

THE

PUBLISHED IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS

UNION POST

NEWS YOU CAN USE

APRIL 2010

Pictures: Paula Geraghty



Visteon workers in the vanguard at last year's rally in Belfast

MAY DAY 2010... IT'S A CELEBRATION!



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► SOLIDARITY

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UNION POST



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Blockade buster: MV Linda – soon to be the MV Rachel Corrie – ready for historic voyage

GAZA BOUND

Irish join relief effort by sea

THE FREE Gaza Campaign is hoping to put a new addition to its fleet into action bringing humanitarian aid to the blockaded Gaza Strip as soon as possible.

Volunteers are currently re-fitting the MV Linda, an 1,800 tonne cargo vessel recently bought at auction in Dundalk.

The MV Linda – soon to be renamed MV Rachel Corrie – was purchased for €70,000 by the human rights organisation on March 30.

Proceeds from the sale were used to pay arrears to its mostly Ukrainian crew after the ship was seized and auctioned off by the High Court following an application by the International Transport Federation.

The MV Rachel Corrie will set sail for the Mediterranean in May where it will join an international flotilla of vessels packed with supplies in a bid to challenge the illegal blockade and its devastating consequences for the population of Gaza.

Ships from Turkey, Greece, Malaysia, Belgium, Sweden, Indonesia as well as Ireland are taking part in the effort.

Israel's blockade of Gaza is in its third year, and virtually no reconstruction materials have been allowed into the territory which is still in ruins after the IDF's massive onslaught in December 2008/January 2009 which killed more than 1,400 Palestinians, almost 400 of them children.

At least 11,000 houses, 105 factories, 20 hospitals and clinics, 159 schools, universities, playschools and technical institutions were either damaged or destroyed and are still in ruins.

More than 20,000 people were driven from their homes –

and many are still living in tents.

The Free Gaza Campaign is asking for the public's help to buy cement and school supplies for the people of Gaza.

The initiative is in response to a call by UN Relief and Works Agency chief John Ging who told reporters in March: "I have no cement or steel or iron. We can't get in one bag of cement, one pane of glass... to actually begin that reconstruction."

Israel has also banned books, paper, pens and school supplies, and the Free Gaza Campaign plan to deliver them along with messages of solidarity to the children of Gaza.

A spokesperson told *The Union Post*: "Normally we don't ask for donations for specific items, since all donations to our tax-exempt accounts in Cyprus or the US are used to buy the boats or for operating costs."

"However, we are sending out this special appeal to hundreds of people who have asked us whether they can contribute something specific. Therefore, we have set up our PayPal

account at www.freegaza.org/en/donate to accept donations for cement and book bags.

"In the message section on PayPal, tell us if you want the money to purchase cement or book bags.

"Or you can wire money into a specially set up Irish account [details below].

"We will use your donation for cement for reconstruction or book bags for the children if you designate it's for them. Just €5 will buy a bag of cement and €10 will buy a school or sports bag, so do please help."

Left: view from the bridge



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MAY DAY 2010

BELFAST
Saturday, May 1

MARCH: Assemble Writers' Square, Donegal Street, Belfast, at 11.30am for speeches. **GUEST SPEAKER:** RMT general secretary Bob Crowe. March through Belfast city centre accompanied by brass, pipe & samba bands. **FAMILY DIVERSITY FESTIVAL** in Writers' Square follows march from 1pm – 5pm. Live music, children's art workshops, face painting, gourmet food, craft stalls and full bar. Admission and entertainment free.

DUBLIN
Saturday, May 1

MARCH: Assemble Parnell Square, Dublin at 2pm. March is followed by a public meeting at Liberty Hall. Prominent speakers on the day.

L'DERRY
Saturday, May 1

MARCH: Assemble 1.30pm at Custom House Street for march via Foyle Street, Carlisle Square and the Diamond to rally and entertainment at Cafe del Monde Square.



ROBIN HOOD IN REVERSE



THE IRISH Government's core strategy of cutting people's incomes and driving down wages across all sectors of the economy has been exposed in a new Congress report.

Shifting The Burden outlines the real plan behind a policy worked out in the second half of 2009 – elements of which were laid bare on Budget Day last December.

The authors claim in the introduction to the report that the secret agenda Government ministers dare not reveal to the public is "a determination to load the full cost of the collapse on to working people and the poor".

It continues: "Be they wage earn-

ers, pensioners or social welfare recipients, their pockets will be picked to finance the 'recovery'."

The broad outline of the strategy is clear – make an example of the public sector by enforcing cuts to public servants' pay, hit welfare hard, hit pensions hard and target low paid workers by slashing the minimum wage.

And do this while justifying the pain with bogus appeals to patriotism and calls for the need to maintain competitiveness.

At the same time, bail out the banks to save the developers and financiers whose recklessness caused the crisis in the first place while stick-

ing rigidly to a deflationary policy that most other governments agree is the wrong policy at the wrong time.

Shifting The Burden warns that this fatuous plan will not work because it is fundamentally flawed and its application could turn Ireland "into a social and economic wasteland for a decade or more".

It concludes: "The Government plan is failing because it is based on false assumptions, a complete misreading of the global crisis and it ignores all the warnings from history.

"Like disciples of a dead faith, they cling grimly to the wreckage instead of starting over with a new vision."

READ THE FULL DOCUMENT <http://www.ictu.ie/publications/fulllist/shifting-the-burden/>

Library ceremony to mark Workers' Memorial Day

ON Wednesday April 28, Congress will mark Workers' Memorial Day with an event in Dublin's Chester Beatty Library to remember those who have lost their lives, have been injured or have acquired an illness through work.

Workers' Memorial Day is marked on that date each year across the world.

Among those attending this year's event in Dublin will be Congress general secretary David Begg, legal affairs officer

Esther Lynch and TEEU's Eamon Devoy, who chairs Congress Health & Safety Committee.

Health & Safety Authority chief Martin O'Halloran and Brian Magennis, of the Irish Hospice Foundation, will also attend.

The ceremony will include reflections from religious and community leaders, including Noleen Blackwell, FLAC, Brian Whiteside of the Humanists' Association, Terry Gillespie,

from the Religious Society of Friends as well as Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Diarmaid Martin.

Also present will be Siobhan O'Donoghue, Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland, representatives from the Jewish and Islamic faiths, Dean of Christchurch Cathedral Very Rev Dermot Dunne, Susan McKay of the National Women's Council, Jnanadhara, of the Buddhist faith, and Chris Hudson of the Unitarians.



ICTU: Don't dock wages

CONGRESS has called on employers to be sympathetic to the plight of workers left stranded by the forced closure of air space over Europe.

ICTU legislation officer Esther Lynch said: "Docking wages is a harsh reaction and it will put even more pressure on workers who may have incurred significant and unexpected costs to get home.

"Congress is also urging employers not to penalise people by putting pressure on them to use up what is left of their annual leave. We saw this happening earlier in the year,

when workers absent due to the extreme weather were put under pressure to use up their leave."

Ms Lynch also claimed employees away on business were entitled to be paid as normal.

She added: "Employers can request that the employee continue to work during the period they are stranded, as it is likely they will have access to facilities to do this – but the employer must meet the cost."

Ms Lynch advised stranded employees to contact their employer as soon as feasible and if they had any concerns to also contact their union.

Hutton debate in Dublin



Alternatives: Will Hutton

WORK Foundation chief Will Hutton is to deliver a lecture and take part in a debate on May 12 in Dublin focusing on the theme of an alternative economic vision for Ireland.

The award-winning columnist and author of *The Stakeholding Society* and *On The Edge* will be joined at the Liberty Hall Theatre by Labour Party deputy leader Joan Burton, TASC director Paula Clancy and Congress general secretary David Begg. ICTU president Jack O'Connor will chair the debate. The event will kick off at 7pm. Entry by ticket only – contact your union or eileen.sweeney@ictu.ie

NIC-ICTU CONFERENCE REPORTS AND PICTURES IN NEXT ISSUE OF THE UNION POST

Lesotho project blooming

TRADE UNION activists in Lesotho have praised the effectiveness of a joint initiative, involving the Lesotho Congress of Democratic Unions, Congress and Irish Aid, to build up trade union representation.

According to LECODU, after little over a year, the organisation is now represented in all 10 districts of the country.

Previously LECODU only had committees in two districts.

Meanwhile, a key part of the project that deals with disseminating information about HIV/AIDS is also going from strength to strength.

In Lesotho about 25% population have been infected and it is estimated that 300,000 children have been orphaned by the disease.

A source said: "The existence of the 10 district committees has contributed to a more decentralised and effective spreading of information about HIV/AIDS."

One important LECODU-affiliated union involved in this important work is the Lesotho Association of Teachers.

LAT treasurer Adelina Maile underlined how vital the Irish assistance is to the work of the union in educating teachers about HIV.

She said: "Many adults in Lesotho have contracted HIV/AIDS and, in common with other countries across southern Africa, the education sector in Lesotho is losing so many teachers to this deadly disease that schools are being forced to shut down."

"This project enables the LAT to continue their life-saving work with teachers and enable schools to remain open."

The Lesotho initiative is the first time ICTU has formally engaged in a capacity building programme with a trade union congress in the developing world.

It has been co-funded by grant assistance from Irish Aid (€20,000) and by contributions from Congress affiliates IMPACT (€10,000) and PSEU (€15,000).

A Congress source said: "This project now needs funding for the second year. Congress is confident that the partnership project will be ensured by new contributions from several affiliated unions in 2010."

"So far we have already received important contributions from INTO (€20,000), IMPACT



Picture: Eileen O'Leary

(€10,000), PSEU (€5,000), ASTI (€1,000) and IFUT (€200)."

LECODU general secretary Elliot Ramochela and board member Adelina Maile took part in a Global Solidarity summer school in Waterford last August. At the time, Mr Ramochela said he was "greatful beyond expression" to both ICTU and the Irish Government for having "despite economic hardships" through this project "rescued embattled and marginalised workers of Lesotho and their families".



Adelina Maile and Elliot Ramochela

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EDUCATION

Don't be driven by needs of business...

ASTI president Joe Moran has insisted that despite pressures to deliver a narrow points-focused education, Irish teachers are still committed to pupils receiving a balanced and fulfilling school experience.

He told delegates at the union's annual conference in Galway earlier this month: "As teachers we must ensure that the education debate is not driven by the needs of industry and business alone."

"Educationalists must speak up for education in debates about the smart economy, maths education, science education, curricular reform, grade inflation, and other such debates."

Mr Moran added: "Teaching and learning is not an industrial process where for example mathematical understanding is simply transmitted by the ultra qualified teacher to the learner."

"Rather teaching should be viewed as a form of human activity involving a unique combination of enthusiasm for what one teaches and a positive interaction with the learner."

"Therefore the interpersonal interaction in education is absolutely vital."

...nor be fooled by divide and rule tactic

ASTI general secretary John White has called on members not to be fooled by attempts by a right-wing commentariat to undermine trade union solidarity.

He warned: "Attempts to divide unions from one another can only weaken the role of unions in representing an alternative vision for our society in this horrendous recession."

"Attacking solidarity is attacking the very essence of trade unionism."

"Public sector trade unions are faced with very difficult choices. Whatever the decisions taken by the members of various unions, it is vital the trade union movement remains united."

Mr White told delegates at ASTI annual conference in Galway the union movement had enough to deal with from "external enemies without having internal rancour and distrust".

He added: "Those with an anti-union agenda will attempt to 'make big' any hint of difference among union members and we must keep to this to the forefront of our minds in all our deliberations over the coming weeks."



Meeting of minds: Roz Briggs (left) and Paul O'Flaherty (right) of Mercer's with (centre) Congress' Fergus Whelan and David Begg at Putting Pensions to Work conference in March Picture: Congress

Congress joins CIF in calling for Pensions Fund build plan

CONGRESS has joined with the Construction Industry Federation in calling for Pension Fund investment in major civil engineering projects as a means of "building our way out of recession".

Both organisations claim the currently almost moribund sector could be re-energised if trustees put their money in new-style Construction Bonds.

Congress official Fergus Whelan pointed out that bonds could be used to fund projects such as the new university at Grange Gorman, new schools and hospitals – even the O'Devany Gardens renewal project abandoned last year.

He said: "Most major projects – Dublin's conference centre, the new terminal at Dublin Airport and the AVIA stadium – are either completed or close to completion."

"This means the skilled designers and workers who

have produced these world-class projects will soon be on the dole and many will be forced to emigrate. We could see a serious depletion of our skills base, which would then hamper our capacity to recover."

Mr Whelan – who sits on the Pensions Board – claimed Irish pension funds hold around €70bn in assets – with much of it invested overseas.

He said investment in the Construction Bonds made "perfect sense" because trustees were looking to transfer out of volatile equities into suitable bonds which are more dependable in terms of certainty of return.

Mr Whelan added: "Most countries in European have unveiled a stimulus package aimed at keeping their construction industries from this kind of economic meltdown. It is clear that the Irish government will not follow suit."



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Govt squandered wealth of nation

THE Irish Government has been attacked for picking up the debts of banking executives while withdrawing books for schoolchildren and cutting teachers' and lecturers' pay "to the bone and beyond".

TUI general secretary Peter MacMenamin, speaking to delegates at the union's annual conference in Ennis on April 6, claimed ministers had bought into a new form of "redistributive politics".

He said: "Instead of redistributing wealth, noticeably not

done in the good times, the Government has allowed wealth to be concentrated among a few – developers, bankers and others in an inner circle.

"When they blew all they had – and much more – through personal greed, the Government squandered the nation's resources for generations into the future by distributing the personal debts of those few, resulting in a liability equivalent to €12,000 for each individual, man, woman and child in this country."



Attack: Peter MacMenamin Picture: TUI

Mandate hails 'model' agreement

MANDATE has hailed a new partnership agreement with Superquinn as a "model" for how all retail companies should operate in Ireland.

Under the innovative *Working Through Partnership* agreement, which includes SIPTU and BFAWU, all sides will work more closely together to enhance both the business and the lives of employees.

Superquinn employs more than 3,000 staff at 23 locations across the Republic.

The WTP agreement includes a series of initiatives including:

- Hosting of monthly Store Partnership Forums and biannual Company Partnership Forum,
- Enhanced disciplinary and grievance procedures, and

- Improved communications facilities, training and development opportunities for staff members.

Mandate's assistant general secretary Gerry Light claimed the new set-up would help resolve



Mandate's Gerry Light and John Douglas with, centre, Superquinn chief Simon Burke

issues as well as enhance workplace democracy.

He said: "The partnership framework gives workers an opportunity to influence company policy and operational structures through the monthly Store Partnership Forums and the biannual Company Partnership Forum.

"This progressive and innovative agreement shows how unions and businesses can work to-

gether in order to create a mutually beneficial work environment."

Mr Light added: "Both parties agree that this 'partnership of trust' will enable Superquinn to have a more engaged workforce giving them a competitive advantage over their rivals in the retail trade."

The agreement was welcomed by the Labour Relations Commission.

LRC's director of conciliation Kevin Foley said: "The lynchpin of effective industrial relations is a commitment to constructive information sharing and dialogue.

"The agreement entered into by Superquinn and Mandate clearly sets out both parties' commitment to enhancing their relationship through dialogue and communication and the Commission congratulates the parties on this.

"The Commission is confident that this agreement will reap dividends for both sides into the future."

EC seeking review of work time regulations

THE EUROPEAN Commission has announced it is seeking a review of EU-wide working time regulations.

Employment commissioner Laszlo Andor said the failure to reach an agreement on revising current legislation last year "did not mean the problems around the existing rules have gone away" and insisted that a "balanced solution" that addressed workers, businesses and consumers was still needed.

He added: "We need a comprehensive review of the rules based on a thorough impact assessment with a strong social dimension."

Reacting to the news, ETUC general secretary John Monks claimed there was a clear link between long and irregular working hours and increased work-related health problems.



Monks: Primary goal

He said: "Although the world of work has changed, this evidence has not changed since the first legislation on working time, nor since we last discussed the revision of the working time directive.

"Protection of the health and safety of workers must therefore remain the primary goal of any review of the working time directive.

"This is of crucial importance for all workers, but in particular where workers in the performance of their jobs can affect the lives of third parties, for instance in healthcare professions or transport."

Picture: ETUC

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber has written a letter of protest to the UK's Colombian Ambassador following the murder of another teacher trade unionist.

Duvian Dario Rojo Cadavid and his wife were gunned down in Puerto Barrio in March after he had spoken to the media about terror gangs extorting money from teachers. He was the sixth teacher trade unionist killed so far in Colombia this year.



Union anger as banks pocket another €11bn

CONGRESS president Jack O'Connor has slammed the Irish Government's "wing and a prayer" approach to the fallout over the banking crisis after it was forced to commit a further €11bn to keeping the main finance houses afloat.

He flagged up the irony that the same economic policy being pursued by ministers reflected "the outlook which contributed to the problem in the first place" and added "the chickens have well and truly come home to roost".

Mr O'Connor, who is also SIPTU general president, said: "The Government's policy of pandering to the rich and 'look the

other way' regulation and its reluctance to rein in the banks when times were booming has now been replaced by a tardiness in making the banks face up to their losses – a position that is in stark contrast to the approach of the US and UK governments.

"The wing on a prayer approach to crisis managing the Irish banks has got to come to an end. We were assured that the €11bn that was pumped into the three main Irish banks would stabilise the banks and, in turn, kick-start lending again.

"That did not happen. Now a further €11 billion plus has been committed."

Corpo tax call 'race to the bottom'

CONGRESS has dubbed the call for corporation tax to be lowered for "innovative activities" as "yet another case of business advocating a race to the bottom".

ICTU economic advisor Paul Sweeney was reacting to new report published by the Innovation Taskforce, a Government think-tank set up by the Taoiseach last year to find ways of making Ireland into a 'Global Innovation Hub'.

He said: "Irish companies already enjoy one of the lowest Corporation Tax rates in

the developed world and the lowest social contributions.

"They enjoyed a vast array of 'tax breaks' during the boom.

"Arguably, the level of corporate welfare in Ireland is already so high that it stifles enterprise.

"While there is a case for using the tax system to spur growth and innovation, it seems as though lowering already-low tax rates is always the first item on the agenda of any group associated with business."

He added: "You can only go so low. How long before someone advances a case for zero rates of tax?"

Mr Sweeney was also critical of what he called the "very loose concept" of "innovative activities".

He said: "What does that mean and who defines it? Is it a moveable feast and will it depend on political whim?"

"After all, the last decade saw a huge rise in 'innovative activities' within the banking and finance sector... and look where that got us."

Picture: Congress



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Horan slams 'union militant' remark

CPSU general secretary Blair Horan has hit back at comments made by Transport Minister Noel Dempsey about "militant union leaders".

Referring to the rejection by some unions of the public services proposals, Mr Dempsey had singled out the CPSU chief.

He told the Irish Independent: "I don't know where Blair Horan or any-

body else thinks there might be a pot of money they're going to get."

Rejecting the minister's comments, Mr Horan, right, pointed out he was a social democrat who had supported the Government on European Treaties over the past decade and "had taken on the militant left to do so".

He added: "Minister Dempsey has in the past blamed bankers and develop-

ers for the mess that the country is in, and now criticises the unions, but conveniently neglects to accept that it was the reckless domestic economic policies of the past decade that has wrecked the Irish economy.

"It is the minister's own Government that is in denial, attacking lower paid public servants while pretending that the low tax model is sustainable."



INMO's Haiti cash drive

THE EXECUTIVE of the INMO has launched a major drive to raise funds for nurses in Haiti following the devastating earthquake in January.

According to the International Council of Nurses, more than 500 students were killed in schools of nursing when the quake struck. The Haitian Nurses Association was also flattened.

General secretary Liam Doran said: "The INMO is determined, in some small way, to offer assistance at this time – and any help that any member can give would be greatly appreciated."

The INMO has made arrangements with the ICN to forward all proceeds to help fund a redevelopment initiative to build key facilities lost in the disaster.

Proceeds from a special INMO table quiz held in the Anna Livia Ballroom in Dublin's Gresham Hotel on April 19 along with a donation from the Retired Nurses Section totalled an impressive €1,700.

Media 'buried Cuba story'

A STUDY into how the international media covers Cuba has calculated that newspapers and broadcasters are 77 times more likely to run a negative than a positive story.

Researchers at a top US university took a snapshot of a six week-period around March this year and analysed each news story mentioning Cuba.

It was during this time that Cuba announced the largest per-capita donation of aid to Haiti apart from the US.

But American figures were distorted by the fact that the US sum included the cost of stationing 10,000 troops in the devastated republic.

Excluding the US, Cuba's assistance to Haiti exceeds the total pledged from all G8 nations put together.

According to Cuba Support Group Ireland, only The Miami Herald referred to the donation and then only in relation to a historic meeting between US and Cuban officials about coordinating aid.



Picture: James Wardell/ITUC-GSI

School unions disagree over pay proposals

INTO general secretary Sheila Nunan has insisted that "how more than ever" workers and their families "need protection".

She was speaking in defence of the public service agreement on RTE's The Frontline on April 12.

Ms Nunan claimed the proposals offered "some certainty on pay, jobs and pensions and the restoration of pay cuts over time".

Describing it as a no more than a "strategic, protective strategy for workers", she said ordinary working people were "fearful for the future".

Ms Nunan added: "I do believe it to be the least worst option at this unique time."

Meanwhile, TUI general secretary Peter MacMenamin has vowed to mount a vigorous campaign against the proposals.

Warning that teachers had been "bled dry" and "had nothing more to give", he said: "The feedback on the Croke Park proposals from our annual congress, executive committee, branches and individual members has been unanimous.

"These measures are simply unpalatable. The only sure thing in these proposals for our members is further uncertainty."

He added: "It is also important to emphasise once again that TUI members alone will decide on the acceptability of the proposals. An aggregate vote of unions should not, cannot and will not be accepted."

SPLIT DECISION pages 10 & 11

www.ictu.ie/global solidarity/newsevents/news/2010/01/18/trade-unions-responding-to-haiti-emergency

UNISON: We've a real axe to grind with Tories...

UNISON has entered the General Election fray with a hard-hitting poster campaign targeting voters in UK marginal constituencies who might be thinking of opting for the Conservatives.

The ad drive, funded by the union's General Political Fund, urges the public "Look What's in the Tories' First Budget", below the image of an axe with a blue blade.

General secretary Dave Prentis, right, claimed the poster would give voters "a sharp reminder" of Tory plans to slash vital public services. He said:



"Public spending and the threat of job cuts are high on the election agenda.

"Tory councils have already wiped out thousands of jobs across the UK and local people are paying the price.

"We are seeing vital services such as meals on wheels, nurseries, day centres, home care and libraries disappear – and if the Tories get into power they have said that thousands more jobs will go.

"Our message is a simple one – use your vote and stop the threat to your public services."



RAI call for pay cuts 'hypocrisy'

CONGRESS has slammed calls for a cut in the minimum wage by the Restaurant Association of Ireland.

RAI chief executive Adrian Cummins told delegates at the group's conference in Killiney on April 13 that the cost of doing business was "increasing on a weekly basis" and that the Government had to "seriously address" the problem.

Measures the RAI wanted introduced included reducing the minimum wage, scrapping Sunday pay premiums for staff and cuts to local authority rates.

Hitting back, Congress official Peter Rigney claimed the body, representing restaurant employers, was being "hypocritical, given that the sector has the worst labour law compliance record".

He said: "Repeated investigations by the National Employment Rights Authority have found workers in the sector receiving as little €3 and €5 per hour." Mr Rigney pointed out

that NERA had recovered €737,000 in unpaid wages from almost 450 employers and claimed the sector as a whole had a compliance rate of only 21 per cent – the lowest in the entire economy.

He added: "The Restaurant Association of Ireland would be better served addressing the sector's problems with compliance than trying to cut peoples' wages. They should be aware of the legal maxim, 'He who comes to equity must come with clean hands'."

"The sector's problems do not stem from excessive wage costs, but from the fact that Government is sucking money and demand out of the economy through a policy of deflation."

"When peoples' incomes are cut, discretionary spending – such as eating out – is hit first."

"By supporting the income cutting agenda, the RAI is actually supporting a policy that will just worsen the situation for its members."



RWAG protest outside Supermac's in Galway

Attack on wages 'shameful'

THE Restaurant Workers Action Group has staged a lively lunchtime protest outside Supermac's flagship restaurant in Galway.

The April 16 demo in Eyre Square was held to highlight the Quick Service Food Alliance's challenge to the current system of setting wages in the sector.

According to the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, Supermac's – as part of the QSFA – is seeking to challenge wage protections for its own workers.

The MRCI – which set up the RWAG – also claims this is happening against a backdrop that saw Supermac's pre-tax profits quadruple last year.

Restaurant owners and industry groups have been calling for the reduction of worker protections, including a €1 per hour cut in the national minimum wage, a weakening of the standards laid out in the JLC and a challenge to the right of the JLC to determine working conditions.

Many restaurant workers have already seen

their hours cut and are struggling to survive.

Gul Gencoglu, a restaurant worker in Naas, spoke about the hardship these proposed changes would cause.

She said: "If my wages were cut, I would not be able to pay my rent. I would have no choice but to turn to social welfare for assistance."

"This is not what I want. I want to work. I want to have decent conditions. I don't want anything more than that."

MRCI director Siobhan O'Donoghue added: "The restaurant industry is driving an attack on minimum wage rates and basic protections for workers. This is not about saving jobs – companies like Supermac's have actually seen their profits increase dramatically, while lower-wage workers are struggling to survive."

"The industry's attack on wages for the poorest workers is shameful."

"Now, more than ever, we must ensure protections remain in place for those who need them most."



NEWSBRIEFS

Tenth of UK wage earners are permanently in the red

A NEW POLL has revealed that around 10% of people in the UK are permanently overdrawn and don't go back into the black when they receive their wages each month.

The moneysupermarket.com survey also showed that a further 12% used their overdraft at least five times a year.

However, the figures are an improvement on last year's results, when 17% of those surveyed said they were permanently overdrawn and 52% had dipped into the red at least once during the previous year.

Moneysupermarket.com chief Kevin Mountford said: "While it is encouraging to see fewer people reliant on their overdrafts, we should be concerned that there are still such a large number of people permanently overdrawn."

"With rising inflation, it is going to be difficult for many to break the habit of living in the red, and it may be that more people will fall back into this position as living costs increase."

Georgians enthuse about SIPTU's 'modernist' icon

THE IRISH Georgian Society has – perhaps surprisingly – called on Dublin City Council to consider the architectural merits of the present Liberty Hall before giving the green light for its demolition.

The body, that is normally most vocal in defence of 18th and 19th century edifices, claimed the existing 17-storey building was "one of the few examples of international modernism in Dublin".



UNITE vow on bank jobs as EU force divest move

UNITE has vowed to work hard to maintain as many jobs as possible following news that Bank of Ireland has been forced by the European Union to divest a number of its subsidiaries.

The union, which represents more than three quarters of the 1,000 employees at Bank of Ireland Life, New Ireland Assurance and the ICS Building Society, said it would "engage with existing and potential new owners" to ensure both a recovery of confidence in the sector as well as protecting terms and conditions of employment.

Regional officer Colm Quinlan said: "This announcement is not the first tremor to hit Irish bank workers and it will not be the last."

IBOA fear of 'slash and burn' move on bank jobs

IBOA chief Larry Broderick has claimed many ordinary bank employees fear they will become "sacrificial lambs" if the industry contracts as a result of financial crisis.

He urged the Irish Government to use its influence on finance houses receiving public funds to stop any "slash and burn" approach but concentrate instead on protecting jobs in the sector.

Mr Broderick said: "It would make little sense for the taxpayer to underwrite these institutions to the tune of tens of billions of euro so that they could then make thousands of their employees redundant – with the result that the Exchequer would incur further expense in terms of additional social welfare benefits and loss of income tax revenue."

DECISION TIME

SIPTU YES

SIPTU'S National Executive Council concluded that "the balance of advantage rests with acceptance" of the draft agreement on public service pay and reform.

However, the NEC also stated that the proposals "would benefit" from some clarification – in particular that part of the agreement dealing with a share of savings from reforms being put towards restoring pre-Budget 2010 pay scales.

The union executive pointed out the plan also provided for security against compulsory redundancy and allowed for "rigorous mechanisms" to control outsourcing.

SIPTU denied any acceptance of the proposals would entail a "wholesale diminution of terms and conditions of employment" relating to the resolving of disputes through arbitration over the reform element.

The statement, issued on April 13, stated: "Our negotiators did not agree to anything of the kind."

The NEC underlined that members would be justifiably sceptical about whether the Government

could be trusted which was why union negotiators insisted on the setting up of an implementation body with equal employer and union representation and overseen by an independent chairperson.

"Members must decide whether continuing with the industrial campaign or adopting a medium term strategy entailing acceptance of the proposals and working within them offers the best way of furthering our objectives."

Meanwhile, delegates at the SIPTU-affiliated Medical Laboratory Scientists Association voted to endorse the public service proposals at their AGM in Westport on April 17.

It is understood the endorsement is conditional on obtaining a temporary pause in the cold laboratory procurement process as part of seeing a "meaningful engagement" on the reconfiguration of the pathology service.

MLSA general secretary Terry Casey described the Croke Park proposals as "the best strategy in the medium term".



INTO knife-edge: Delegates endorsed recommendation by narrow margin

IMPACT SEEKING CLARIFICATION

IMPACT's Central Executive Committee is to seek clarification through the LRC. A spokesperson said the CEC remained committed to a negotiated settlement but that "lack of clarity over certain aspects" of the deal remained "problematic". Once clarification is given, union officials will then bring the package back to the union Executive before the proposals are put to ballot.

PDFORRA NO

PDFORRA's National Executive recommended rejection of the public service agreement following a meeting on April 12.

General secretary Gerry Rooney said the deal was considered to offer "no guarantees" over the recovery of pay or, indeed, over further wages cuts.

He added: "It was also felt that the list of commitments being sought in return for the vague guarantees on pay from ordinary members of the Permanent Defence Forces were excessive – particularly given the widespread reform process that has taken place over the past decade or so."

"No recognition was given to this reform in the proposed agreement at all."

CPSU NO

UNANIMOUSLY recommending a rejection of the Croke Park draft agreement, the CPSU Executive claimed it:

- Failed to secure a reversal of all pay cuts,
- Provided no guarantees on the restoration of pay levels, and
- The Civil Service Transformation Agreement was "too opened, lacked clarity and was, therefore, unacceptable".

AHCPS YES

THE Executive Committee of the Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants has recommended acceptance of the public service agreement.

In a statement issued on April 9, the AHCPS leadership claimed the document was the "best hope" in the "current economic climate" of ensuring no further cuts in pay as well as providing a mechanism for reversing wage cuts through the reform element of the package.

"The Association believes that the alternative is either prolonged industrial action which in the present economic circumstances will not produce a better outcome, and/or further pay cuts."

ASTI NO

RECOMMENDING rejection, ASTI's Central Executive Council expressed its "total and vehement opposition" to the deal.

IFUT NO

THE National Executive of IFUT unanimously recommended rejection of the government's proposed agreement at a meeting on April 14.

General secretary Mike Jennings said: "While recognising that there are some positives in the proposed agreement, the offer of a blank cheque for the renegotiation of staff contracts, with fundamental and far reaching implications for educational standards, is simply not acceptable"

INMO NO

THE INMO Executive Council, after a "detailed examination" of the draft document, voted unanimously to recommend a rejection of the proposals in a nationwide ballot of members.

In a letter to members, general secretary Liam Doran claimed accepting the current recruitment moratorium would result in a further 6,000 posts being lost in the public health service over the next three years.

It would also involve an acceptance of the recommended cut of more than 3,500 acute hospital beds contained in the "fundamentally flawed" McCarthy Report.

On pay, Mr Doran also pointed out that the draft document failed to guarantee there would not be any further pay cuts.

He added that the INMO would only support change that is "patient centred and quality assured" producing a more produc-

Recession blamed for shock rise in workers' depression

A NEW survey has flagged up an alarming increase in mental health illness among UK workers.

The authors behind the Roehampton University study have blamed worries connected to the economic downturn for the shock rise.

According to the research commissioned by charity Elizabeth Finn Care, 47% of people have experienced depressive symptoms since the recession hit – nearly five times higher than levels recorded among the general population before the slump.

Of those who have lost their jobs over the past year, 71% have suffered depressive symptoms.

Interestingly, figures show that people in the middle Social Economic Status (SES) groups are more likely to suffer from depression if they lose their jobs (59.8%), compared to those in the lower SES groups (44.9%) and the higher SES groups (46.7%).

Also young people (aged 16 to 30) are more likely to be suffering from depressive symptoms than any other age group in the recession, with 43% suffering from anxiety and 45% from stress.

Dr Joerg Huber, of Roehampton University, said: "What makes our findings worrying is the high percentage of people reporting symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress."

"This applies even more to those who have lost their job or experienced a major loss of income."

Recent reports have linked recession-related job insecurity and pressures to problems including increased suicide, heart disease and other problems.

Targets health risk to teachers

INCREASING work pressures have lead to higher levels of depression among teachers, the NASUWT has warned.

The union based its claim on the findings of a new survey of school staff in England and Wales.

Researchers found that a lack of support from management, a "tick-box culture", targets and difficult pupils was leading to stress, burnout and depression among teachers.

Symptoms reported included heart palpitations, lack of sleep, eating problems as well as depression.

NASUWT general secretary Chris Keates said: "This research highlights the need for access to support, counselling and specific health interventions for the workforce."

"It also confirms the need to tackle the root causes of stress in schools, such as the impact of the high-stakes accountability regime on the wellbeing of school leaders, teachers and other staff."



Press conference: INMO leadership recommends rejection



Cool reception: Tánaiste speaks at INTO congress



tive health service that was "accessible to people in local communities and delivered in a safe manner".

Describing the proposals as "flawed", Mr Doran concluded: "Even in the face of the very troubled times that we live in, the INMO is not prepared to advise acceptance of an agreement which we sincerely believe will not reverse pay cuts but will materially damage an already struggling public health service for generations to come."

UNITE NO

A MEETING of UNITE's public sector representatives voted overwhelmingly on April 8 to reject the public sector agreement – a decision that was later confirmed by the union's National Executive.

Irish regional secretary Jimmy Kelly claimed the document was seeking to "copperfasten" Government policy of taking money out of the real economy to prop up the very banks and finance houses that had caused the crisis in the first place.

He said: "The promise of 'jam tomorrow' is wholly undermined by the actions taking place in banking and insurance."

"A billion euro was saved in public sector pay that takes money out of every business and enterprise in the country, while €8bn as a minimum has gone into Anglo Irish Bank which has no long-term future benefit for anybody other than overseas bond holders."

"This is like *Alice in Wonderland* and the membership of UNITE and other trade unions needs to stand up and inject a dose of common sense. Our unequivocal recommendation to members will be to reject this proposed agreement."

"We will ballot our members over the next two weeks and will continue our campaign of public sector action to force government to adapt a more progressive approach to the problems we face."

INTO YES

The INTO Executive has recommended acceptance following a narrow vote in favour at the union's recent congress.

PSEU YES

THE PSEU's EC has recommended acceptance of the proposals.

General secretary Tom Geraghty told *The Union Post*: "We did this because an agreement that there will be no compulsory redundancies for four years and no pay cuts for four years, that provides for pay reviews each year plus a deal that commits to negotiate on proposed pension changes, has to be better than continued uncertainty."

"The only alternative is prolonged high-level industrial action."

He added: "There is no evidence of support for this and even if there was, it would not change the facts that our economy is shattered and our fiscal position is parlous."

"The real question to be asked is whether a person voting on this agreement can be assured that a vote against the agreement will leave them safe?"

NIPSA hits out at Civil Service ban on radios

NIPSA has warned of "disgruntled and demoralised" staff after thousands of public sector workers across Northern Ireland were ordered to switch off their workplace radios for good.

In recent weeks, chiefs at both the Department of Social Development and the Department of Education and Learning have banned members of staff from listening to music and radios, which union sources claim came "out of the blue".

Civil service bosses said they took the action because workplace radios require licences from organisations that collect music royalties.

Blasting the move, NIPSA general secretary Brian Campfield warned the ban would impact on workplace morale.

He said: "This will lead to problems for the departments because they will have a lot of disgruntled and demoralised staff on their hands, and that situation can't be allowed to continue for any length of time."

"Even people in prisons are generally allowed to listen to the radio."

Accepting that tariffs had to be paid for workplace radios, Mr Campfield claimed taxpayer-funded departments should pay the necessary fees, particularly for those employees carrying out repetitive tasks.

He added: "A lot of the work that people in these areas perform can be quite monotonous and it's a long enough day without having some background music."



Campfield: warning

NIPSA claims it is bringing "equality to the heart of government" by organising a special event at Stormont's Long Gallery on May 5. Prof Richard Wilkinson, co-author of *The Spirit Level – Why Equality is Better for Everyone*, will be detailing the hard evidence that shows almost everything from life expectancy to depression levels, violence to illiteracy is affected by how wealthy a society is but how equal it is. The event kicks off at 10am.

Lifts dispute court ruling

THE LABOUR Court has issued a binding recommendation on the TEEU on its nine-week dispute with Pickering's Lifts.

In its recommendation, the Court expressed regret that the employer had opted not to attend the case or to make a submission on the issue in dispute.

After a "careful consideration" of the evidence the Court recommended that the company offer:

- An ex-gratia lump sum of four weeks' average pay per year of service, average pay to be determined by reference to the method of calculating pay for the purposes of the Redundancy Payments Acts, without the application of a weekly cap on earnings,
- Statutory redundancy entitlements in line with the Redundancy Payments Acts 1967 to 2007,
- That the company should first seek volunteers for redundancy, and
- In the event additional compulsory redundancies are necessary, these should be selected on a last in/first out basis.

The Court urged both parties to "engage constructively and with some urgency" to settle the dispute.

INTO CONGRESS



Bank 'joyriders' caused crash

OUTGOING INTO president Maire Ni Chuinneagain, above, has slammed the Government for forcing ordinary workers to bail out "an elite band" of "so far untouchable financial joyriders".

She made the remarks during her address to delegates at the union's annual congress in Galway on April 5.

Ms Ni Chuinneagain claimed current Government policies were crashing the economy causing high unemployment and leaving emigration the "default option" for thou-

sands. She told delegates the wealth of recent years had been squandered and the financial future mortgaged to pay for the misdeeds of the few.

"The recent NAMA revelations in the Dáil show the extent of the deception, the result of which is downward spiral for ordinary workers, local indigenous businesses and vulnerable members of our society – the young, the old, the sick and the unemployed."

She warned the Government was turning the recession into "full blown

depression", adding: "Their only plan it seems is to cling to the wreckage of their own disastrous economic policies."

Ms Ni Chuinneagain added: "Every year for the foreseeable future, the equivalent of the annual education budget, currently half of EU norms, will be used simply to pay the interest on the NAMA debt."

"That is the legacy of the elite band of financial joyriders who we now forced to bail out."



ICTU chief David Begg and INTO general secretary Sheila Nunan at INTO congress

'Never surrender' plea as INTO chief bows out

TRADE UNION veteran John Carr has stepped down and is to retire after 10 years at the helm of the largest teachers' union in Ireland.

In a moving speech at the INTO's annual congress in Galway last month, he spoke of how it had been an "extraordinary honour" and "immense privilege" to lead the union.

And he described his time as general secretary as "the most challenging... and most rewarding of my life".

Mr Carr added that though he was now leaving the pitch, he would be "supporting from the stands".

Referring to the struggle to improve investment in education, he told delegates: "Together we opposed the crude imposition for political purposes of national testing on all children."

"We were successful because of your professionalism and understanding of curriculum and assessment."

"Together, we put class sizes in primary schools at the very top of the educational agenda."

"We argued for improvements. We protested against cutbacks. Last year we celebrated a significant reversal of those cutbacks." He reminded his fellow teachers that

class sizes were now smaller than a decade ago "but nowhere near small enough".

Despite the many gains made over the years, Mr Carr warned that these advances could be reversed "at the stroke of pen" and pointed that this was a challenge that faced a new generation of activists.

He also told conference he had supported social partnership "not as a blind principle but as a means to an end" and that INTO would continue to oppose "the race to the bottom in all employment".

Mr Carr said he wished he could have departed with his "agenda complete" but underlined that it was necessary to confront the fallout from the government's failed economic policies.

He added: "But I say to you that the human spirit is never beaten when it is defeated. It is only finished when it surrenders. Don't ever do that."

"But I have always believed that it is better to negotiate hopefully than to arrive prematurely at a dangerous impasse. We are there right now."

"The choices you will make in the coming months will be vital, not just for teachers but for the country."

Pictures: Moya Nolan/INTO



In perfect UNISON...

Clockwise from top left: John Douglas (MANDATE), Eric Fleming (SIPTU), Eugene McGlone (UNITE), Patricia King (SIPTU), Tom Geraghty (PSEU), David Begg (ICTU), Jack O'Connor (SIPTU, ICTU) and Liam Doran (INMO) voice support for UNISON's A Million Voices campaign in defence of public services

IMO issue Govt health warning

IRISH Medical Organisation chief Professor Sean Tierney has called for a public debate on universal health coverage and warned that Ireland – with the development of private hospitals and private health insurance – may be veering towards a US rather than European healthcare model.

Addressing delegates at the IMO's annual conference in Killarney on April 8, Mr Tierney said: "I would warn against any attempt by the State to try and use the private health system to shore up an under-funded public health services."

"Privatisation in the area of health has been proved to be a failed ideology across the world and can only ever benefit the better off."

"While we acknowledge the role of private medicine in Ireland and the part it has played in the provision of some services, private medicine is not and cannot be a substitute for a publically funded system."

"Neither is there a case for selling off our public health services to private entrepreneurs, as some people now advocate."



Len McCluskey (front row, third from right) during his recent three-day visit to Northern Ireland

UNITE front-runner visits North

LEN McCluskey – hotly tipped to be the first sole head of UNITE – was in Northern Ireland recently on a three-day visit to some of the region's manufacturers.

A former Liverpool docker, he was the chief negotiator in the recent British Airways dispute, and is a leading contender to become general secretary of the union.

During his visit, Mr McCluskey said he wanted to hammer home the message that having a strong manufacturing base was of vital importance.

He said: "Manufacturing is something government needs to support in order to ensure that we have good public services."

Mr McCluskey also voiced his support for Northern Ireland's public sector workers, who, he said, were bearing the brunt of government spending cuts. He added: "It needs to be made

clear that public-sector debt was not caused by public sector workers but by spivs and bankers."

When dubbed "an agitator who relished industrial disputes" by the local press, he hit back: "My history shows that my career has not been about destroying industry – but if I'm accused of being an agitator in defence of working people and better wages, then I plead guilty."

Mr McCluskey also explained to local UNITE members that the union would be endorsing the Labour Party in the General Election "despite the obvious disappointments of the past 13 years".

He added: "We know the Tories will attack working people and the trade unions."

"Despite David Cameron's touchy-feely approach, the Tories still represent the elite and the corporate giants."

Picture: UNITE



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REPORT

Unions good for reducing work quit rate

A NEW REPORT from the TUC has claimed unions can play a positive role in helping to prevent staff feeling stressed and de-motivated by new working practices as well as in reducing the number of staff quitting their jobs.

The Road to Recovery calls on government and employers to recognise the value unions can bring to workplaces – with the resulting contribution to economic prosperity.

The report – part of the TUC Touchstone series – uses case studies to show how unions have worked with employers to introduce green initiatives in the workplace, create redeployment opportunities for staff and negotiate changes to staff pension schemes.

It claims that as well as giving staff an opportunity to raise concerns at work, unions are better at resolving conflicts, with the number of UK employment tribunal claims in unionised workplaces (1.3 claims per thousand staff) less than half that of non-unionised workplaces (2.9 claims per thousand staff).

The report's authors argue that by giving staff a voice at work, employees are less likely to feel de-motivated by changes to working practices. The report cites research showing that unions can reduce 'quit rates' in both the public and private sectors – staff in unionised workplaces are less likely to quit their job than in non-unionised workplaces. This positive effect is more pronounced in workplaces where unions have higher membership.

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "Unions' work goes well beyond wages and working conditions. By giving staff a voice at work they can help to resolve conflict and reduce number of people quitting work."

"Conflict between unions and employers will always generate the headlines. But behind the scenes, many employers are working closely with unions to modernise their workplaces and recover from the recession."

FIGURES released by the Central Statistics Office show an increase in trade union membership in the Republic.

A total of 34% of employees were union members in the second quarter of 2009 – up two per cent on the same period in 2008.

According to the CSO's Quarterly National Household Survey, 37% of full-time workers said they were members of a union, compared with 20% of part-time employees.

Condolences at Polish tragedy

SIPTU has sent its "heartfelt condolences" to Polish members, to the wider Polish community in Ireland, and the Polish people as a whole following the Smolensk air crash tragedy.

In a statement, the union's leadership made particular reference to veteran trade union activist Anna Walentynowicz who died in the crash.

Ms Walentynowicz's sacking from her job in Gdansk shipyard in August 1980 resulted in a wave of strikes that led to the setting up of Solidarnosc.

General president Jack O'Connor and general secretary Joe O'Flynn extended their sorrow at her passing to family, friends and colleagues.

They added: "The deceased also included senior officials of the government, the central bank, the army, navy and judiciary as well as noted political figures and historians who will be sorely missed by their families and Polish society."

"Our thoughts and solidarity are with the people of Poland at this difficult time."



'It's a sweet little idea... but I don't think it will work.' Bill Nighy stars as a finance house CEO spouting the usual nonsense in the Richard Curtis directed short The Banker in support of Robin Hood Tax.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYtNwmXKlvM

Global move to petition G20 leaders

A GLOBAL petition has been launched online to ask G20 chiefs to implement the Robin Hood Tax.

The ITUC-backed petition will be presented to the world leaders before their next summit meeting in Canada at the end of June.

An accompanying letter states that the financial sector has caused the current crisis by creating "a casino economy" through focusing on short-term speculative gain.

It continues: "You [the G20 leaders] have mobilised hundreds of billions of dollars to save the banks and the financial system."

"At the same time, neither the social nor the climate emergency is being addressed with the political urgency it deserves and with the necessary financial resources to back it."

"Financial services corporations benefited for decades from the absence of meaningful regulation and are largely responsible for the crisis."

"We believe it is time for them to pay their fair share of the costs of recovery."

"A Financial Transactions Tax would be the most effective instrument to secure this."

It concludes: "Business as usual is not an option. We urge you to decide at your next meeting in Toronto to introduce a tax on financial transactions. Back your words with action."



→ THEROBINHOODTAX →
Sign the petition at www.makefinancework.org

ORGANISING

CWU bid to recruit NI call centre workers

THE CWU is stepping up its focus on organising non-recognised telecoms workers in Northern Ireland – including those employed in call centres.

To kick-start this initiative, the Northern Ireland Engineering branch has launched a Telecoms Workers Section to help union members in non-unionised firms organise and provide them with workplace representation.

A special launch was held in Belfast's Black Box venue on March 31.

Workers from a number of firms, including Teletech, Firstsource and Carphone Warehouse, attended the event.

These companies mostly employ young people – often in their first job and with little knowledge of their rights and even less experience of the benefits of belonging to a trade union.

The TWS will provide support, training and resources to help address the specific needs of these employees, who are invariably having to deal with appalling terms and conditions, low pay and no job security.

CWU Regional Secretary Lawrence Huston said: "Poor employment practices have a detrimental affect on the working lives and well-being of many of our young and vulnerable workers."

"Insecure employment and poor treatment at work lowers expectations of what working life should be about."

"Workers repeatedly tell us their managers have told them they are not allowed to join a union."

"This attitude is a disgrace."

"Our message to these workers is clear – you have a legal right to belong to a trade union."

It is understood the TWS of the NI Engineering Branch will be holding its first meeting in May.

A number of TWS members have already attended workplace reps training.

CWU organiser Kerry Fleck said "Moving towards a solid network of union members across this industry and having workplace reps is a massive step forward for workers in this industry."

"Many are facing employers who are openly hostile to the entire concept of trade unions."

"It is important that these new reps, working at the coal face have the entire trade union movement behind them as they try to overcome anti-union attitudes of multi-national companies."

She added: "Members of the TWS section will be attending their first May Day celebrations this year and hopefully they will be back next year in even greater numbers."

To find out more about the TWS contact CWU regional secretary Lawrence Huston at the CWU Regional website: www.cwuniregion.org or contact the N.Ireland Engineering Branch via e-mail: cwunie@btinternet.com



**When somebody dies at work,
they are never the only victim.**

Work deaths harm whole families

**International Workers' Memorial Day
28 April
www.ictu.ie**

STRONGERTOGETHER
CONGRESS
Irish Congress of Trade Unions



CONGRESS DEBATES BOYCOTT CAMPAIGN



TRADE unionists from Palestine and Israel took part in a lively – and sometimes heated – debate at a conference on the Middle East earlier this month.

The Congress-organised event, in St Patrick's Hall, Dublin Castle, went ahead despite the loss of nine key speakers.

They were unable to attend the April 16 conference because of the closure of air space over much of Europe following the volcanic eruption in Iceland.

However, the conference did hear from Foreign Affairs Minister Micheal Martin, Omar Barghouti (Palestinian National Committee for BDS) and Avital Shapira-Shabirow (International Department director of Histadrut – the General Federation of Labour in Israel).

Speakers from the US and Canada also made contributions.

Organisers staged the conference – chaired by ICTU president Jack O'Connor – in a bid to build support for Congress policy as well as to learn how other union bodies dealt with the issue around the world.

They also hoped to strengthen relationships with labour movements in the Middle East and beyond and to assist discussions about how union solidarity can contribute to a peaceful solution that respects UN resolutions as well as human and trade union rights.

A lively debate followed a speech by Avital Shapira during which she accused Congress of bias against Israel.

She also claimed the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign could damage the prospect of a negotiated solution to the conflict.

Several speakers challenged Ms Shapira on



Clashing viewpoints: PNC's Omar Barghouti and Avital Shapira-Shabirow of Histadrut

this point and claimed Histadrut had not only failed to condemn the 2009 attack on Gaza – which claimed 1,400 lives – but had actively defended it.

Concluding the sometimes heated discussion, Jack O'Connor said it was not sufficient for trade unionists and progressive people to ignore the plight of the Palestinian people just as they should never have ignored the Holocaust in the mid-20th Century.

Several speakers called for an examination by Congress of more effective means to progress the BDS campaign.

A full record of proceedings – including speeches and debates – will be posted on the Congress website in the coming days.

Congress has a long history of engagement with trade unionists in the Middle East.

In November 2007, an ICTU delegation

visited the region and met with representatives from all sides, including Israeli and Palestinian trade unions, the Israeli government and civil society activists.

Members of the delegation also entered the Gaza strip to meet with representatives of the elected Hamas authority.

A report arising out of the visit and containing key recommendations was later published (see link 1 below).

In 2009, Congress adopted a motion at its Biennial Delegate Conference, which included support for calls from Palestinian civil society for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign against Israel (see link 2 below).

Meanwhile, the TUC and the Palestine Solidarity Campaign has issued a joint appeal to consumers not to buy goods from illegal Israeli settlements.

Speaking at the launch of a campaign leaflet *Would You Buy Stolen Goods?* on April 8, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber also called on the UK Government to ensure the EU bans the sale of such goods.

He said: "As consumers we can make a difference by not supporting the businesses that sustain these settlements.

"So next time you're shopping, make sure you don't buy goods labelled 'Product of the West Bank (Israeli Settlement produce)'.

"This is not a call for a general boycott of Israeli goods and services which would hit ordinary Palestinian and Israeli workers.

"Instead, we're calling for targeted, consumer-led sanctions to send a clear message against the settlements."

LINK 1 www.ictu.ie/download/pdf/palestine_final.pdf **LINK 2** www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity/newsevents/2009/12/07/palestinian-trade-union-movement-unanimously-confirms-support-for-boycott-campaign/

Pictures: Congress

NEWS YOU CAN USE LET US KNOW WHAT YOUR UNION IS DOING. EMAIL US AT braziermedia@btinternet.com

PCS urges candidates to 'take the pledge' on services...

THE Public and Commercial Services union has organised a series of question time events in a number of Northern Ireland constituencies in the run up to the May 6 General Election.

Union members as well as the general public will be able to grill candidates in particular on their attitudes to public services.

The events are being held in:

● City Hotel, Queens Quay, Derry, on Wednesday, April 28, from 6.30pm – 8.30pm

● Holiday Inn, Ormeau Avenue, Belfast, on Thursday, April 29, from 6.45pm – 8.45pm

● Canal Court Hotel, Merchants Quay

Newry, Tuesday, May 4, from 6pm – 8pm

Refreshments will be provided at all the events.

The PCS has 300,000 members in the Civil Service, non departmental public bodies and the private sector across the UK – 3,000 of whom work at the Home Civil Service in Northern Ireland. The union has also asked all candidates to support its five pledges on public services. These are:

1) I pledge to work to ensure that public services are properly resourced and delivered by the public sector and that there are no further local office closures, public sector job cuts or privatisations.

2) I pledge to support measures aimed at closing the UK tax gap including recruiting HMRC staff and ensuring tax loopholes are closed.

3) I pledge to support civil service national pay bargaining and to press the government to offer pay increases to public sector workers at least in line with inflation.

4) I pledge to honour the 2005 commitment on public sector pensions and defend the rights of existing members of the civil service compensation scheme.

5) I pledge to campaign to ensure any changes to public services are only made after proper equality impact assessments have been conducted and their findings implemented.

For further information, contact Gayle Matthews, PCS, on **028 90 687137** or by email **gayle@pcs.org.uk**

Firm's suicide response 'is just not good enough'

UNIONS have claimed moves by France Telecom to address a recent spate of workplace suicides don't go far enough.

The telecommunications giant was heavily criticised last year over a sharp rise in the number of employees taking their own lives after a major restructuring of its operations.

The outcry led to the personal intervention of President Sarkozy and prompted the company to bring in new policies to reduce workloads and stress. Company chiefs agreed to recruit 3,500 extra staff and ensure that job transfers were voluntary and not mandatory.

However, Nabyl Beldjoudi of the Force Ouvriere union slammed the plan and claimed it amounted to a series of emergency responses and did not represent a comprehensive national strategy to deal with "psychosocial risks".



EVERYONE in Ireland has an ancestor who came from somewhere else, Congress president Jack O'Connor told an anti-racism rally in Dublin.

Addressing a crowd of 1,500 gathered outside the Dail, he said the only difference was when they arrived on these shores.

The April 11 rally and march from the Garden of Remembrance to the Dail was staged in memory of slain Tyrrellstown teenager Toyosi Shitta-Bey.

In his speech, Mr O'Connor said Congress had long demanded that every worker in Ireland, no matter who they were, be treated with dignity and respect.

He reminded those present: "No one of us shapes what is. What shapes what is, is the combined collective activity of us all."



Pictures: Paula Geraghty

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Picture: Reuters / Alan Tan

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Staff return to NHS after 19 years on private contracts

UNISON has hailed the move to bring more than 200 ancillary staff employed at Belfast's Musgrave Park Hospital back into the health service after 19 years of privatisation as "an outstanding achievement" for the union and its members.

Hospital workers at Musgrave Park – who provide cleaning, catering, portering, transport, security and telephone services – became the first casualties of Thatcher's discredited privatisation programme in 1991.

More than 300 employees – 85% of them low-paid women workers – were sold off, first to Compass, then to Mediguard and later to Mediclean.

Of the original workforce just over 20 remain.

UNISON regional secretary Patricia McKeown said: "This is the longest and last privatised contract in our health service. It is the final in-house return of workers who were put through hell to serve political dogma.

"They have persevered and justice is theirs at

last." Ms McKeown insisted the union's determination that one day these workers would return to the health service had won through in the end.

She said: "Throughout those years we successfully sued the former Eastern Health board for failure to apply TUPE transfer rights to the catering staff, denial of pension rights for the workers and equal pay for the women.

"In 1996, the Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland investigated this and other contracts and concluded that the women workers had suffered discrimination."

Ms McKeown pointed out that new employees under contract had subsisted on minimum wage levels for many years while those workers who had been transferred lost out on pay and conditions.

She added: "Standards fell as exploitation rose. On three separate occasions [as contracts were successively awarded to different companies] the Eastern Health Board and the old Greenpark

Health Trust could have done the right thing but failed to do so."

It was only in the last few years that Mediclean – the last company to take on the contract – conceded to UNISON negotiators new health service pay rates but by then most of the original workforce had gone.

Ms McKeown added: "The remaining original workers have lived through very difficult times but still did their best to deliver to patients and public.

"UNISON pays tribute to all our members in the Musgrave Park team.

"We know their stories and the sacrifices they have made to stick with the health service.

"We acknowledge the role of the Belfast Trust in recognising their worth."

Ms McKeown warned that a "new privatisation threat" loomed if the Tories took power but added: "We do not intend it let it happen again."



People power: Thousands took to the streets of Ballinasloe on March 28 to voice their opposition to Portiuncula proposals

Picture: Paula Geraghty

10,000 at rally over hospital cut plan

NEARLY 10,000 people marched in Ballinasloe last month to protest at any bid to downgrade services at Portiuncula Hospital.

The numbers who took to the streets underlined local resentment over the proposals to put in place a super manager to run Portiuncula, Roscommon and Mayo hospitals from a base in UCHG. The move is bitterly op-

posed by IMPACT, SIPTU and the INMO.

Portiuncula Action Committee secretary Padraig Mulligan, of IMPACT, described the March 28 protest as the biggest Ballinasloe had ever seen and showed the depth of community resistance to cuts at the hospital which employs more than 700 people.

He said: "As we come to

Easter, a quote from Padraig Pearse springs to mind, 'Beware the risen people', because the public have given the message that they will not tolerate the downgrading of the hospital."

Noreen Muldoon, of the INMO, said her union would fight "tooth and nail" to protect services and warned there would be further protests and action taken unless assurances were given over the

future of Portiuncula and Roscommon hospitals.

She added: "Why change what is working well? This new reporting procedure can be only seen as a reduction or closure of the two hospitals. It's something we cannot accept."

Locals have also called on Portiuncula-born Health Minister Mary Harney not to reduce the current level of services.



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