The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Uproar in Murmansk as Teachers' Salaries Withheld Amid Economic Crisis

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March 25, 2015



A large number of teachers in Murmansk's had not been paid for their work in the first half of March.

Teachers' salaries have been withheld en masse in Murmansk as Russia's economic crisis bears down on the regional budget, news site FlashNord reported Wednesday.

The Murmansk branch of Russia's national teachers' union filed a complaint with regional governor Marina Kovtun, claiming that a large number of employees of Murmansk's educational institutions had not been paid for their work in the first half of March, FlashNord reported. Collective bargaining agreements list March 19 and March 22 as the deadlines by which teachers must be paid, the report said.

“The sharp rise in inflation, the decrease in educators' real income — many of whom earn minimum-wage salaries — insufficient savings and the current situation linked to payment delays have caused anxiety for many and fomented high social tensions in communities,” the union's complaint said, according to FlashNord.

City officials said that the delay in teachers' payment stemmed from a lack of funding from regional authorities, FlashNord reported.

Earlier this month, the Murmansk region discontinued its distribution of some social benefits such as child allowances and housing subsidies, citing delayed funding from the federal government as the reason behind the cuts.

Issues with the timely payment of teachers is not exclusive to Murmansk. Some 60 teachers of Siberia's Zabaikalsky region declared a strike earlier this month after not having been paid for more than three months.

The Zabaikalsky affair had been the first large-scale teachers strike in Russia in more than a decade, according to the Kommersant newspaper.

Last month, female teachers from the Urals city of Yekaterinburg concerned about salary cuts were bluntly told by a regional official that finding a rich husband would put an end to their financial troubles. The Sverdlovsk region, of which Yekaterinburg is the administrative center, slashed the teachers' salary fund by 75 million rubles ($1.3 million) in September, media reported at the time.

Teachers and their pupils were kept in the dark in the far eastern Primorye region this month after electricity was cut in 17 kindergartens because of the municipality of Spassk-Dalny's inability to pay its power bill, news agency Interfax reported in early March.

A survey published earlier this month by the Moscow-based Levada Center, an independent pollster, found the salaries of 9 percent of Russians were currently being withheld. The poll, conducted among a representative sample of 1,600 people in 46 regions with a margin of error not exceeding 3.4 percent, revealed that 15 percent of the population expects delays in getting paid in the coming months if the economic situation continues on its current course.

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Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/03/25/uproar-in-murmansk-as-teachers-salaries-withheld-amid-economic-crisis-a45134