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Ukraine

'Russia's war no excuse for attacks on trade unions'

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Ukrainian workers make up the [bulk of frontline soldiers](#) defending the country against Russia’s war of aggression, but that hasn’t stopped Volodymyr Zelensky’s government from attacking trade union rights.

Last month, five union officials from the [Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine \(FPU\)](#) and Ukrproftur PJSC were arrested, including FPU president Grygoriy Osovyi. Four remain in jail, while Osovyi, a European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) Executive Committee member, is under house arrest.

The five are accused of allegedly setting up a criminal organisation and misappropriating trade union property in 2016–18. But the FPU has condemned the arrests as an attempt “to discredit the most numerous and influential trade union association in the country”.

The ETUC also criticised the arrests, noting in an [April 24 statement](#) that while it “continues to condemn Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine ... this cannot be used as an excuse for attacks against trade unions ... in particular at this crucial time where the labour reforms are being discussed”.

Among the proposed reforms being debated in parliament is Draft Bill 6420, which would give the state power to seize trade union property.

According to the FPU’s [April 11 statement](#), it aims “to finally complete the process of illegal and non-transparent alienation of trade union property, which today performs important functions, providing medical and sanatorium services to workers, military personnel, and shelter for internally displaced persons”.

Unions, employers and the government are also negotiating possible changes to the country’s Labour Code. The FPU has been a strong critic of the government’s proposed draft reforms.

Authorities have been seeking for decades to weaken the Soviet-era legislation, but have faced stiff resistance from unions. With strikes and protests banned due to martial law — imposed as a result of Russia’s invasion — the government is again trying to achieve this goal.

This is not the first time the war has been used to attack union rights. In 2022, parliament passed Laws 5371 and 5161, which allow for “zero hour” contracts and curtail workers’ collective bargaining rights in businesses with less than 250 workers — about 70% of the workforce.

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