitration overseen by ACAS, the conciliation and mediation service. In a joint statement, the three main unions involved, UNISON, Unite and GMB, said: "We welcome the fact that ACAS has accepted our arguments that members should receive a higher pay increase." ACAS stated that the award is "justified and affordable in the context of the claim for the year 2008/2009". Lower paid workers also get an extra UKP 100 as agreed previously. The arbitration process delivered an extra 0.3% on top of what the employers had offered in 2008 (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 1 No.'s 3, 8 and 9 and Year 2, January 2009).

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/298>; http://www.unison.org.uk/news/news_view.asp?did=5194

Recession no excuse to continue gender discrimination

March 16, 2009

On 16 March, the UNISON public service union stated: "Women should not be expected to pay the price for earnings injustice." Calling for radical changes to the outdated 1975 Equal Act, UNISON director of organising and membership Bronwyn McKenna said: "Employers are profiting from pay inequality and using the recession as an excuse to perpetuate discrimination." She stressed, "The Equality and Human Rights Commission must take a tighter grip on the issue and end the gender pay gap once and for all." Ms McKenna's comments came as it emerged that this body responsible for safeguarding equality in the UK is to tell the government that the economic climate is too fragile to impose equal pay reviews on business.

English: http://www.unison.org.uk/news/news_view.asp?did=5223

London tube workers to vote on strike

March 23, 2009

Workers on London's Underground rail network are balloted on strike action in a dispute over job security and pay. The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) said it feared 3,000 jobs could be at risk. Nearly 10,000 RMT members will be asked to vote in the ballot that opened on 24 March and closes on 8 April. "London Underground seems to think that observing agreements is optional, and its plan to cut jobs is simply unacceptable," said RMT General Secretary Bob Crow. He said managers had refused to rule out compulsory redundancies, including among staff at the formerly privately owned Metronet maintenance group which became part of Transport for London (TfL), which operates the Underground, last May. The RMT is also protesting against an "unacceptable" five-year pay offer that it said gave no real-term increase for four years.

English: <http://www.rmt.org.uk/Templates/Internal.asp?NodeID=120842>

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For more information, please contact the editor Maarten van Klaveren, Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies (AIAS) M.vanKlaveren@uva.nl, or the communications officer of the ETUI Tristan Macdonald tmacdonald@etui.org. For previous issues of the Collective bargaining newsletter please visit www.etui.org/publications. You may find further information on the ETUI at www.etui.org, and on the AIAS at www.uva-aias.net. © ETUI aisbl, Brussels 2009. All rights reserved. We encourage the distribution of this newsletter and of the information it contains, for non-commercial purposes and provided the source is credited. The ETUI is not responsible for the content of external internet sites. The ETUI is financially supported by the European Community. The European Community is not responsible for any use made of the information contained in this publication. To unsubscribe, please contact Tristan Macdonald tmacdonald@etui.org.