

THE **UNION POST**

PUBLISHED IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS

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JUNE 2010



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Picture: Paula Geraghty



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CONDEMNED
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CONGRESS: Human cost of bank bail-out 'immeasurable'

TOO HIGH A PRICE



Paul Sweeney



Jack O'Connor

CONGRESS has warned Ireland is paying too high a price for the bank bail-out which is costing us jobs and damaging prospects for recovery.

Reacting to figures released earlier this month showing a rise in unemployment from 13.5% to 13.7% in the Republic, Congress economic advisor Paul Sweeney claimed the 'true' unemployment figure was far higher and that diverting billions to shore up finance

houses was destroying jobs and undermining growth.

He said: "The Government's highly deflationary policy is taking money out of the economy and destroying jobs, as these figures show."

"The price is too high – in financial, economic and social terms. In addition, wholesale cuts in spending and incomes are reducing both investment and demand in the economy – again the first casualty is jobs."

Demand is down 10% in the last three years."

Last month, Congress president Jack O'Connor lashed the Government's "intellectual bankruptcy" after controversial benefit changes were revealed in the Social Welfare Bill.

He slammed the measures – targeting one parent families and the unemployed – as "reprehensible beyond belief".

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13.7%

officially on the
dole but the true
figure could be

18.5%

and rising...

UNION POST



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Irish Congress of Trade Unions
31/32 Parnell Square
Dublin 1
Ireland
Tel: +353 1 8897777
Fax: +353 1 8872012
Email: congress@ictu.ie
www.ictu.ie

Northern Ireland Committee
Irish Congress of Trades Unions
4-6 Donegall Street Place
Belfast BT1 2FN
Northern Ireland
Tel: 02890 247940
Fax: 02890 246898
Email: info@ictuni.org
Web: www.ictuni.org

DESIGNED & EDITED BY BRAZIER MEDIA
Email: braziermedia@btinternet.com

BELFAST MAY DAY



BOLD AS BRASS!



Patricia McKeown, left, with Palestinian flag led sizeable group of UNISON members on march



Brian Campfield, left, leads NIPSA contingent



Downpour: UNITE women use flags for shelter



NIC-ICTU's Peter Bunting & Bob Crowe of RMT



Following the march there was entertainment and food on offer at marquee in Writers' Square

Pictures: Kevin Cooper, Photoline

ICTU chief slams 'reprehensible' govt

CONGRESS president Jack O'Connor has slammed the Government's "intellectual bankruptcy" following the publication of its "heartless" new Social Welfare Bill.

Calling the current administration "reprehensible beyond belief", he claimed the proposals penalised the "most vulnerable" in society.

Among the changes proposed in the new Bill is reduced eligibility for the one-parent family payment from April 2011 as well as punitive measures against unemployed people who refuse jobs deemed suitable. Mr

O'Connor, who is also SIPTU general president, said: "This is a direct consequence of the budgetary policy reversal by the Government between April and August of last year in which the prospects of any element of balancing the burden of adjustment in society were discounted in favour of a decision to impose the entire €4 billion deficit cut on working people and on those who depend most on public services."

"The Government contemptuously dismissed proposals from the trade union movement and even employers' organisa-

tions for putting in place a proactive jobs support strategy. Instead it has embarked on a policy which will leave our young people exposed to the most ruthless and unscrupulous exploitation."

He added: "Their only alternative will be to emigrate, taking with them the skills and potential to rejuvenate our country in the medium term."

"Of course there is nothing new in this. Enforced emigration is the traditional strategy of Fianna Fail and those on the right."

Too high a price

● From Page 1

Mr Sweeney said it was clear the unemployment trend was going up and cautioned that more jobs would be lost if the Government was determined to persist with its policies.

He added: "Equally, it is clear that the figure of 13.7% underestimates the 'true' level of unemployment and thus the scale of the social and economic devastation now unfolding."

"When you add to that number the tens of thousands who have been forced to emigrate, because they cannot find work; the tens of thousands who have stayed in or returned to education for the same reason and the tens of thousands who can only get part-time or casual jobs, you get a more accurate picture of the scale of the problem and its huge social impact."

"Taking those numbers into account, the true unemployment figure could be as high as 18.5%."

"This is a huge crisis and will put serious strain on our social fabric. The lost potential for the economy, for society and the individuals is huge, when almost one in five is out of work."

"The level of human suffering is immeasurable."

"We urgently need a significant reordering of Government priorities with people placed firmly before banks and private profit."

"In May 2009, Congress called for a €1bn job creation and protection plan, it needs to be implemented immediately."



A section of the crowd at the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign rally in Dublin on June 6. UNISON regional secretary Patricia McKeown, inset, spoke on behalf of Congress

Convoy attack 'action of rogue state'

CONGRESS has claimed Israel acted like a "rogue state" following the assault on the Gaza aid convoy by IDF special forces that left nine activists dead.

In a joint statement issued after the May 31 attack, general secretary David Begg and president Jack O'Connor said the Israelis had showed "an utter disregard for all precepts of international law and human rights".

It continued: "The people on those boats were civilians engaged in peaceful humanitarian work and were no threat to anyone. To launch a military assault on a humanitarian convoy is beyond the

bounds of all that is acceptable and should be judged as such by the international community."

"The assault was akin to the actions of a rogue state."

Meanwhile, Congress assistant general secretary Peter Bunting has insisted that "decent people everywhere" must now stand with the besieged people of Gaza.

Speaking following the release of Irish and Malaysian peace activists from the MV Rachel Corrie, he added: "If people are angry at the continued economic siege of Gaza, then take similar action as an ethical consumer and an active citizen and boycott Israeli goods."

"If you have a pension plan, contact your broker or those who manage the fund and ensure that you are not contributing to the economic oppression of the Palestinian people."

"At the same time, we must not forget that there are brave human rights activists in Israel itself – over 6,000 demonstrated last weekend in Tel Aviv."

"Show them that they have our support."

"The ICTU campaign of boycott and divestment of Israeli goods is aimed at the government of Israel and its militarised policies towards its Palestinian neighbours."

Pictures: Paula Geraghty

Ministers ignoring jobs crisis

CONGRESS has blasted the Irish Government for ignoring the jobs crisis and failing the Republic's 435,000 unemployed.

In a May Day statement, general secretary David Begg said: "Government inaction and failure has seen the numbers out of work triple and has ensured that long-term unemployment and emigration are central features of Irish life, once again."

Claiming it was "as drastic an indictment of official policy as it is possible to get", he added: "The

spectre of the 1950s and 1980s now haunts working families all across Ireland."

"It appears that Government is just not working," Mr Begg slammed the Government for seeming "utterly transfixed" by the banking crisis, while those who had lost their jobs had seen their benefits cut.

"There appears to be a bottomless pit for the senior bankers that caused this mess – and the jobless are told to wait in line, literally."

"For there to be any sense of jus-

tice or of a burden being shared, Government must move with urgency to give the jobs crisis equal billing with the banking crisis."

"Even enlightened self-interest should tell them that we will not even begin to recover until employment starts to pick up."

"Claims that we have already exited the recession or have turned the corner are meaningless, until we start getting people back to work."

Pointing out that a number of "organisations, institutions and individu-

als" had proposed "innovative responses" to the problem, Mr Begg added: "For our part, Congress has put forward proposals on how we could effectively protect and create jobs. Government did nothing."

"We have published proposals that could help create tens of thousands of jobs in the Green Tech sector and also agreed with construction employers a new initiative to allow the billions held in Irish pension funds to be invested in key infrastructure projects."

MORTGAGES

Congress calls for setting up of debt resolution body

CONGRESS has called for the setting up of a new Office for Debt Resolution to ensure householders with mortgage problems do not rely on the "grace and favour" of banks to keep their homes.

The new agency would have the power to vary or revise existing mortgages taking account of changed circumstances and would strike a balance between the rights of householders and those of banks.

The proposal to create the non-judicial body was made in a presentation to the Government's Expert Group on Mortgage Arrears and Personal Debt on May 18.

In his address, general secretary David Begg said: "It is not acceptable that hard-pressed households – struggling with job loss and income cuts – should be forced to rely on the grace and favour of banks to keep their homes.

"That is unfair and untenable, especially given the scale of the mortgage and debt problem.

"At the very least, householders in difficulty should have the right to know that there is a fair, independent way to deal with the problem.

"We envisage the ODR operating independently of the legal system, acting to strike a balance between the rights of householders and the banks.

"Consequently, it would have the power to vary or revise existing loan agreements, to take account of changed circumstances."

Noting that there may be up to 200,000 people living in households where there is a difficulty with mortgage repayments, he added: "They are entitled to some level of security and to be treated with the same degree of understanding already shown to those that caused the crisis."

Congress official Esther Lynch claimed the current banking code of conduct on mortgage arrears was inadequate which seemed to point to a "serious underestimation of the scale of the problem".



Picture: Congress

David Begg said Irish householders should not have to rely on 'grace and favour' of banks

She said the setting up of the ODR would provide an easy-to-understand alternative to the courts, providing a less intimidating atmosphere in which people can "work through" all of their debt problem.

She said the Office for Debt Resolution would:

- Protect family homes from repossession and from creditors practices that exacerbate financial distress,
- Consider if there has been reckless lending or excessive penalties charged and reduce the debts accordingly,
- Have the ability to modify or reduce the terms of a mortgage, and decide the schedule and order of payment across all creditors,
- Have the power to consider the totality of peoples' debts and conclude an arrangement that sets out an affordable payment schedule, suitable to the person's means and provision of a

decent standard of living.

● Be impartial and have a duty to ensure balanced negotiation and to prevent manipulative or intimidatory techniques. This is particularly relevant as the debtor may have multiple creditors all seeking immediate repayment,

● Be able to suspend interest and other charges and penalties as these can exacerbate financial distress,

● Have the capacity to address negative equity and repossessions by remodeling and revising existing loans to take account of changed circumstances,

● Have the capacity to determine equity changes including facilitating a role for local authorities in equity purchase or buy and rent back, and

● Will have the power to freeze/modify interest rates.

For a full copy of the Office for Debt Resolution Proposals, go to www.ictu.ie/publications/fulllist/office-for-debt-resolution/

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LEGISLATION

Union fury over Bill proposals on protests

TRADE unionists protesting against job cuts or paramilitary killings could face up to six months in jail under proposed Northern Ireland parades legislation, it has been claimed.

Proposals contained in the Draft Public Assemblies, Parades and Protests Bill mean that those organising demonstrations or rallies involving 50 or more people could in future be required to give 37 days advance notice.

If the proposals become law, they will seriously hamper the way Northern unions and other interest groups operate.

A NIPSA spokesperson said: "The new legislation will severely restrict the ability of trades unionists, political activists, community and campaign groups to organise effective and spontaneous public demonstrations to highlight issues which often require a speedy and immediate public response at very short notice."

"Protest meetings such as those against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, solidarity vigils held to support the victims of racist attacks, or demonstrations such as those outside the BBC in relation to airtime being given to the BNP, will all fall under the remit of the new law."

The proposals – designed to deal with the vexed issue of contentious parades – are currently out for public consultation.

The draft Bill includes plans for two new bodies to replace the Government-appointed Parades Commission.

The first would be an office where applications can be made for permission to hold a parade or a protest.

The second would be an adjudication body which would decide on disputes.

Under the proposals, Stormont Justice Minister David Ford would also be given the power to ban a parade.

Migrant survey: bullying shock

MORE than half of migrant nurses claim to have experienced bullying or workplace discrimination while working in Ireland, a shock new study has revealed.

In a survey of 300 non-EU nurses carried out by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, 34 per cent reported being bullied by native-born fellow nurses while another 25 per cent claimed to have been bullied by nurse management.

A further five per cent claimed to have been bullied by junior doctors or consultants.

Of those questioned – mainly from the Philippines and India – only one in five said they planned to remain in Ireland.



From left, independent researcher Brian Harvey, Una O'Connor and Jack McCarthy of IMPACT's Boards and Voluntary Agencies branch executive and union general secretary Shay Cody Picture: Conor Healy Photography

Warning govt cuts may decimate community and voluntary sector

A NEW STUDY has warned the community and voluntary sector is facing a crisis with the potential loss of one in 10 jobs as state funding is slashed.

The report – commissioned by IMPACT's Boards & Voluntary Agencies branch – estimates up to 5,000 jobs will go even as demand for services increases due to the recession.

It claims voluntary organisations that are more critical of government policy could also be seen as "an easy option to cut".

There are about 6,100 voluntary and community organisations in the Republic, employing more than 53,000 people.

The sector's estimated value to the economy is €6.5bn, while state funding approaches €1.89bn.

The study, carried out by independent research consultant Brian Harvey and launched on May 12, looked at the disproportionate impact budget cuts will have on the sector.

The report found the recession had meant a massive increase in demand "not only in traditional areas such as the need to help people with cash, shelter, food and food parcels, but in new areas such as money-lending, debt and mortgage arrears, as well as unemployment".

Una O'Connor, secretary of IMPACT's Boards and Agencies branch, emphasised the reliance on a huge level of commitment and skill from individuals working in the sector.

She explained: "With limited resources, we have made this a strong and vibrant sector which supports a strong social economy."

"Inflicting cuts on the community and voluntary sector is nothing less than a betrayal of everything that we have achieved."

Ms O'Connor, who works for the Sophia housing project in Dublin, added: "This report confirms that the ability of the sector to represent those most in need will be sharply reduced and that the civil society voice for a more enlightened social policy will diminish."

"It marks the greatest risk that the community and voluntary sector, which has been a model of best

practice and expertise in so many fields, has ever faced."

During 2009/2010, when the state budget increased overall, budgets for voluntary and community organisations were reduced.

On the state side, government spending rose by 6% in 2009 and is due to fall by 1.8% in 2010.

However, the voluntary and community sector cuts were between 18% and 20% over the same period.

The report claims that while the cuts were lower in social and health services, they were much higher in community development.

Ms O'Connor said a contraction in the voluntary and community sector of about 15% over the next two years is expected.

She added: "We know that voluntary and community organisations are trying to absorb cuts."

PAY CUTS

"Most staff in these organisations have taken pay cuts similar to those in the public services or have gone on three-day weeks."

However, despite efforts to absorb cuts, heavy job losses are expected.

Ms O'Connor added: "In employment, we project a loss of almost 5,000 jobs, with an additional 1,100 posts at risk in community employment. These are cautious and conservative projections."

"These jobs are done by skilled professionals, with years of experience and commitment, vital qualities for modern social and public services."

Public services provided by the sector include social housing, services for people who are homeless, social services for children and older people, development aid, services for people with intellectual and physical disabilities, community development, services to people who are unemployed and disadvantaged communities.

Ms O'Connor underlined that community and voluntary organisations provided the "human face" of public services to the most vulnerable people in our society, adding: "These organisations have evolved into professional, quality services and are not a cheap alternative."



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Last month, Congress invited **WILL HUTTON** to speak on building an economic alternative vision for Ireland. This is what he had to say...

RESHAPING THE FUTURE

A LEADING economic analyst has called for the setting up of “an innovation ecosystem” to help drag Ireland out of the economic crisis.

Will Hutton, executive vice chair of UK think-tank The Work Foundation, made the comments during a Congress-organised lecture and debate at Liberty Hall, Dublin, on May 12.

He pointed out that running “like a golden thread” through such an approach was the view that fairness was “paradoxically the indispensable value that makes capitalism function”.

Mr Hutton said: “Capitalists don’t think that fairness – as I define it – counts. They define fairness as essentially ‘I eat what I kill’.”

But he added: “Capitalists don’t think that fairness – as I define it – counts. They define fairness as essentially ‘I eat what I kill’.”

“I did the deal. I made the money. Here is the bleeding carcass. I killed the beast. I have the right to eat it. And when I’ve gorged myself, there might be a bit left for you but I did the killing, I kill what I eat – and that’s only fair.”

Mr Hutton pointed out there was another conception of fairness which involved “proportionality” and getting “due deserts” for your efforts and claimed that studies of hunter-gatherer societies had shown that “in order to survive, you have to share”.

Mr Hutton said: “Sharing reciprocity and due desert for discretionary effort are embedded in the human condition. What happened in the last 20 years is that we allowed our capitalism in Britain and Ireland to forget that fundamental principle.”

Describing the behaviour of some banks as “unbelievable”, he outlined how banking assets had risen inexorably since deregulation in the 1980s to become four and five times GDP in the case of Ireland and the UK.

He claimed this growth in Ireland, which was less diversified and more focused on commercial real estate, property lending and construction, “came close to bankrupting the state”.

Mr Hutton warned that despite bailing out the banks, the basic business model remained essentially the same.

He told the audience: “They’re back to their bad old ways because they know no other. That’s the way they make money. They’re growing their balance sheets again.”

Mr Hutton predicted the British state could be overwhelmed if there was another banking crisis

in 10 years time with bank assets eight or nine times GDP, but noted this was less true of Ireland with NAMA scaling back bank assets here.

Turning to how the current mess came about, he pinpointed the introduction of new banking techniques to manage risk at a time when the capital that was underpinning growth in assets was being run down as a prime cause.

He said: “They thought the bigger they were, the less risky they were. We now know the bigger they were, the more risky they were.”

Mr Hutton also flagged up the massive increase in private debt in developed countries and pointed out how in many countries this now constitutes more than three times GDP.

He predicted this would make growth in the years ahead “very, very difficult” and suggested that even China – which has been using private debt to grow its economy just like the West – was “going to hit the rocks too”, adding, “these are serious times”.

Mr Hutton claimed that Ireland’s big public sector deficit teamed with enormous private debt presents “an existential threat” to the country.

Slamming Ireland’s political and financial establishment, he claimed the Irish people should have been alerted to the risks that were being taken in the run up to 2008.

“You were living in La-La Land. For a country

as small as yours to have banks the size your banks were, to build up private debt on the scale that you did...”

Admitting that what lay ahead was a “policy challenge” for government in its bid to reduce the deficit in the euro zone, he said this involved cutting household debt as well as “unwinding” what took place in commercial real estate.

However, he claimed that Ireland now had some “credibility” because of what had been done to address the budget deficit and wanted it to push for greater financial regulation in the euro zone.

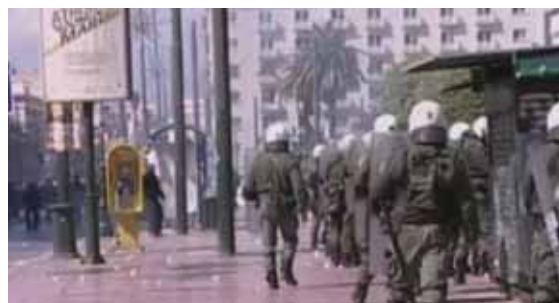
He told the audience: “We need a European Monetary Fund, we need early resolution measures to prevent banks from over-lending on their balance sheets too quickly, and to wind them back without their collapse.”

“We need pan-European financial regulation. Don’t buy the line from London that hedge funds have no place in this or private equity. Private equity has borrowed worldwide \$1.7 trillion and it has to repay that before 2016.”

Mr Hutton claimed this massive sum could not be repaid within that time-frame.

“They’re going to write those loans off and who’s going to pick up the bill? Western taxpayers. This notion that private equity hedge funds are not part of the crisis – they are an ongoing part of the crisis.”

The banks are back to their bad old ways because they know no other. That’s how they make money... Capitalists don’t think that fairness – as I define it – counts. They define fairness as essentially ‘I eat what I kill’...





Mr Hutton underlined the crucial importance of the knowledge economy in leading both Britain and Ireland out of the recession.

He said Ireland had to find a way of exploiting new opportunities through emerging new technologies – such as manuseservices, developments in low carbon energy, tidal and wave science – that were likely to have a “transformative” impact on society.

Mr Hutton claimed in future a better-educated public would also be making greater demands on both the public and private sectors.

“You want a great experience with what you consume and it’s the inter-relationship between technologies and demand.

“You want smarter things from your iPhone, smarter apps. You want a pill that sorts you out if you’ve got muscle pain. That’s what’s driving the knowledge economy.

“It’s like the tide – it’s coming in. You as consumers – and as workers – are going to make more and more demands in your workplace.

“How you’re led, managed, organised in unions is going to be very, very different in future.”

According to The Observer columnist, despite the importance of the knowledge economy, British and Irish investment was “pathetic” and insisted “the taps” had to be turned on to fund the sector.

In comparison with the rest of the world, both

countries were currently “not at the races”.

He added: “If we’re going to capitalise on all this opportunity in the future, we’ve got to have the kinds of ways of irrigating our productive entrepreneurs – who grow the economic power – not our unproductive entrepreneurs in banking who actually tax us and shrink our economic pie.”

Mr Hutton suggested Ireland needed to focus on constructing an innovation ecosystem built around universities as “real poles” to generate wealth.

He described this approach as a “part centre left, part centre right”, using taxation to fund research while allowing entrepreneurs to pocket returns “for their discretionary effort”.

Mr Hutton warned the trade union movement had to grasp that “things have got to change”.

The emergent new technologies would lead to “a dynamic private sector” that was going to push for “more and more contractual flexibility”.

He claimed that employers were not going to hire if they were going to be “saddled with huge costs for ever and ever”.

In the light of this reality, there needed to be a “new bargain” in the 21st century workplace with a move from “unemployment insurance” to “employment insurance”.

This would involve employees paying a five per cent premium so that if their companies got into

trouble, they would be able to get 90 per cent of their salaries for the first year while they re-trained “or found something else”.

“You can be the author of your own life. It’s a grown-up thing to do. Take your own risks – but you can’t do it by yourself. You’ve got to do it nested in a network of institutions that help you mitigate the risk. I regard that as a social democratic task in the 21st century.”

Trade unions had to become “a midwife to a new deal at work” and think of themselves “less as the shock troops in the socialisation of capital” and more as “an enlightenment institution” to act as one of the checks and balances – such as a free press or the rule of law – “that keeps capitalism honest and permit workers to have a voice they wouldn’t otherwise have”.

Mr Hutton said Ireland “should not waste the crisis” but use it as a means of pushing innovation and investment in the years ahead.

He outlined a vision of a “fantastic network of productive entrepreneurship” that “regrows the Irish economic pie”.

Mr Hutton insisted there had to be a skills revolution “synthesising disciplined, creative, respectful and ethical minds” with a move towards flexisecurity and life long learning.

Added to this should be a building up of “intermediate institutions” to populate the ecosystem and “drive wealth generation”.

Cautioning that though the retirement age was “certain” to rise, there would also be a growing recognition of the importance of fairness in pay determination, negotiation of changing job roles, performance pay, bonuses and in dispute resolution.

He said: “Fairness not just process, but ensuring that effort is proportionally rewarded.

“The reason we must have fair remuneration for company directors as well as workers is because of the elemental need to have fairness running as a golden thread throughout our capitalism.

“Traditional trade union concerns on pay, disparities on bonuses, dispute resolution, the processes about how you sort out the workplace have to be fair as much as the outcomes,

“A lot of people on the left think, ‘From each according to his ability, to each according to his need’, but I don’t think that idea of fairness works any more than ‘I eat what I kill’. You have work hard to think hard about fairness means.”

...We need pan-European financial regulation. Don't buy the line that hedge funds have no place in this or private equity... You want smarter apps for your iPhone, you want a pill that sorts out muscle pain. That's what's driving the knowledge economy...



Picture: European Union





Pat King, ASTI, and SIPTU's Patricia King

Pat Kings crowned!

PATRICIA King has been appointed SIPTU vice president.

The May 27 announcement means that Ms King, who has been Congress vice president for the past three years, will become the first woman to serve as a national officer of the union.

SIPTU has three national officers – each of whom shares equal authority.

Ms King, who lives in Co Wicklow and is married with two children, has been a full-time organiser for SIPTU for 25 years and has represented members in both public and private sectors.

Meanwhile, ASTI has appointed a new general secretary designate, also with the surname King.

Dubliner Pat, who is currently the assistant general secretary, takes up his new role this month.

His appointment was approved at a meeting of ASTI's 180-member Central Executive Council on May 8.

Mr King, who worked as a secondary level teacher at Presentation School, Terenure, will succeed current general secretary John White in September.

Pictures: ASTI/SIPTU

Apprentices call

SIPTU has called on the Irish Government to employ redundant apprentices to help develop new visitor and tourist attractions.

It follows a recent €3.8 million FAS initiative that will allow 750 redundant apprentices to complete their apprenticeships with private employers.

The union has proposed that a similar amount be given to State bodies to employ a further 400 apprentices.

SIPTU organiser Brendan O'Brien said: "There are currently 7,000 redundant apprentices. The vast majority of them are young people aged 18 to 25.

"We're proposing that around 400 apprenticeship places be allocated immediately throughout various public sector bodies to work on tourism-related projects to help with the recovery of local economies."

He added: "A lot more needs to be done urgently for the thousands of apprentices who are facing into long term unemployment."

Getting to grips with classroom violence



General secretary Avril Hall-Callaghan gets to grips with personal safety trainer Jim McAusland, of Defence Sense UK, at a recent self-defence workshop in Belfast

TEACHERS in Northern Ireland have called for government funds to be used to raise awareness of violence directed against public sector workers.

Pointing to the growing number of incidents, Ulster Teachers Union general secretary Avril Hall-Callaghan said: "Violence must never be seen as acceptable and when incidents arise – whether in the classroom because of abusive pupils or outside because of parents – it is imperative teachers have the assurance of back-up and support.

"Teachers already have the powers they need to manage bad behaviour but many fear retribution if they were to forcibly remove an unruly pupil, for instance.

"Teachers must feel safe to act when pupils are, for example, fighting and could hurt each other."

Ms Hall Callaghan also flagged up "endemic violence" in the special care sector.

A new survey has revealed three-quarters of special school teachers struggle to cope with

disruption on a daily basis. A further two-fifths reported being verbally abused every day with one in five facing intimidation and one in 10 actually reporting being attacked.

She added: "Teachers in special schools should not be expected to tolerate abuse in the classroom as part of their job.

"The survey was carried out among colleagues in England but, sadly, it reflects the experiences of our members here in Northern Ireland too with valuable teaching hours being lost every week as teachers spend time dealing with disruptive pupils.

"Being abused or assaulted should never be tolerated in any workplace, yet it appears that there is a certain endemic level of abuse being directed at teachers working in specialist settings as well as an unspoken understanding that such behaviours are to be expected as part of the job.

"There must be no expectation that teachers should have to tolerate assaults or abuse at work by virtue of the pupils they teach."

Picture: Kevin Cooper Photoline



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Picture: Kevin Cooper Photoline

The money's there... it's just in the wrong hands

OPENING the conference on behalf of Derry Trades Council, Eamonn McCann admitted that these were "trying times for trade unionists" and predicted that what lay ahead in terms of an assault on jobs, working conditions and services would "test our resolve to the limit".

Giving a number of examples of how cuts had already impacted on service provision in Derry, he said: "These are front line services by any definition of the term and gives the lie to the notion that public sector spending reductions that the Government and Executive are demanding and identified as so-called waste are not inefficiencies but cuts."

But Mr McCann warned worse was to come.

He said: "£113m cut from health, regional development cut by £80.5m, education by £73.7m, employment and learning by £27.8, culture by £25.5m and so on..."

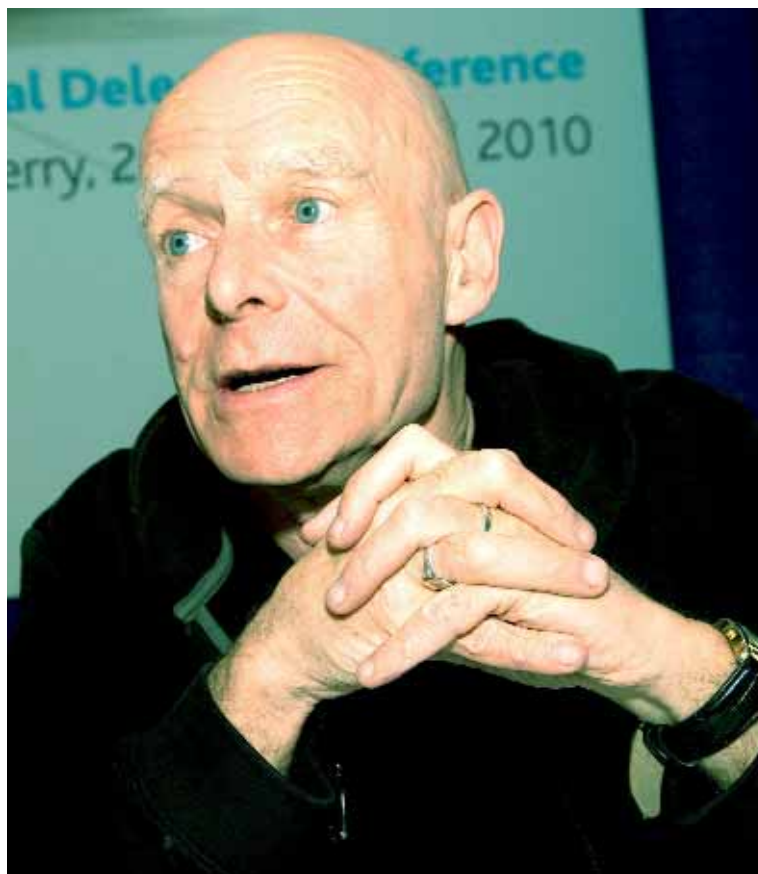
"Everywhere there is a simple question that needs to be asked – why should working people have their jobs destroyed and their services wrecked to pay the bills for the capitalist crisis and the bankers' bail-out?"

He pointed out that tax avoidance, tax evasion and uncollected taxes amounted to £123bn per year and that returning the tax rate to 60% would recoup £19bn – "after all, that is what the rate was under Margaret Thatcher".

"It's just not true that the money isn't there. It is just in the wrong hands and being used for the wrong purposes."

"These are simple arguments that will be all the more persuasive if voiced in clear and consistent terms by our movement and expressed in action as well as in words."

He added: "We can win the argument against neoliberalism if first we make the argument and then put it into practice."



Setting agenda: Eamonn McCann kicked off proceedings with a stirring speech



Bill Lynn, NIPSA, calling for remission on Motion 2: "The elephant in the room is not the public sector, the elephant in the room are the greedy bankers, the greedy capitalists who have got us into this position today. We have to defend all public services, whether it's in housing, health or education."

Corpo Tax agenda blasted

IN introducing the debate on the economy, Congress assistant general secretary Peter Bunting noted how cutting Corporation Tax was high on the agenda of all political parties in Northern Ireland.

He told delegates: "What is being mooted in Northern Ireland is a transference of money out of the pockets of workers and working families to the rich in terms of giving grant aid to corporations under the guise of reducing their tax payment bill."

Mr Bunting pointed out that only four per cent of firms in Northern Ireland actually paid Corporation Tax at the full rate of 28%, whereas most companies paid tax at 19%.

But now Northern Ireland's political parties were suggesting this rate should be reduced to 4.5%.

He told delegates: "I don't mind public income going to creating jobs, for companies who develop new products, for companies who boost exports, for companies who invest in research and development – areas which can create a sound basis for an economy."

"But where you blindly give people public money under the premise that they will create

nothing, then it is a licence for the rich to put the difference of the 19% in their back pocket and line their bank balances."

Mr Bunting also took aim at those who would trade off Northern Ireland's block grant for reduction in Corporation Tax.

He warned: "Reducing the block grant means that we will reduce frontline services to those who are the most needy, and who are – in general terms – the people we represent."

"The rich don't need public education, the rich don't need public health – they can buy it."

"So why transfer money from our pockets from the most deprived and marginalised in our society and give it to the rich?"

He described as "annoying" and "repugnant" the fact that every political party in Northern Ireland agrees with the cut.

Mr Bunting added: "We are approaching a stage when you listen to all the political parties where they are all advocating the fact that the old way of dealing with the economic crisis is to reduce spending."

"I have a difficulty with that – because our support is becoming very close to becoming conditional."

"It's time that we must have a debate in future – somewhere along this road that how do we address the situation in Northern Ireland where the poor and the marginalised have never benefitted from the Good Friday Agreement."

"If you go the Mount Vernons, the Turf Lodges, the Ballybeans and you look around you and say where is the peace dividend?"

"Where has it been manifested in the public sector? We are constantly fighting a rearguard action in relation to the retention of jobs and public sector services."

"It seems to me that at some stage we need to have a conversation within this movement – do we continually support political parties in Northern Ireland and it may well be time in the near future to think of some other political movement to represent working class people and as an alternative to the stagnation and the failed policies."

Concluding, he told delegates: "There is a better, fairer way – it's articulated in the Congress document Campaigning for Jobs and Services."

"It is rooted in non-sectarian politics, working class politics and perhaps it's time, comrades, that we got back to building a working class political movement."



Top table discussions: David Begg, Peter Bunting, John Corey, Avril Hall-Callaghan and Eamonn McCann during conference at City Hotel in Derry

Together we are stronger

IN his address, NIC-ICTU chairperson John Corey called on governments to hold those responsible for the recession to account, instead of succumbing to the current propaganda effort to shift the blame on to public services and public servants.

He told delegates: "Those responsible must not be allowed to sweep their criminal actions under the carpet."

"In my view this should be one of the defining issues in the UK General Election – which party is really going to ensure that banks and financial institutions are fully accountable to the state and the people."

Referring to David Cameron's comments about the public sector in Northern Ireland being bigger than that of the old communist states of Eastern Europe, he said he at first thought it was "some kind of joke".

But then he thought to himself that this was a view shared by almost every political party in

Northern Ireland – that the size of the state "was too big" – and warned: "One way or other nearly all have all the public services and public servants are lined up for attack."

Attacking the various slanders against public sector employees, Mr Corey said: "If any political party is really serious about getting Northern Ireland out of recession top of the list in their manifestos should be more investment in our public services – not less."

"All working people would benefit from more and better public services."

The former NIPSA general secretary underlined that the trade union movement stood for all workers – whether in the public or private sector – and singled out the "resolute stand" of Visteon workers and their trade union UNITE.

He added: "When the trade union movement fights for our public services, it is not doing so only in the interests of public servants."

"It is to protect those public services for all

workers and their families – all are users of public services." Attacking the "despicable" murders carried out by dissident republicans over the past year, Mr Corey reiterated the trade union movement's "absolute condemnation" of their actions, adding: "We are in the business of going forward not backwards."

On personal note, the outgoing Chairperson thanked members of the Northern Ireland Committee for their support and also put on record his thanks to officials and staff at Carlin House.

In concluding, Mr Corey emphasised the vital importance of remaining united and working together as trade unions.

He told delegates: "United we stand, divided we fall is not just for workers in each workplace or just for members inside their own trade union – it applies equally across all trade unions."

"I have always believed the trade unions are the greatest movement in the world. The more we can work together the stronger we will be."



Means of robbing the poor: Peter Bunting hit out at those calling for a cut in Corporation Tax

Personal impact of globalisation

Gareth Smyth, UNITE, supporting Motion 4: "I'm from Sion Mills, a village that was built around a linen mill."

"My grandparents worked in that linen mill, my mother and father worked in that linen mill and my brother and I worked in that linen mill – but no one will work in that linen mill again."

"That is because like so many factories and manufacturing industries, it is now closed and crumbling into its foundations."

"Manufacturing was not decimated by this recession, it was decimated and destroyed by the betrayal of various governments over the last three decades."

"From the 80s on they decided to cower before big business who wanted to impose globalisation and free markets."

"The only thing that's free about free markets is that it's free for multinationals to go out and exploit workers throughout the world."

Congress chief warns of 'dire, dire times ahead'

"WE are in deep, deep trouble if the Tories get elected", Congress general secretary David Begg confided to delegates.

Describing the phrase One Nation Tory as the "original oxymoron", he claimed the Conservatives election slogan "We're all in this together" did not stack up "in terms of what they want to do".

He pointed out that the 1,000 richest people in the UK had increased their wealth by almost a third last year "while the rest of the country was going through the most horrid time".

Mr Begg told conference that the "same deflationary mindset" demonstrated by David Cameron existed "on both parts of this island".

He said Congress had been petitioning the Republic's government to deal with fiscal retrenchment over a longer period – up to 2017 – but that they had insisted "it had to be done by 2014".

JAPANESE-STYLE SLUMP

Mr Begg predicted that such policies would propel both parts of the island into "a very long slump", possibly a Japanese-style recession lasting 10 years.

Blasting talk about "green shoots of recovery", he insisted that recovery was not around the corner but that both North and South were in for "dire, dire times ahead".

Mr Begg told delegates that recent research had shown that half a million public sector jobs could go across the UK if £163bn was taken out of the economy.

He explained: "The Tories do not see fiscal retrenchment as an evil that is forced upon them.

"They actually believe in it as a matter of intellectual persuasion. They are adherents to public choice theory – that is the application of neoliberal theory to public services."

Insisting that the collapse in the economy was



Grim warning: Congress chief David Begg

not a public sector crisis but rather a private sector crisis, he name-checked the Prime Minister of Iceland, who, he said, had accurately summed up how the crisis happened.

He told delegates: "She said, 'Mistakes were certainly made – the private banks failed, supervisory systems failed, the politics failed, the administration failed, the media failed. And the ideology of an unregulated free market utterly failed'."

Mr Begg pinpointed the period between September 15, 2008, when Lehman Brothers collapsed, and October 22, 2008, when Alan Greenspan admitted there was "a flaw in the system" to a US Congress select committee, as the end of the 30-year "liberal era of capitalism".

He said that we were moving towards a different world but warned that "what kind of economic order will emerge we can't be sure of".

Mr Begg noted that there had been general disappointment on the left that more radical change hadn't come about as a result of the crisis, but reminded delegates that it took five years after the

Wall Street Crash for Roosevelt's New Deal to emerge.

He added: "These things take a little bit of time to emerge but change, once it starts, is inexorable in its development."

Mr Begg claimed there was no shortage of ideas about how to respond to the crisis and drew attention to a new NIC-ICTU document on the economy.

He also spoke about a recent study by the Irish Academy of Engineering and Intertrade Ireland that had pointed to "enormous economies of scale" that could be made "if organised properly" over the next two decades.

DECENT PLACE TO WORK

This would mean developing an efficient and integrated transport system, high-quality connectivity as well as cost effective energy supplies with a focus on eight cities across Ireland North and South.

Mr Begg also noted that having an attractive quality of life was vital as "you won't get investment if it's not a decent place to come and work".

He told delegates that people don't spend money in a recession, which Keynes dubbed "the paradox of credit", and suggested an all-Ireland National Recovery Bond as a "patriotic" means of funding growth.

Mr Begg said: "If people were given a reason to invest money in something like this, I'm quite sure they would do it.

"If only we had the right political leadership to say an alternative is possible, it doesn't have to be a 10-year slump.

"It is possible to take this opportunity to make the whole island of Ireland a decent place, which can give a good quality employment with good quality services for its population. It is not rocket science."

We need 'dollop of honesty'

CONGRESS vice president Eugene McGlone has called for a "root and branch" appraisal of trade union structures across Ireland north and south.

Mr McGlone, who is also UNITE's Irish deputy regional secretary, told delegates that unions faced a series of tough questions in "determining the direction of our class in the age-old struggle against capital".

He said: "What have we done with the legacy handed down to us?

"Have we examined it to ensure that it is fit for purpose and taken the appropriate actions to keep it healthy for the next generation?"

Referring to setting up of a special commission to look into the issue, Mr McGlone said the last time unions "did more than tinker" with structures was when ICTU was set up nearly half a century ago, but pointed out he was "certain" it was not now functioning as well as it

could be. Admitting that the trade union movement had not always been "a happy homogenous organisation", he claimed what was needed was "a dollop of honesty" in reappraising "our effectiveness and usefulness".

He said: "That does not merely mean the functions of the ICTU but it includes it.

"It means critically examining how we do our business in our own unions. How we interact with each other.

"Can we still afford as independent unions to hide behind the fig-leaf of our individual sovereignty to the detriment of our colleagues in other unions?"

Mr McGlone, who was moving Motion 42 on behalf of the Northern Ireland Committee of ICTU, added: "Competitive trade unionism has done more damage to our class than can be assessed. 'Better



Way forward: Eugene McGlone than you' trade unionism is a curse."

He insisted the "wasteful and pointless" competition among affiliates had to stop.

"We all know that we must stop pretending we don't do it, because we all do it.

"Let's be honest, let's admit our faults and at least let's resolve to

stop lying to ourselves, lying to each other and lying to our memberships."

Mr McGlone flagged up SIPTU's Rest Assured campaign as a shining example of the way forward for unions.

He told delegates: "It is a paradigm of how we should behave. It is about interdependence for the greater good, ultimately the greater benefit of our members.

"It represents as close as we can currently get to a 'union made badge'. It's an example of how by spending our resources in a smarter way we can help one another."

Paraphrasing Dante, Mr McGlone also urged delegates not to be afraid of change and to "follow our path and let people talk" in engaging with the Commission and "opening up the possibility of how we do things for our members".



Patricia McKeown, UNISON, welcoming the report on equality: "There is one other cause for celebration. It's official. Since the Executive Council met last Wednesday, for the first time in our history the general composition of the Irish trade union movement has gone 51 per cent female."



Antoinette McMillan, NIPSA, giving qualified support for Motion 12: "The RPA in local government to date is as big a disaster as it has been in health and in education... Let's not kid ourselves, if front line services are hit by cutbacks, the politicians will act like Pontius Pilate and place the blame on staff."

TAX BOMBSHELL

Finance expert explodes myth public sector cuts necessary

PUBLIC sector cuts are completely avoidable, a top tax expert insisted at conference.

In a wide-ranging speech, Richard Murphy – who described himself as both a practising chartered accountant and a socialist – told delegates that a total of £123bn was lost to the UK Exchequer each year through a combination of tax evasion, tax avoidance and non-payment of taxes.

Mr Murphy, author of *The Missing Billions*, pointed out that £28bn was known to be owed but hadn't yet been collected, because not enough staff were employed in Revenue offices to process the amount.

He claimed this was because the Government had slimmed down the service and got rid of 25,000 public servants.

"What on earth is the logic of sacking 25,000 public servants to leave £28bn unpaid when we're told that £40bn will plug the gap in our fiscal crisis? That is insanity."

Added to the sum known to be owed is £70bn in tax evasion and £25bn in tax avoidance.

Mr Murphy said: "When you actually correctly interpret the stats in the public domain and add these three numbers together, it amounts to £123bn of tax lost per year."

"The Financial Times recently reported with glee that £40bn has to be found from cuts. £40bn would mean sacking half of all teaching assistants in the whole of the UK, cutting public sector pay by 5.5%, removing vast numbers of privileges for pensioners, removing the benefits to many children in nurseries and on and on and on..."

"Every single step will be regressive because it hits the poorest in the community hardest and leaves the rich completely untouched. And yet out there is £123bn to be had."

Pointing out that tax "underpins our democratic society and a decent way to live", he said the solution to the budget deficit was simple – "collect all the tax that's owed and tackle tax avoidance and tax evasion".

Tax havens were "extremely harmful" because "they go out of their way to create laws that undermine the democratic voice of governments in places like the UK".

Mr Murphy also claimed the Irish Republic had "gone out of its way" – through its 12.5% Corporation Tax rate – to undermine the tax revenue of every other country in Europe.



The bottom line: Richard Murphy insisted companies must meet their tax obligations

And he also had a warning to those north of the border who wanted to see a similar reduction in Corporation Tax.

"I'll tell what happens when you let companies come into an economy and they're only interested in not paying tax. They're not interested in paying decent wages either. They're not interested in complying with regulations or in environmental laws. They're not interested in supporting communities."

"They are there because they are fly-by-nights. They are there because they want to fleece you."

"If you want a 12.5pc tax rate in Northern Ireland, my suggestion is think very hard before you pursue that one. It would be a disaster for you and for every other person in the UK."

Mr Murphy also called for a massive shake-up in the UK's tax relief system.

He outlined how of £39bn given in tax relief each year, most went to those earning more than £100,000.

"The person who has income of a million pounds per year gets tax relief worth £85,000 in cash – that's four times average UK earnings – and they get it in tax revenue. That's ludicrous."

Mr Murphy claimed it would be a simple matter – "one line of legislation" – to pass an anti-avoidance law and, in so doing, close off another loophole.

He added: "We got to do it. We've got to make companies pay their obligations. We can prove that we can raise over £40bn a year and still give extra tax reliefs to those that need it – those earning the least in our society who at present pay a higher tax rate overall than the wealthier in our society."

Kerry Christie, IBOA, speaking on Motion 13: "The crisis was caused by a combination of reckless mismanagement by senior banking executives and overbearing conceit on the part of property speculators and a lack of effective supervision by the regulatory authorities and their political masters. Many of these senior execu-

tives are still at the helm of our industry, with egos still inflated and demanding salaries and perks to prove it. They are the fattest of fat cats, licking the cream while ordinary working people who had no role in creating this crisis are facing the dole or cuts in their terms and conditions of employment."

Jim King, GMB, seconding Motion 12: "We need to explode the myth that local government workers are well paid and are somehow treated better than our colleagues in the private sector. It is a known fact that one in four low paid jobs is in the public sector."

Unions must have a say in architecture of future

CONGRESS president Jack O'Connor delivered a blistering attack on the speculators and the profiteers who believed there could be a return to "business as usual" despite the near collapse of the world economy.

Noting that these were same attitudes that prevailed before the fall of Lehman Brothers in September 2008, he told delegates that socialists had a far better grasp of what went wrong.

He said: "One of the great ironies is that the history that has unfolded since the fall of Lehman has revealed a very fundamental thing – that the socialists understand capitalism better than the capitalists."

"The capitalists just believe in it, the socialists understand it."

"It is the people on the left – the broadest left – across the world who are pursuing policies that are directed towards a longer-term vision than simply getting back to business as usual."

Mr O'Connor, who is also SIPTU general president, warned delegates that any relief – "such as it was" – enjoyed north of the border was certain to come to an end.

SLASH AND BURN

He said: "The consequences of those policies are threatening you in this economy now in a way that you have ample evidence of in what has unfolded in the South."

"We in the Republic have a degree of experience of the consequences of the quick approach and the slash and burn approach."

"Look what has happened with those policies beloved by the right – the policies of the Lenihans, the Camerons, the Osbornes – when they were applied experimentally in the south over the last 12 to 15 months."

"We have gone from an unemployment rate of 4.3pc to now approaching 13.5pc."

"You don't do that without trying – that requires work, and it requires the application of abstract orthodox principles that are about ensuring it is ordinary people – the ordinary citizens the working people and the people who depend on public services most that bear the entire burden of a crisis created by others."

Mr O'Connor pointed out that these policies were designed to reassure global financial markets "that we are available for exploitation" as well as to reassure the wealthy at home that "whatever trauma is inflicted" on economy and society, "they won't be required to contribute on a significant scale".

He underlined how the rise in unemployment was being used to drive down wages across the economy and to encourage people that they have no alternative but "to surrender their rights won over many years of trade union work".

Mr O'Connor characterised as "an absolute



Understanding capitalism: Jack O'Connor

crime" the running down of the manufacturing sector in Northern Ireland that once enjoyed such a glowing global reputation.

He said: "It is a tragedy that we have allowed industries like Visteon, like Bombardier, like Nortel, to disappear to low-cost countries, thus undermining the potential to rebuild a new economy here."

Referring to proposals for a bill of rights for Northern Ireland, he described as critical the need for any legislation to recognise as fundamental "the right to work, the right to a decent job, the right to be treated fairly in that job, and the right to a decent standard of welfare provision as well as access to training".

He added: "You cannot develop a decent civil society without recognising the rights, the interests and the voice of organised workers in any society."

"This is not just about recognising them as worker but recognising as citizens. There are no organisations in civil society who have the tradition and who are – despite our deficiencies – so well equipped to articulate the interests and the voice of working people."

"If you try to build a civil society that ignores that voice you are building on hollow ground and you are building something that has no prospect of enduring."

Mr O'Connor cautioned against those who believed that "all the problems with capitalism had been ironed out" and that the economic collapse

"was simply a bump in the road".

He said: "The fact of the matter is that the developed world is now so indebted that its capacity to endure another bump is very much in question."

"As one who has spent his whole life looking forward to the challenge that lay ahead and the responsibilities that that placed on them."

Mr O'Connor called on delegates to recognise the scale of the challenge that lay ahead and the responsibilities that that placed on them.

He said: "We have a responsibility to interpret history, we have a responsibility to recognise the consequences of the shift in the balance of power from working people to faceless shareholders in the globalised economy."

"And we have to join with others in global unions across the world who are developing techniques designed to substitute the loss of their leverage [reflected] in the decline of industrial power."

"Industrial muscle, industrial organisation and collective bargaining will still remain central to our plan to exercise leverage in society and workplace on behalf of working people."

Noting that the last few decades had seen a general move to the right across society, he said it was up to unions to shift that balance back – and with that, a responsibility to face up to organisational deficiencies within the trade union movement.

GRASP THE OPPORTUNITY

He added: "That is why I urge you all to participate fully in the Commission on trade union organisation."

Calling on delegates to "grasp the opportunity" presented by the Commission, he said that unions had to "apply the lessons of reality".

He added: "We are not adequately resourced to contest the ideological space, resourced in terms of expert economic advice, not adequately resourced to compete within the information space where people derive their thinking and their outcome."

"We're not adequately resourced to address the challenge of influencing the political agenda in all parties."

"If we decide to take on that challenge, I believe we must – it does entail making decisions, challenging shibboleths and stepping out of our comfort zone in a very, very dramatic way."

"If we choose not to do that – if we choose to slumber on then the reality is that we will be renegeing on the legacy that the courageous men and women, who suffered and starved and some who died, so that working people have a say in the architecture of the future."



Pamela Dooley, UNISON, on Motion 8 on public services: "It is ironic that Northern Ireland was systematically criticised for a decade because of the size of our public sector, yet when recession hit the public sector opponents breathed a sigh of relief because they now see it as a buffer shielding them from the worst effects of the economic downturn."

"The enemy is doing a very good job of discrediting public servants and the serv-

ices they provide. Hysteria is whipped up in the press with stories of high-ranking civil servants with superb terms and conditions of employment and protections that the majority of workers can only imagine."

"That hysteria creates a climate that enables the politicians to cut the heart out of the health service, close hospitals and schools and abandon public housing projects. It is short-term and it is a disaster for the economies North and South."



Ideological attack: Brian Campfield

We need a response to assault on services

NIPSA general secretary Brian Campfield attacked what he described as “the free rein” given in the media to finance sector “experts” who were now “leading the charge in the campaign for the culling of public services, jobs, pay and pensions”.

Making the comments while moving Motion 7, he claimed these same “self-interest groups” were now calling for public spending to be diverted to the private sector.

He highlighted in particular proposals that Northern Ireland surrenders part of its block grant in return for a reduced rate of Corporation Tax.

“So public services should get the chop to allow the so-called entrepreneurs in our society to get on with the business of creating private sector wealth and jobs – something they have been singularly unsuccessful at achieving over the last number of decades despite the large public subvention.

“But we know also that the concentration of policy has not been to concentrate on our locally home-grown entrepreneurs but on the attraction of Foreign Direct Investment. Will they ever learn?”

He reminded delegates that the experience of FDI so far has seen the running down of commercial operations and the transfer of jobs to lower wage economies in the developing world “after benefiting from years of public support”.

Mr Campfield underlined how virtually every political party in Northern Ireland would sign up to a pay freeze on public sector pay “if they could get away with it”.

He said: “We are witnessing an ideologically-driven media focused assault from the inheritors of the neoliberal mantle and we need to be able to respond.

“As a trade union movement we must be in a position to combat these attacks. Unfortunately the enemies of the public sector seem to be getting a free run without much challenge.”

He insisted trade unions needed to put politicians and political parties “on the spot”, adding: “We must make it as difficult as possible for them to implement cuts.”

It was necessary to bring the arguments to local communities and “build the broadest possible movement against the cuts”.

“Of course local communities themselves will inevitably be struggling to defend their services but we need to consider how we work together and build a real alliance which will be effective in combating the attacks on public services: an alliance which the political parties here will not be able to ignore.”

He added: “If we truly desire a fairer and more equal society then we need to start with defending public services.”

Recession has taken heavy toll

DEPUTY First Minister Martin McGuinness opened his address by congratulating Congress president Jack O’Connor on his speech and pointing out that there was not “a blade of grass between what he said and what I believe”.

He reminded delegates that political stability was the “bedrock” upon which “a better future for all our people” must be built.

“The arrangements outlined in the Hillsborough Agreement have put in place a template that will see us make further progress.

“And it is our intention to create that momentum and in doing so guarantee a society where discord and division are replaced by unity of purpose to build a better, more equal and just future for all of our people and for generations to come.”

Mr McGuinness insisted that building an economy “in a socially responsible manner” was at the heart of “a vision for the future”.

Acknowledging that finding a way out of the economic crisis was “painfully slow and fragile”, he claimed growing the economy was the Executive’s “top priority”.

The Deputy First Minister outlined the key themes involved in doing this – tackling energy and fuel poverty, dealing with debt, support for the housing market and construction, support for household budgets as well as “mitigating the threat” of unemployment and helping business.

He pointed to the £25m spent on fuel credit, the freeze on domestic rates, extending the free bus scheme for pensioners and doing away with “double taxation” on water as examples of actions that had already been taken.

WORKING TOGETHER

Mr McGuinness also underlined the importance of politicians and trade unions working together “to improve the lives of our people”.

He spoke of his preference for a Bill of Rights that is “both comprehensive and inclusive”.

“The Bill of Rights will require a buy-in from everyone and I’m confident that such a bill will secure a just and lasting peace based on equality, mutual respect and protection for all.”

On dispute resolution, Mr McGuinness praised a new DEL initiative, which included a pilot employment relations programme jointly developed with NIPSA and the LRA.

He also pointed to the repeal of statutory grievance procedures – which he said had proven to be “overly complex” – and flagged up alternative dispute resolution options, including an expanded LRA arbitration scheme and improvements to the Tribunal system.

Mr McGuinness added: “The aim is to resolve more disputes earlier while fully recognising that some cases will require a full legal hearing. These are designed to expand the range of options – not to restrict them.”

Turning to job creation in the manufacturing sector, he claimed that despite an overall decline, that there was growth in some industries, such as non-metallic minerals, fabricated metal products, office machinery and equipment and furniture, which “are areas we think we need to build on”.

Admitting that the recession had taken “a heavy toll”, the Deputy First Minister insisted that manufacturing would remain “at the forefront of policy making”.

He also called for “a joined-up approach” on the Green New Deal.

“By investing in an ambitious programme to cut



Economic growth is key: Martin McGuinness

consumption of fossil fuels we can create jobs, help secure our energy supply and build a competitive, low carbon economy.

“Work is ongoing to identify business opportunities in the renewable energy sector and build awareness of these in local industry.”

On the question of cuts, Mr McGuinness told delegates “our priority is to protect frontline services”.

He said: “Spending on public services is, I believe, an investment in our community. It is about delivering to those most in need. Those that work in our health and education systems need to be protected – not have their jobs threatened.”

However, he added that the reality was the Assembly and Executive did not have control of fiscal policies.

“We are not in a position to use the taxation system as a tool for tackling the economic crisis.”

Acknowledging the strong views expressed at the conference about Corporation Tax, he insisted a reduction was “not about taking from the poor and the vulnerable to help business” but about creating a level playing field to encourage investment and create jobs.

In concluding, Mr McGuinness said: “People want peace, jobs, prosperity. They want political leaders to be courageous, decisive, to work together and recently people recognise – in all political parties – that working in an all-island way to develop our economy is something that can bring huge benefits.”

An attack on one...

Barney Lawn, PCS, on Motion 9 on protecting public services: “It’s important that we share our experiences and tactics among each other and work collectively as we’re all going to be subject to the cuts agenda.”

CONGRESS BACKS FAIR HOTELS DRIVE

CONGRESS has thrown its backing behind a new campaign that gives ethically-minded consumers the option of supporting hotels that treat their staff fairly and respect workers' rights.

More than 40 hotels across Ireland, where staff have collective bargaining rights, have signed up to the Fair Hotels drive that will encourage trade unions and their members to use the hotels for family holidays and breaks, conferences and meetings.

Welcoming the initiative, Congress general secretary David Begg said: "The sense of powerlessness and the deep anger



against the behaviour of people who have wrecked our economy is palpable.

"But we can begin to reclaim the sense decency we all believed was part of our national value system.

"The Fair Hotels Campaign is a perfect opportunity for citizens to do something tangible for ethical consumption.

"Hotels that treat their staff fairly are entitled to public support. Those who refuse to recognise that their employees have rights are not.

"Congress is delighted to give its full and enthusiastic endorsement to the Fair Hotels Campaign." A source at the May 25 launch said: "The campaign will use the combined purchasing power of 850,000 workers in Ireland and 12 million workers overseas.

"Alongside this is the institutional purchasing power of 50

Irish trade unions and 32 non-government organisations to benefit hotel workers, fair hoteliers and ethical consumers."

And it makes sound business sense for hoteliers to treat their staff well. The source added: "Over the next three years, Congress-affiliated unions will hold 61 delegate conferences requiring 44,390 bed nights for their 17,650 delegates in hotels across Ireland.

"In addition, unions will continue to use hotels for meetings, training, overnights and functions as required and for family holidays and breaks."

For further details, check out www.fairhotels.ie

MANDATE hits out at 'deplorable' dismissals



Labour chief Eamon Gilmore speaks at recent rally in support of Connolly's workers

MANDATE has slammed "the deplorable behaviour" of Connolly Shoes management following the dismissal of two workers involved in a dispute.

Claiming the action was "irresponsible and potentially illegal", the union's assistant general secretary Gerry Light said: "This is deplorable behaviour from a company which is blatantly ignoring workers' fundamental rights contained in current employment legislation."

According to Mr Light, the four staff members who have now been sacked have more than 100 years of service between them and have shown great loyalty to the company

through good times and bad times.

Congress recently granted the dispute "all out strike" status and on May 21 hundreds of locals from Dun Laoghaire joined trade unionists and prominent politicians to show their support at a public rally.

Mr Light said: "The two dismissed workers have been on strike for the last nine weeks in support of two of their colleagues who were previously dismissed for refusing to sign an undertaking which would seriously erode their terms and conditions of employment including their hours and pay.

"The actions of management in Connolly

Shoes is clearly a breach of the workers' fundamental employment rights and represents the tearing up of long-established statutory employment legislation developed to protect ordinary workers as they participate in official industrial action."

He added that Connolly Shoes had persistently refused to accept an invitation to attend the Labour Relations Commission extended to them by the director of conciliation Kevin Foley more than six weeks ago.

Mandate has already accepted the invite and claims LRC attendance is the only way to find a resolution to the dispute.

Picture: MANDATE

Public sector workers denied right to strike



SO many workers take their basic freedom to join a union for granted. In Turkey, large numbers of public employees do not have that right to join or form trade unions, to bargain collectively or even to strike.

In the private sector the right to organise and form trade unions falls hugely short of international standards. Severe penalties, including imprisonment, are possible for participation in strikes.

The International Labour Organisation has issued detailed guidance on how Turkey can bring its labour laws into line with the ILO core conventions on the right to organise, the right to strike and the right to bargain collectively in the public and private sector. But these reforms have yet to be implemented.

In July 2009, an indictment was presented in the case of more than 30 members of the Con-



federation of Public Sector Trade Unions (KESK) accused of membership of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Amnesty was concerned that the evidence contained within the indictment regarded the union's support for Kurdish language rights and other legitimate union activities and did not demonstrate their participation in or advocacy of violence.

Also last year, more than 40 employees of the Turkish state railways were suspended following a one-day strike by union members regarding their right to collective bargaining and right to strike. A spokesperson for the company said that as state employees, they did not have the right to strike in law and that the action taken

was therefore illegal. Despite government commitments to address the issue, national law failed to uphold public sector workers' right to strike as protected under ILO standards to which Turkey is a party.

Despite government statements indicating that legal amendments aimed at bringing national law into conformity with international standards on trade union rights could be brought before parliament, no progress was made during the period under review.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Call on the Turkish government to bring its labour laws in line with the ILO conventions so that workers in Turkey can enjoy their human rights by going to the following link: www.amnesty.org.uk/actions_details.asp?ActionID=689



A NEW weekly all-Ireland Irish language tabloid – Gaelscéal – has been launched.

Featuring a heady mix of national and international news stories, sport, features, education and Irish language affairs, the publication is a joint venture between Eo Teilifís (producers of TG4's Irish language soap Ros na Rún) and the Connacht Tribune. Gaelscéal is

grant aided by Foras na Gaeilge and edited by Co Down native Ciarán Dunbar. Project manager Trevor Ó Clochartaigh said: "I am relishing this challenge and I am sure that the team that we have put together will be able to put together a first class paper."

"We have correspondents throughout Ireland and across the world with regular contributors on international

affairs from Brazil, Poland, the US and the UK.

"We also top columnists writing for us, including TG4 frontman Páidí Ó Li-onáird, former RTE journalist and financial expert Conall Ó Móráin, socialite and journalist Bernie Ní Fhlatharta and Cork GAA legend John Allen." Check out online edition at www.gaelisceal.ie

Advanced Trade Union Leadership Development Award

The Advanced Trade Union Leadership Development Award is targeted at activists from within the trade union movement who will benefit from skills and knowledge on relevant trade union themes. The personnel recruited will be officials, shop stewards, union learning representatives, trade union employees and lay activists.

Trade Unions rely upon an active and committed range of employed and lay activists whose efforts feed into a larger and at times complex system in which the fundamental purpose and direction of trade unionism can at times feel removed from their work. This award is a development award designed to reconnect activists to trade union fundamentals in the context of a society moving out of conflict.

By the end of the two day residential programme participants will have gained:

- An introduction to the history of trade unionism.
- An introduction to the key economic and ideological models within which trade unions operate.
- An overview of the importance of understating the impact of globalisation and neo-liberalism.
- An analysis of trade unions in post conflict societies.

Contact:

Mel Corry – Project Co-ordinator
T: 90331053 M: 07789250353
Mel@trademarkbelfast.com
www.trademarkbelfast.com





Delegates Natalie Martyn, Aileen O'Halloran and Tara O'Boyle with ASTI president Joe Moran *Picture: ASTI*

YOUNG TEACHERS NEED STABLE JOBS

THE lack of stable jobs for recently qualified teachers is having a damaging impact on the Republic's education system, a special conference was told last month.

Delegates attending the ASTI-organised event for young teachers on May 22 heard that fewer than one in 10 newly qualified second-level teachers can expect to obtain a full-time permanent teaching job within a year of graduating.

According to a recent OECD report 'Teaching And Learning In Society', the Republic of Ireland has significantly more temporary teachers than most other OECD countries.

Only 73% of second-level teachers here have permanent employment compared to the TALIS average of 85%. More than half – 53% – of Irish second-level teachers under 30 have a temporary teaching contract of one year or less.

The low availability of permanent teaching jobs means most newly qualified second-level teachers spend a number of years moving from job to job. Many new teachers are employed on an hourly basis, have little job security and do not receive a full income.

ASTI president Joe Moran told delegates this trend towards an "hours culture" was damaging to the education service offered to young people.

He said: "These young teachers have spent the last four to five years studying and training so that they can make a positive contribution.

"Instead they find they have little prospect of gaining anything but precarious employment for some time, often seven or eight years.

"Instead of a quality induction experience, teachers teaching six or eight hours a week in a school may feel unknown in the staffroom.

"They may have insufficient contact with pupils, which can affect interaction in the classroom.

"They find it difficult to integrate into the life and the culture of the school and to avail of career-enhancing opportunities such as mentoring programmes and team working opportunities."

Highlighting the TALIS report, he noted the study found a strong link between "disciplinary climate in the classroom" and the type of teaching contract held by the teacher.

He said that ASTI was calling for reform of the current system of al-

locating teachers to second-level schools and the introduction of an induction year for newly-qualified second-level teachers.

Mr Moran described the current system as "outdated" and "unduly restrictive" and forced many schools to apply for concessionary hours in key subject areas.

Allowing an induction year for newly qualified teachers would allow them to gain valuable classroom experience as well as boost their professional development.

He added: "This would ensure a high quality induction experience for second-level teachers which would have long-term benefits for the teaching profession and the education service."



Talk: June Sorensen of ITUC

€20,000 donated to Burma unions

IMPACT and PSEU have donated a total of €20,000 to support the underground trade union movement in troubled Burma.

It follows the recent setting up of a solidarity fund by the International Trade Union Confederation to funnel aid to the Federation of Trade Unions Burma.

The FTUB held its first congress last March in the border regions of Thailand.

In April, Bernard Harbor, of IMPACT, and PSEU's Eugene Quinn each presented €10,000 cheques to June Sorensen, who has responsibility for Burma solidarity work at the ITUC, at a meeting in Dublin.

Ms Sorensen told the audience of the extreme oppression suffered by workers under the Burmese junta.

Burma is one of the last countries in the world where state institutions actually impose forced labour on the population.

But despite the risk of arbitrary arrest and torture, trade union activists continue to clandestinely organise and unite workers.

Ms Sorensen in particular highlighted one recent strike by garment workers demanding a wage increase of \$10 a month.

Unions raise €114k for Haiti

CWU general secretary Steve Fitzpatrick presents a €90,000 cheque to Congress chief David Begg in aid of the Haiti Emergency Campaign.

It follows the launch of a massive solidarity campaign organised by the International Trade Union Confederation in response to January's devastating earthquake.

Trade unions mobilised support on an extraordinary scale and Congress contributed a total of €114,816 to the disaster fund which will be used to support reconstruction as well as providing help to the Haitian trade union movement.

Along with CWU's outstanding donation, there were significant and important contributions from NIPSA, PSEU, INTO, MANDATE and UNISON.



WORKERS' MEMORIAL DAY



Those attending the Workers' Memorial Day event in Dublin join Dublin Castle gardeners for a moment's reflection to remember those killed or injured in workplace accidents. Right: Arlene Foster speaking at the Long Gallery in Stormont

Pictures: Tom Clancy, Kevin Cooper Photoline



'One death is too many'

THE Northern Ireland Committee of Congress marked this year's Workers' Memorial Day by holding a special event under the theme 'Remember the dead, fight for the living' at Stormont.

Trade unionists, politicians and relatives of those killed and injured at work gathered in the Long Gallery in Parliament buildings on April 29.

NIC-ICTU chairperson John Corey said: "This is an opportunity to remember all those who have been killed or injured at or as a result of their work and continue to fight for improved workplace safety for the living."

He added that it was vital also to acknowledge trade union safety reps who worked "day and daily" to protect the health and well being of their fellow workers.

Minister for Enterprise Trade and Investment Arlene Foster, who also

spoke at the event, emphasised that "one death was simply one too many".

She added: "It is imperative that there continues to be effective co-operation between the regulators, employers and trade unions to ensure that collectively we achieve a healthier and safer workplace, not only for today's workforce but also for future working generations."

At another Congress event, in Dublin's Chester Beatty Library, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin reminded those present that people were at the heart of a modern economy.

He said: "Workers are not disposable goods. Their protection can never be subordinated to exclusively economic goals and profit."

"Safe workplaces require norms that must be respected. But safe workplaces are more. Workers are never just employees. They are al-



Remembering: John Corey & Archbishop Diarmuid Martin

ways people and must enjoy the respect and protection that people deserve."

Congress general secretary had earlier called on the Irish government to give official recognition to Workers' Memorial Day.

In a statement he said: "It is time to make this a national day. The International Labour Organisation supports this and Workers' Memorial Day is now officially recognised in 19 countries around the globe."

"Earlier this year, the UK joined that list of countries that officially recognise the day."

Mr Begg underlined how important it was that action to prevent deaths and injuries at work be prioritised.

He said the resources of the Health & Safety Authority in the Republic must be "ring-fenced" as Ireland currently spends less on worker protection and has one of the lowest numbers of health and safety inspectors in the EU, with roughly five inspectors per 100,000. The EU average is 10 per 10,000.

Meanwhile, the ITUC has flagged up the role unions play in making workplaces safer.

Guy Ryder, general secretary of the global union confederation, said: "Unions are key for ensuring that safe and sustainable work is not a privilege for the few, but a right for every worker."



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 ► **WORKERS - ARE YOU FED UP WITH TAKING A BATTERING IN THE PRESS?**
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SIPTU vows to fight CIF court move

SIPTU has vowed to "vigorously resist" any attempt to slash wages in the construction industry.

It follows reports last month that Construction Industry Federation chiefs had asked the Labour Court to cut legally-binding minimum wage rates in the sector.

The union insists it will fight the move tooth and nail as well as any bid to peg back overtime payments and travel allowances.

SIPTU Construction Branch organiser Martin Meere said: "We will be present at the Labour Relations Commission hearing on the CIF claim for decrease of wages in the construction industry which will take place on June 14.

"SIPTU will vigorously resist the assault on the wages of our members in the construction industry."

The union estimates that the employers' demands would mean pay cuts of between €130 and €170 a week for general operative grades and more than €180 a week for craft workers.

This is the second attempt by the CIF to cut wages in just over two years.

Its last demand for a 10pc pay cut was thrown out by the court.

BLOGSPOT

Blog boost for kids' charities

A NEW blog has been launched which aims to boost donations to children's charities as well as collecting memories and stories from those who donate.

Co Antrim woman Lesley Miller, who set up the When I was 8 blog, told The Union Post: "I want to know what charities users of the blog have donated to for helping children, the amount of the donation and what they wanted to be when they were eight years old.

"The latter request may seem a little strange but I think that this is the age when children who are loved and cared for start thinking about their wider aims and ambitions while still being child-like, an innocent but 'big wide world' perspective."

Ms Miller is to keep running totals on the amounts collected for individual charities as well as provide information on those who make donations.

She added: "Please have a look at the blog and if you like, donate, write to the blog by commenting on any feature and then tell others who may wish to do the same."

Check out the blog by visiting: <http://wheniwas8.wordpress.com/>

INMO CONFERENCE

TIME TO FACE

IN her address, INMO president Sheila Dickson blasted those "few greedy, selfish, self-serving, self-opinionated and self-righteous individuals" who had threatened the "very fabric of Ireland as a nation state".

She contrasted the positive contributions made by INMO members with the actions of those "who felt they could walk on water" and who had caused the economic crisis in the first place.

Ms Dickson told more than 300 nurses and midwives who gathered for the three-day INMO conference in Trim, Co Meath, last month: "Despite this the government has seen fit to cut our pay on two occasions, over the past year, to cut social welfare payments and to impose levies on all tax compliant workers.

"At the same time the same government has steadfastly refused to require others, with much greater means, assets and wealth than any of us here, to pay anything like their fair share."

She also noted how public sector workers had been "vilified" by "know-it-alls" in the media and, turning to Minister Harney who was a guest at the conference, she claimed the government had shown "a lack of respect" and "an inability to listen to those 'providing a great service to communities'".

Ms Dickson acknowledged that the economic difficulties facing the country were "unprecedented" but insisted they could not be tackled by an approach that "tears the heart out of ordinary people" while sheltering some quarters from the "icy winds" of the recession.

Emphasising that the INMO wanted to engage with the minister, her department, and the HSE, she said: "This is not a time for conflict but, equally, this is not a



President Sheila Dickson

time for neglect. We are willing to put forward imaginative ways of working but is the system, including the government and the HSE, prepared to listen to this viable alternative?

"Only time will tell but we cannot afford to get this wrong."

Ms Dickson claimed that the role of nurses and midwives in the developing and management of health services "had greatly diminished" since the HSE came into being.

She told delegates: "We have a HSE that now has an overt policy of not filling any nursing or midwifery post.

"Of saying that Directors of Nursing are no longer necessary at individual hospital level and of indicating, consistently that we have too many nurses and midwives in this country and that, effectively, the health service would benefit from a cull of nurses and midwives."

This she pointed out was an "insulting, damaging and provocative approach" that was "cloaked in the language of reconfiguration, reform, restrictive work practices, duplication, centralisation of services and, of course, transformation".

Ms Dickson then outlined six "facts" about Ireland's health service.

She said: "It is a fact that we continue to have 53 hospitals in

this country that, following independent review, have been found to be understaffed with the result that the patients' daily lives are diminished.

"It is a fact that we now have almost 2,000 fewer nursing posts in the system than we had on December 31, 2007.

"It is a fact that no frontline nursing or midwifery post is being filled at this time due to the government imposed moratorium.

"It is a fact that our newly qualifying graduates have no prospects of being offered a post in the Irish health system.

"The result is that when they apply for registration they now also apply for a certificate of verification so that, immediately, they can go and work in the UK, America, Australia or the many other countries that welcome them with open arms.

"It is a fact that we have Director of Nursing posts vacant while, at the same time, the HSE seems able to fill senior general management posts immediately, when a vacancy arises, regardless of the cost.

"It is a fact that we have projects, under the title reconfiguration, taking place at the moment which are being implemented in an incomplete, unsafe and non-sensical manner.

"The outcome, in recent weeks, has seen extra patients on trolleys, in wards, which compromises every patient's care."

Unfortunately, Ms Dickson claimed, despite these facts, no one in the HSE wanted to listen.

She told delegates: "Instead all we see and hear is of organisational reform, at management level, with the frontline being left bereft of the necessary skilled professional manpower and authority, with accountability, necessary to properly look after patients."

Govt failings on health during



Overview: Sara Burke

WRITER and analyst Sara Burke gave delegates an overview of nearly 10 years' health policy – but in particular focused on the impact the last three budgets had on the health care system in the Republic.

Contrasting the promise of the government's 2001 health strategy, which had "some good stuff in it", she noted that much of its content was "made redundant soon after it was published".

In fact, Ms Burke told conference this early promise was replaced by "Brendan Drumm's mantra" of "doing more with less, more services with fewer staff and a smaller budget" as well as the "steady but quiet" privatisation of health care.

She said the entry of for-profit private care had "revolutionised the landscape of Irish health care... so that [today] one in three hospi-

tal beds are in the private largely for profit sector and two in three nursing home beds".

Characterising the current situation as "investment without real reform and constant restructuring", Ms Burke claimed such an approach was known in the UK's NHS as "disorganisation", adding: "so much restructuring people do not know who they are or what they're doing – and yet nurses still have to get on with their job..."

She told delegates Health Minister Mary Harney had presided over a system that "actively promotes" private care in public hospitals and where a two-tier approach had become institutionalised.

Ms Burke said: "We still have a system whereby 50pc of the population who have private health insurance can get faster access into

THE FACTS



HEALTH Minister Mary Harney was given a frosty reception during her attendance at last month's conference in Trim. According to reports, a number of delegates confronted her as she left the conference venue. She later admitted nursing staff were "angry" and acknowledged that a lot of people were "enduring huge pain across the economy".



LIMERICK-based INMO rep Nora Cunningham was the recipient of this year's Gobnait O'Connell Award.

The clinical nurse manager, who was nominated by colleagues at the Mid West Regional Hospital, led a local work to rule to address widespread hospital overcrowding in the interest of patient safety.

The action achieved an end to trolleys in hospital wards, on corridors and behind doors, improving conditions for patients as well as ensuring in-patient beds are used more efficiently in future.

Presenting the award, INMO general secretary Liam Doran – pictured above with Nora and president Sheila Dickson – said: "Nora is a true professional and trade unionist and a tremendous patient advocate and we in the INMO are proud to have her as one of ours."

boom was criminal

the public hospital systems and where most public hospitals carry out well in excess of their private care.

"In my opinion, in time we will identify one of the major crimes of the boom as the failure to dismantle our two-tier system of public hospital care.

"And the government's failure to provide a one-tier universal health system where access is based on need not ability to pay."

She pointed out the one-tier health system was not on the table because politicians lacked "courage" and "vision" but noted for the first time all opposition parties were in favour of differing versions of a universal system.

Turning to the impact the economic crisis has had on the health system, she disagreed with those

politicians who blamed the broader international depression.

In fact Ms Burke described the current economic crisis as a "spectacularly Irish phenomenon" caused by an eroding of the tax base, the non-regulation of bankers and the fuelling of a property boom, adding: "We made our own economic mess".

One of the government's responses had been a moratorium on recruitment that had since translated to 3,000 fewer staff – at least half nurses – working in the sector.

The result was a health system in a "mess... despite increased investment" with hundreds of people still being treated on A&E trolleys and more than 18,000 public patients waiting for treatment for more than three months.

Pictures: INMO



SOME FIRMS 'MILKING THE RECESSION'

SOME retail companies are milking the recession Mandate has claimed.

Speaking at its recent biennial conference in Galway, general secretary John Douglas, above, accused some retail firms of attempting to take advantage of the economic downturn by forcing unnecessary redundancies, pay reductions and reduced terms and conditions on to low paid workers despite maintaining extremely healthy profits.

Mr Douglas claimed that during the last few years the union has seen:

- The introduction by one profitable firm of a highly questionable redundancy scheme that enabled it to replace workers on a higher pay scale with workers on a much lower pay scale,

- Another leading store – which is still highly profitable – is pursuing the suspension of allowances for late night, early morning and overtime work and undermining long established terms and conditions of workers, and

- A leading retail outlet has attempted to cut the wages of the

staff at the top of their pay scale by 15.5% along with a reduction of 25% in public holiday pay and a 25% reduction in Sunday allowances.

Mr Douglas told delegates: "In addition to these specific cases, the feedback from our members suggests that most retail workers have lost approximately eight to 12 hours per week as a result of cut-backs from their employers which equates to €100 for those working full time in the industry.

"Ironically, the attempts at pay-cutting by profitable retailers in the Irish marketplace are clearly not that well thought through and will only serve to prolong this recession.

"For example, Irish retail workers tend to spend almost all of their income in the local economy and without this spending, the Irish economy would crumble.

Mr Douglas concluded: "When a profitable retailer takes money out of the pockets of their employees, it obviously means there is less spending in their local communities and therefore more jobs are lost. It's a vicious circle."

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SALARIES

NIPSA slams 'ridiculous' CBI call to freeze pay for 2 years

NIPSA has slammed the call by CBI chiefs for an immediate two-year freeze on public sector pay. Deputy general secretary Alison Millar said: "It is ridiculous that the CBI are calling for a pay freeze at a time when the Retail Price Index is running in excess of 5%."

"Many public sector workers are low paid and rely on state benefits to bring them up to a living wage."

"If the Government responds to the CBI pressure then it is likely the union's membership will respond accordingly, and industrial action cannot be ruled out."

CBI director general Richard Lambert had called on the Chancellor to include cuts to the public sector wage bill in his forthcoming Budget.

He told the BBC: "Experience suggests that the best way of bringing down a substantial deficit without damaging growth is through spending restraint rather than raising taxes."

But Ms Millar hit back and pointed out that many NIPSA members were already finding it difficult to make ends meet.

She said: "NIPSA has evidence that a large proportion of our members are clinging on by their finger tips to meet daily living expenses with the high cost of food, rent, mortgages, rates and other utility bills."

"A public sector pay freeze could mean that more people will default on their mortgages and the Government will have to step in and assist these people in other ways."

"Why is it workers on low or average salaries are being asked to bear the brunt of the financial crisis caused mainly by the city bankers who got us into this mess?"

Ms Millar added: "A public sector pay freeze is not the answer. In addition NIPSA would query why Government continues to spend huge amounts of taxpayers money on private sector consultants often to tell them what they already know – it is purely and simply a back saving exercise".



RIGHTS BATTLE

MORE than 200 migrant workers and their supporters staged a demo outside the offices of Enterprise Minister Batt O'Keeffe on June 2.

The protesters, above, called on Mr O'Keeffe to give workers employed through the employment permit system the right to change employer.

Under current rules, the system binds a worker to one employer and, according to the Migrants Rights Centre Ireland, this has become a leading factor in instances of exploitation.

The organisation claims 80% of exploitation cases it deals with involve workers in the employment permit system.

The MRCI is seeking an administrative change which would give migrant workers the freedom to leave exploitative conditions and find alternative work within their job category – without having to go

through an entirely new permit application. Director Siobhan O'Donoghue said: "Minister Batt O'Keeffe can change the lives of thousands with a simple administrative change."

"Most workers on permits will only come forward to report exploitation if there is a way out that does not put their legal status at risk."

"The best way to protect workers and prevent exploitation is by giving the right to change employer, which gives them a fair chance to find an alternative and report exploitation."

Zeno Arumugan, a work permit holder from Malaysian, added: "We are here today because we are trying to get Minister O'Keeffe to make the employment permit system fairer."

"We are not asking for special treatment, just the basic equality and rights that other workers have."

Pictures: Paula Geraghty

Clauses 'breach ILO guidelines'

IMPACT has claimed the Irish government could breach International Labour Organisation conventions if it presses ahead with plans to allow employers to plead "inability to pay" minimum rates.

Delegates at the union's biennial conference in Kilkenny last month also heard how proposed changes to the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill 2009 could lead to the Labour Court being blocked by a deluge of cases.

Billy Gallagher, a member of union's Central Executive Committee said: "When the government scuppered an agreement and introduced public service pay cuts last December, IMPACT and other unions warned that the real target was incomes across the economy – starting with the minimum wage."

"Less than two months later,

the government's assault on minimum pay rates is under way.

"Cheered on by employers groups like IBEC and ISME, the government has said it will amend the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill 2009 – initially designed to strengthen worker protections – to allow employers plead 'inability to pay' minimum pay rates set out in existing Employment Regulation Orders and Registered Employment Agreements."

He told delegates this proved employer organisation had "undue influence" over the government and warned changes would leave minimum wage workers vulnerable to abuse by bosses "quite happy to exploit low-waged workers to protect and inflate the bottom line".

Mr Gallagher added: "EROs and REAs set legally-enforceable

minimum pay rates – usually slightly above the national minimum wage – in a number of low-paid sectors including hotels, retail and construction."

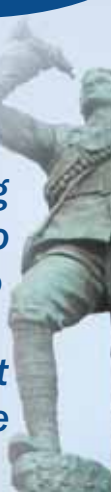
"The system has been in place since 1946 and most EU countries have similar arrangements. The proposed legislation will be, in our view, a breach of ILO conventions."

"The 'inability to pay' clause could block the Labour Court with the volume of cases that will be pursued if the government amend the legislation."

"The construction, hotel, restaurant, cleaning and similar industries will be affected, and the reality of the struggle facing workers in these industries is not being acknowledged at government level. It proves yet again how far removed from reality they really are."

UNIONS

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BRAZIER MEDIA

TRADE UNION NEWS SPECIALISTS

braziermedia@btinternet.com Bob Miller 07894305173 Joe Mitchell 07703055302