

## **Address by Brian Campfield, Congress President**

### **Launch of MRCI Report *All Work & Low Pay***

**November 26, 2015**

Firstly I would like to thank the Migrant Rights Centre for inviting Congress to participate in the launch of the report which has been elaborated upon by the previous speakers and the findings and conclusions, which have been given a real human dimension by Sami and Bernadette.

The report complements the work of Congress, in particular our *Charter for Fair Conditions at Work*. The Charter sets out five key components to the achievement of Decent Work for all, regardless of race, colour or creed: They are

- **Payment of the Living Wage**
- **Fair Hours of Work**
- **Right to Union Representation & Collective Bargaining**
- **Respect, Equality & Ethics at Work**
- **Fair Public Procurement**

We have been extremely active and interventionist with the Charter, deliberately enlisting the support of TDs and Councillors across the jurisdiction. In this regard we make no apologies for putting our politicians on the spot and asking them to declare their support, through their signatures for these principles.

For many Irish people the unfairness and inequality of power in the world of work is best highlighted by the recent events at Clerys and by the continuing poor treatment and victimisation of workers employed at Dunne's Stores.

We know that the only real way to combat inequality and unfairness is by organising and building the pressure on the Government and on employers. The recommendations in this report focus on building that very pressure with a set of attainable demands involving among other things enforcement and penalties, increasing wages and encouraging workers participation in negotiating and enforcing their rights.

Speaking of the enforcement of rights, it appears to me that there are double standards operating in relation to employers who illegally withhold and steal money from their staff, compared to workers who take money from their place of work.

We know from experience that any worker taking money or goods from their workplace will likely face the loss of their job and the full weight of the law.

But an employer who 'withholds' or 'deducts' wages unfairly – use any euphemism you care – faces no such sanction.

That's wrong and that's unjust. Employers who act in this way are stealing and they should be treated as such. That's why I am calling for a **new crime of Wage Theft** to be introduced so that employers cannot do this with impunity.

But while this can be a difficult challenge for workers generally it is a much more difficult task for migrant workers given their vulnerability and isolation and I would say that the report has sharply highlighted these two problems that many migrant workers experience.

We cannot underestimate the scale of the challenge that organising migrant workers presents and the Migrant Rights Centre plays a critical role in keeping the issues of exploitation and discrimination against migrant workers in the spotlight.

When workers who are organised are faced with an injustice they can at least plan collectively how to respond but they often have to confront hard headed employers as well as biased, unfair and inadequate legislation. It is much more difficult for migrant workers who mainly work in unorganised sectors and who suffer from an even greater imbalance of power in favour of the employer.

The trade union movement has a message for non- migrant workers. It is in your own self-interest to support migrant workers because if the levels of exploitation continue then the tendency will be to depress wages and incomes for everyone.

To migrant workers I would say to them that the trade union movement supports you and there is a place for you within the trade union movement, on an equal basis with other trade union members.

There is a need, an imperative, given the common interests of all workers, to strengthen the joint work of Congress and the Migrant Rights Centre, recognising the truth of the maxim of James Larkin, one of the giants of the Irish trade union movement, that "An injury to one is the concern of all."

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate today and I wish you every success in realising the recommendation this report, which if implemented will benefit all Irish workers.

ENDS