

Abstract

## **Post-Socialist Trade Unions, Low Pay and Decent Work: Russia, China and Vietnam**

### **Investigators**

Professor Simon Clarke, University of Warwick  
Tim Pringle, University of Warwick

Vadim Borisov, ISITO, Moscow  
Dae-Oup Chang, AMRC, Hong Kong

Local research teams in Russia, China and Vietnam coordinated through ISITO, Moscow and AMRC, Hong Kong.

### **Aims and objectives of research**

1. Through participation in the NGPA Programme, to contribute to the more adequate theorisation of the character and role of non-governmental public action.
2. To chart the extent to which trade unions in the post-socialist countries are managing to make the transition from governmental to non-governmental organisations.
3. To assess the potential role of trade unions in addressing the issues of low pay and poor working conditions in poor countries.
4. To draw conclusions for international governmental and non-governmental organisations regarding the forms of collaboration and support that they can most fruitfully provide for trade unions.
5. To contribute to the building of research capacity at the local level in the target countries.

### **Key research questions/hypotheses and methods**

The central question that the research is designed to address is:

- What are the possibilities for trade unions in post-socialist countries to act effectively to secure decent wages and working conditions for public and private sector workers?

This is underpinned by a number of further questions:

- What are the conditions for such effective action?
- What are the barriers to the effectiveness of such actions?
- What is the relative effectiveness of trade union action harnessing state powers, as against trade union action mobilising trade union members through representative structures?

- What is the relative effectiveness of government initiatives, trade union action, spontaneous workers' action and the activity of other NGOs in securing decent wages and working conditions?

The underlying hypothesis is that action in support of decent work is more effective the more it involves grassroots organisations. Trade unions have a very poor reputation in the post-socialist countries and have not been noted for their activism, but in each country there have been significant initiatives taken at workplace and local levels and the project will focus on these.

The project will use qualitative case study methods, involving documentary research, interviews, focus groups and observation, primarily at local level, with a series of case studies of best practice, concentrating on the contrasting examples of public services (the health service) and the new private sector, both of which have low pay and poor working conditions, the former with a high trade union density, the latter with very little formal trade union organisation.

### **Relation to the programme**

The primary focus of the project is **empirical research** into the **processes** involved in trade union efforts to secure decent work and the **application** of the findings to attempts to increase the effectiveness of such efforts by national and international trade union, labour and 'fair trade' organisations. The project has a very strong user-orientation, but also has the potential to feed in to all three objectives in all three strands of the programme through dissemination of research findings and participation in programme seminars.

### **Relevance of this research to user groups**

The project will be conducted in close collaboration with regional, national and international trade union and labour organisations and NGOs concerned with labour issues, including the monitoring of Codes of Corporate Conduct. The participants in the project already have very close connections and long experience of collaboration with ICFTU, ILO, the GUFs and other international NGOs in the region.

### **Contact details**

Simon Clarke  
Centre for Comparative Labour Studies  
University of Warwick  
Coventry CV4 7AL

email: [Simon.Clarke@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:Simon.Clarke@warwick.ac.uk)  
tel: +44-2476-523301  
project Website: [go.warwick.ac.uk/Russia/npga](http://go.warwick.ac.uk/Russia/npga)

Dae-Oup Chang, AMRC, Hong Kong co-ordinating teams in Guangdong, Zhejiang and Hanoi  
email: [chang@amrc.org.hk](mailto:chang@amrc.org.hk)

Vadim Borisov, ISITO, Moscow co-ordinating teams in Samara, Perm' and Kemerovo  
email: [icftumos@cq.ru](mailto:icftumos@cq.ru)

September 2005