

## **AUSTERITY HAS FAILED:**

### **Unions and workers fighting back**

**Sharan Burrow, General Secretary, International Trade Union Confederation  
ICTU Congress, 8<sup>th</sup> July 2015**

Congratulations John and Patricia - Congratulations trade union women and men of Ireland for standing up against low pay and exploitative working conditions.

My maiden name is Murphy so the affinity I feel with the ICTU is born of generations of shared family history.

Delegates - Inequality is now recognised by even the arbiters of austerity as an economic risk - sadly not because of the plight of people as their actions reinforced by the scandalous way they are treating people in Greece.

Your fight is critical for Irish workers and their families but it is also inspiring in our global fight to build the power of workers and to tame corporate power.

When David Cameron says 9 pounds by 2020 is a living wage target we should endorse he has clearly never tried to live on a minimum wage.

Let me introduce you to the global workforce and the scope of our collective fight.

There are around 2.9 billion people in the global workforce. Only 60% of workers have a job in the formal economy and even then the majority are in precarious work.

Then there are 40% of our brothers and sisters are struggling in the informal economy with no minimum wage or income, no social protection and excluded from legislated labour rights; and these numbers are increasing.

And around 30 million people are enslaved in forced labour / modern day slavery.

Delegates, the wage share of national wealth keeps falling in almost all nations over the last 30 years while CEO pay in countries like the US has risen by 90 times that of a typical worker since 1978. And safety is just not a priority for too many employers.

Moreover 75% of the world's people have no or inadequate social protection. The social protection floor costs just a few % points of GDP and is the basis of community cohesion, a fundamental means of reducing inequality and is a basic floor of demand - yet workers taxes are not being used for the public services and support for which we pay them and the low tax - tax evasion of corporations is encouraged or tolerated by too many Governments.

Inequality is a matter of political choice nationally and internationally and it is fueled by the dominant model of global trade.

The biggest companies in the world depend on supply chains that are exploitative with low wages, unsafe and insecure work.

When our corporations can't pay a minimum living wage of \$177 a month in Cambodia or \$ 250 or \$120 in Bangladesh something is very wrong. It is called corporate greed!

When a textile worker like Rina from the Philippines tells me she cannot tell her 12 year old son if she will be home to cook him a meal or say goodnight because she is forced to work extra shifts without notice - this is not decent work!

When men gathering seafood for many of our tables are enslaved on boats in Indonesian waters without living quarters and sanitation for months on end there is no hope for them of decent work without us.

And you know the story of slavery in Qatar and the deep corruption of FIFA and all the construction and service companies making profits from the shame of the World Cup in a slave state.

We cannot and will not give up on eliminating slavery.

Delegates, I meet the workers who are producers of the world's wealth but who share little or none of it and worse are invisible with no voice. I get angry with them, I cry with them. They are courageous men and women - they are our brothers and sisters - our family.

A brother this morning cited the American Chamber of Commerce as champions of a volunteerist model of collective bargaining. In fact they are our number 1 enemy...not content to drive an anti-union culture in the US they are everywhere threatening Governments with capital flight if they raise minimum wages or strengthen labour rights. If governments are cowered only we can stand up to their zero hours contracts and their low paid vision of a perfect world for corporate profits and you are - you are showing the way to defeat them. To the Dunnes workers and all others you have global solidarity in your struggle.

And of course it is these American companies demanding the ISDS disputes mechanism in the TTIP. The right to demand taxpayer dollars to prop up their claims for lost profits!!! Now that's socialism -socialising corporate greed.

In Asia we have launched the campaign to end corporate greed and we will extend this campaign to Latin America and Africa in 2016. The world day for decent work on Oct 7 will be dedicated to campaigns for safe secure work, for minimum living wages and social protection under the umbrella slogan of 'End Corporate Greed.

The ITUC global rights index details the worst places in the world for workers to work.

In almost 60 per cent of countries, certain types of workers are excluded from their fundamental labour rights -

Seventy per cent of countries have workers with no right to strike.

Two thirds of countries deny workers collective bargaining rights.

More than half of countries in the survey deny workers access to the rule of law, and Unionists arrested and murdered are on the increase including in European countries where workers in Spain face jail for striking against austerity or migrant workers risk their lives for the right to work.

The shocking reality is that while the Gulf States are the worst region in the world for workers enslaved by the Kafala system it is Europe that represented the greatest decline in respect for workers' rights and entitlements - it's called austerity.

There are some shifts - the G7 considered supply chains for the first time and recognised the responsibility for their global companies to respect fundamental labour rights and ensure due diligence through supply chains. We have also put it on the G20 agenda and there will be an ILO discussion at the Conference in 2016.

The trust of corporations is broken. ITUC polling finds 55 % of respondents in France, Germany, the UK and the USA believe most global companies can't be trusted to look after their workers and tougher laws are needed.

80 % of respondent in Indonesia, the Philippines and Turkey believe that most employers prioritise profits over safety of their workers;

More than three quarters (78%) of people in Indonesia, the Philippines and Turkey want business to pay all their workers a decent minimum wage.

This breakdown in trust places the onus back on governments to ensure the rule of law. This year the world's leaders will endorse the Sustainable Development Goals and full employment and decent work with universal social protection are central to these goals.

I can't leave you without a word on climate. For the destruction of lives and livelihoods is staring us in the face. There are no jobs on a dead plate...that's our message. And 90% of respondents to the ITUC poll want to see leaders take action to prevent climate change and a total of 79% want action in the next 12 months or less.

Government ambition is too low and no country has a national plan, no industry see or has a collective agreement with unions for the transition that is imperative and this the time for planning for a just transition is running out.

The challenge of decarbonisation is a task for all of us. Jobs are already being lost and workers and workers and their communities have a right to know how their governments

and their employers plans to decarbonise our economies. I hope we will see some of you at our union climate summit in Paris in September.

Finally let me both congratulate you and share your joy of the inspirational referendum on marriage equality. Your pride in this act of solidarity and respect for the love of individual for each other and their families is so well deserved.

And just as you celebrated this amazing act of the democratic power - of your power - you will likewise celebrate the victory of the fundamental social justice that your fight for a living wage and decent working conditions represents.

Patricia, your leadership as the first woman secretary will be legendary - you will lead this fight with all unions leaders and most importantly union members in their workplaces organizing - Organizing for workplace justice.

Together within and across nations we can build the workers power that will end corporate greed.

Solidarity.