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# UNION POST

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IN BELFAST  
HIS SPEECH  
IN FULL** PAGES 18,  
19, 20 & 21

**PUBLIC  
SECTOR  
DAY OF  
ACTION**  
**PICTURE  
SPECIAL**  
PAGES 7, 8, 9 & 10



Picture: Moya Nolan

# 'CATASTROPHIC PUBLIC POLICY FAILURE'



Begg: Regret

**Congress hits at Govt  
over collapse of talks  
as Budget day looms**

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# UNION POST



**Deal Government side threw away 4**

**National Jobs' Summit**



WORKING OUR WAY OUT OF THE CRISIS  
HOW WE TACKLE THE JOBS' CRISIS BY  
SAVING AND CREATING JOBS

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UNION POST was produced by Brazier Media for the Irish Congress of Trade Unions

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



## Stop Larkin about ...and find a good home for Big Jim!

A BELFAST craftsman has put out an appeal to find a good home for his prized sculpture of trade union legend Jim Larkin.

Sculptor Anto Brennan, pictured above, crafted the piece in 2007 to mark the centenary of the carters and dockers strike in Belfast.

It is made of sculpting

resin and is finished in a bronze effect.

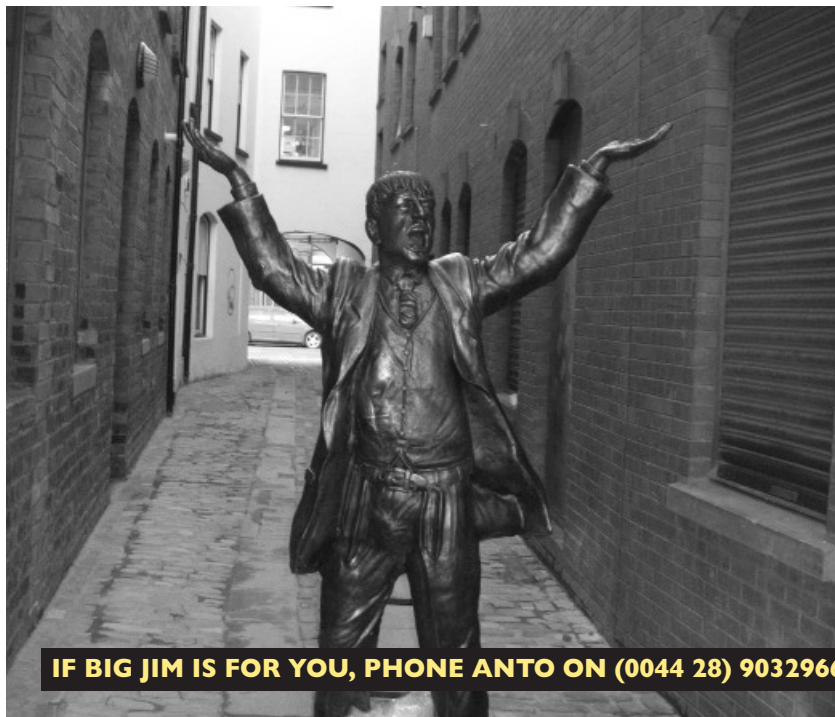
A bronze cast of the original statue can be seen in the Belfast offices of NIC-ICTU.

The striking 6ft 6in creation would be a perfect adornment for a trade union office foyer.

Anto, who also does private commissions from

his Open Window Productions studios on Belfast's Donegall Street, said: "The asking price is £12,000 but of course we're also open to offers and really want Big Jim to go to a good home."

"The buyer will also be issued with a certificate and a DVD of the original unveiling."



**IF BIG JIM IS FOR YOU, PHONE ANTO ON (0044 28) 90329669**

Pictures: Geraldo Brennan

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# Regret over talks collapse

THE GOVERNMENT'S decision to end talks with the Public Services Committee of Congress surprised many observers.

The December 4 move, coming just days before Budget 2010, was noted with "astonishment and deep regret" by Congress.

Negotiations had centred around finding an alternative way of achieving €1.3bn savings in the public sector pay bill.

General secretary David Begg said: "That this decision was taken following a hostile campaign of opposition to the proposals before they could be either finalised or explained is inexplicable."

He claimed an opportunity to reform the public service was being lost and was unlikely to ever arise in the same way again.

Mr Begg added: "The people who condemned

this union initiative out of hand concentrated solely on the bridging mechanism for 2010, which was only a secondary part of the overall plan.

"They failed to appreciate, or perhaps did not want to hear the detailed blueprints for medium term reform and cost savings set out in documents agreed for each sector of the public service, which were the primary focus of the union proposal."

Mr Begg reiterated the Congress view that the Government's approach to cutting the Exchequer deficit was "too brutal, too quick".

A more balanced approach between taxation and expenditure cuts in the period up to 2017 had been set out in the Congress alternative 10 point strategy for A Better Fairer Way and in its Pre-Budget Submission.

The proposal for public sector transformation was one part of that strategy but it also included proposals to:

- Make the better off shoulder a fair share of the burden of fiscal adjustment,
- Protect peoples' homes from repossession,
- Reduce unemployment by interventions to keep people at work and using a National Recovery Bond to finance infrastructure,
- Maintain social welfare rates, and
- Devise a strategy to protect private sector pensions.

Mr Begg said: "I profoundly regret that there is now no possibility of influencing a budget towards social solidarity.

"In time to come this will be seen as catastrophic public policy failure."



## Wealthy must be 'pursued and taxed'

CONGRESS General Secretary David Begg has said the Government must now "choose between continued deference to the very wealthy or genuine support for low to middle income earners and the vulnerable in Irish society".

Speaking at the launch of the Congress pre-Budget Submission, Mr Begg said new taxes on wealth could "generate substantial new resources for the state".

He added: "We no longer have the luxury of maintaining the fiction that all the wealth in this country has suddenly evaporated.

"It has not and, in the interests of wider society, it must be pursued and taxed.

"Our own figures show there is real scope for raising substantial sums in this area – perhaps as much as €2.3 billion in 2010 and more in the years ahead.

"We're talking about more tax for high earners, a new rate of minimum tax for the wealthy, pursuing tax exiles and raising Capital Gains.

"These are just a few examples from a range of options we have compiled."

Mr Begg also said that if Budget

2010 was to have any hope of assisting a general recovery in the economy, it would have to make job creation and protection a centrepiece.

"Last week Congress held a Jobs Conference in Dublin, at which we heard speakers from Germany, Holland and Denmark outline how their countries have successfully tackled unemployment.

"There is nothing – apart from an absence of political will – to stop us learning from their good example and adopting similar schemes.

"Equally, we have published prop-

osals detailing how several thousand new jobs can be created in the 'green economy' and have also proposed a National Recovery Bond to assist the construction sector; create jobs and address deficits in our infrastructure."

Mr Begg said Congress also believed homeowners in difficulty with mortgage repayments, should have recourse to a "NAMA-style scheme that addresses their problems and allows them to stay in their home.

"It is not good enough to bail out banks and ignore homeowners."

**1** Congress proposes a temporary minimum tax on high income earners which could generate up to €207m. Those earning between €200,000 and €500,000 only pay a 13.63% effective tax rate. The effective income tax rate on those earning over €100,000 should be raised to 35%, with the threshold reduced to €100,000.

**2** In a broader restructuring of the tax base, over a longer period, Congress believes there must be a Top Tax Rate of 48% for individuals earning over €100,000.

**3** Government must target tax exiles. If they do business here, they should pay tax here. Many have vast representation and influence, but pay no tax. In the US they would be stripped of their passports. If they have their centre of vital interests here, then they should pay tax here.

**4** A temporary Wealth Tax on those with over €2m for the next three years.

**5** A temporary levy on corporate income. Corporations pay tax at 12.5% and are exempted from the income levies that all

## BUDGET 2010 SUGGESTIONS FOR MINISTER LENIHAN...



workers pay. An increase of 2% will raise €614m in 2010.

**6** Raising tax on DIRT to 30% will raise €125m

**7** Potential revenue that could be earned from targeting those who evade tax is very high.

**8** A further €350m to €450m could be generated from uncollected tax.

**9** There is a huge discrepancy between Capital Gains Tax (25%) and income tax

(41%). CGT should be raised 30% in the next budget.

**10** Capital acquisition tax was increased in the last Budget for the first time ever and had been eviscerated each year before. The reversion to several progressive rates based on rising thresholds (abolished in 1999) should be reintroduced. These measures will restore merit at the heart of business and reintroduce a measure of social equality. ICTU estimates, based on finance data, that this could generate up to €250m.

**11** ICTU also proposes a reform on Personal Tax deductions. These reforms are centred on equity and could raise tens of millions, perhaps €40m to €50m.

**12** Finally, ICTU points out that it is opposed to raising tax on low-income earners on two grounds. Firstly it is unfair and secondly it is bad economics. It will deflate the economy further. The more raised from low incomes, the greater deflationary impact on the economy.

<http://www.ictu.ie/publications/fulllist/areas-where-tax-can-should-be-raised-in-budget-2010-2-dec-09/>

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**TALKS COLLAPSE** AS REFORM PACKAGE BINNED, McLOONE WARNS:

# 'We will see conflict not agreed change'

UNIONS have claimed the deal rejected by the Government on December 4 would have delivered a massive transformation in the delivery of public services and led to the saving of billions of euro.

Peter McLoone, who chairs the Public Services Committee of Congress, said ministers had rejected what he described as a revolutionary approach to public service reform in favour of conflict.

He thought Finance Minister Brian Lenihan would move towards imposing a second public service pay cut in Budget 2010.

Mr McLoone warned this would be a prelude to a concerted attack on pay rates across the economy – starting with the minimum wage.

He said: "The Government has rejected the prize of radical public service transformation with better services and billions in savings.

"We have reached an agreement that would have delivered this transformation with permanent savings, temporary measures to ensure the necessary payroll savings in 2010, and no reduction in services. But the Government has walked away.

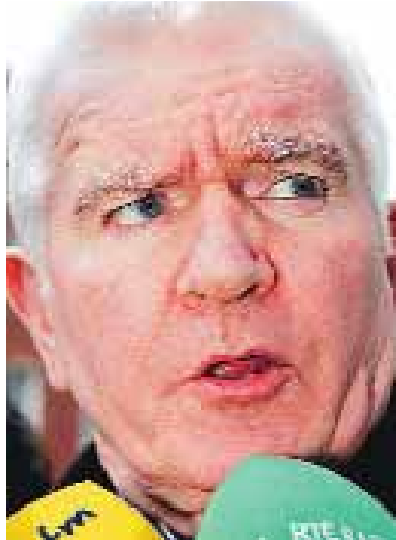
"We are now going to see conflict instead of co-operation with change."

Most of the unions involved in the negotiations have mandates for industrial action if the Government proceeds to introduce compulsory redundancies or cut pay rates or pension entitlements.

Had an agreement been reached, union officials also insisted the package would have protected - and in some cases extended - public services even as resources and staff numbers declined over the next four years.

While the Government's ongoing recruitment embargo delivered massive permanent savings, the deal between would have seen:

- No reduction in any services as a result of the temporary unpaid leave measure
- A guarantee of "no impact on the length and structure of the school year or class contact" and an additional working hour by every teacher each week
- Explicit agreement on the redeployment



**McLoone: Budget warning**

of civil and public servants within and between organisations to ensure better delivery of priority services as budgets and staffing declined

- A process to deliver an extended 8-8 working day in the health services, leading to longer opening hours
- The introduction of new rosters in health - including the introduction of new nursing rosters by January 2011 – leading to more flexible services and a further reduced overtime budget
- Ongoing reductions in the number of in-patient beds and increases in day care, outpatient and diagnostic capacity, in order to provide faster access to services at lower cost
- A greater range of health services in community settings so that more patients could receive treatment at home
- Reviews of health service staffing ratios and skills mixes to help improve patient care at

minimal cost

- New value-for money and waste elimination programmes
- The introduction of shared services in health, local authorities, education and the civil services – in areas like finance, procurement, human resources and payroll.
- The introduction of evidence-based performance measurement in health
- The extension of competitive and merit-based promotions at all levels throughout the public services
- Multi-disciplinary working and reporting arrangements in health
- The supervision and substitution scheme for post primary teacher to be made more flexible
- New procedures for redeploying surplus teachers
- A review of the teaching contract to remove impediments to teaching and learning
- A comprehensive review and revision of special needs assistant employment terms and conditions to identify and remove any impediments to efficient and effective support for students with special care needs
- Cooperation with the restructuring and rationalisation of the VEC sector
- Cooperation with rationalisation of state agencies in the local government sector
- Better management and standardisation of annual and sick leave arrangements
- Changes to civil service opening and closing times and attendance arrangements
- The further development of on-line and e-services.
- The deal would also have included a new 'transformation commission' with independent leadership, charged with ensuring the implementation of the package.
- Temporary savings measures – necessary because the transformation programme would not have delivered the required permanent savings in 2010 - were also on the table to ensure the necessary payroll savings in 2010. The savings would have come from an agreed progressive valuation of 12 days unpaid leave.

# M I S S I N G

## DAMIAN O'BRIEN

**Age:** 37, **Height:** 5ft 9in, medium build, black short hair, sallow complexion, faded scar on forehead.

**Last seen:** at 11.00pm, Percy Place near Baggot St Bridge, **FRIDAY 27<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER**, wearing black blazer and pink scarf.



**MOUNTJOY GARDA STATION AT 01-6668600**

Or email: [find.damian@gmail.com](mailto:find.damian@gmail.com)

## Tax hikes a necessity

THE CPSU has called on Finance Minister Brian Lenihan to beef up taxation in the coming Budget.

A shopping list of tax hikes was outlined in the union's pre-Budget submission, including:

- A new top rate of tax of 48% on single incomes over €100,000,
- Complete abolition of PRSI ceiling,
- All tax reliefs to be examined and substantial savings made, and
- Capital Gains tax to be increased to 40%

The paper also set out statistics on the extraordinary growth at the top of the Civil Service since 1998.

These show that at senior levels the proceeds of the bubble were being used to increase the number of posts to an unprecedented degree.

Of the average 40% increase in numbers only two grades (CPSU grades of Staff Officer and Clerical Officer) show below average increases.

According to the CPSU, these figures indicate that pay for lower paid civil servants cannot be cut while the top heavy structure remains in place.

## €7.4bn tax breaks

TASC has estimated tax breaks have cost the Irish exchequer €7.4 billion in 2009.

In its pre-Budget statement, the independent think-tank claimed an overhaul of allowances would contribute significantly to the €4 billion cuts being sought by the Government.

TASC pointed out the Irish tax system provides more tax breaks than other EU members.

These tax breaks also disproportionately benefit the better-off, thereby reinforcing economic inequality.

The think-tank recommended:

- A one-year 'sunset clause' (automatic expiry) be attached to all tax breaks, and

- Tax breaks only be introduced or, in the case of existing tax breaks, continued beyond the sunset clause, if they satisfy an equality and economic efficiency audit presented to the Oireachtas

# HONOUR COMMITMENTS



Nunan: Promises made

THE IRISH National Teachers Organisation has demanded Finance Minister Brian Lenihan put his money where his mouth is in this month's Budget.

The union claims that recent commitments made by the Government on education are worthless if adequate funding is not allocated to the sector.

In its pre-Budget submission, INTO said these commitments included promises not to increase the pupil teacher ratio in primary schools and to provide 200 extra teaching posts to schools badly affected by recent cutbacks.

The union also called for the restoration of grants – such as the free book grant – abolished in last year's budget.

INTO's submission calls for supply panels of teachers to be set up throughout the country to provide substitute cover to children and continuity of employment to graduate

teachers who otherwise will be forced to consider emigration or rely on social welfare.

General secretary INTO Sheila Nunan insisted the education cutbacks outlined in the McCarthy Report must not be introduced.

She said: "Even a cursory examination by the Department of Finance of the proposal to close small schools would show that no money would be saved and that extreme hardship would result to many parents and children."

The INTO has claimed primary schools are the least well-funded sector of education and were now facing increased running costs such as energy costs, waste disposal charges, water charges, cleaning and hygiene costs.

Ms Nunan said: "In many schools, parents now contribute more to general school running costs than the state through voluntary contributions

and fundraising activities. These increase inequity between schools."

In addition the union called for the development of a National Speech and Language Therapy service, the immediate expansion of the National Educational Psychological Service and the extension of the Early Start Programme to all disadvantaged schools.

Ms Nunan said teachers and other public servants had already made a significant contribution to economic recovery which in 2009 amounted to €1.3 billion and even without additional measures in 2010 would amount to €2.4 billion.

Principal and deputy principal teachers in primary schools had been badly treated by the failure to pay the Benchmarking award paid to other grades. She added: "Benchmarking was made because increased responsibility and productivity delivered. It must be honoured."



Picture: Congress

## Agreement is only viable way forward

CONGRESS president Jack O'Connor, above, has warned that only through agreement between the Government, unions and employers is a viable and sustainable economic recovery possible.

He made the comments at the annual Countess Markievicz Memorial Lecture in Dublin's Liberty Hall on November 23 a week and a half before talks collapsed between ICTU's Public Services Committee and Government officials over alternative ways of finding €1.3bn in cuts.

In his speech, Mr O'Connor, who is also SIPTU general president, had insisted that any agreement reached must have a strong social dividend to be acceptable to workers. He said: "In one respect,

we do agree with our opponents on the Right who articulate the interests of the five per cent who own 40% of national wealth – confidence is the key.

"But that will not be achieved in a country with our history and traditions by demonising people or heavy-handed tactics.

"That approach will meet with stiff resistance whether it is organised by the trade union movement or otherwise.

"Any assessment of the balance of forces would anticipate victory for the orthodox view. However, when all is done, there mightn't be that much left to win.

"The only viable way forward is through agreement. All sides must make accommodation to achieve it. All sides must recognise that there is no pain-free or risk-free way ahead.

"All sides must embrace the requirement to make a contribution but it must be on the basis of ability to do so.

"While we must grapple with difficult issues there can be no basis for agreement except in the context of a measurable additional contribution from high net worth individuals and those on incomes of €100,000 plus per annum through taxation of one form or other – at least in the short to medium term."



# EUROPE'S WAY

GOVERNMENTS across Europe - in contrast to our own administration - have taken decisive action to protect jobs, a special Congress-organised conference was told last month.

The National Jobs Summit, held at the Gresham Hotel in Dublin on November 26, looked at how Germany, Holland and Denmark are successfully tackling the jobs crisis with new and innovative measures.

Congress has demanded the Irish Government treat the issue with the same sense of urgency it has devoted to the banking crisis.

On May Day, Congress called for a €1 Billion Job Creation & Protection Plan with Government intervention to both protect existing jobs as well as boosting employment through new initiatives, such as in the Green Economy.

Opening the conference, Dublin Lord Mayor Cllr Emer Costello flagged up the current Government's abject failure in dealing with unemployment, and claimed ministers had focused on the financial crisis and NAMA to the exclusion of everything else.

## National Jobs' Summit



She said that Dublin - which she dubbed "the engine of national recovery"- was hemorrhaging jobs with a 140 per cent increase in the number of people signing on.

While acknowledging that the problem facing the country was huge, Ms Costello pointed out there were areas of potential growth - the green sector as well as the creative and cultural industries - that could be exploited.

She also urged Government support for small and medium enterprises by putting pressure on banks to release the appropriate funds that would keep these companies afloat.



Sally Anne Kinahan and Paul Sweeney of ICTU with Dublin Lord Mayor Emer Costello at last month's National Jobs Summit



### GERMANY

## Short-time work

CHRISTAIN Steffan, left, representing the German Trade Union Confederation the DGB, acknowledged his own country had also been hit hard by the recession, but that German government intervention in the labour market had saved 1.4 million jobs.

Despite a huge fall in German GDP, the labour market had proven to be quite resilient with unemployment falling from five million in 2005 to three million in 2008.

He pointed out that this negative GDP growth of 6.8 per cent had been largely due to Germany being an export-led economy, but the fall was not mirrored in the labour market.

Pointing to his own sector as an example, he said that though orders for metals and electrical goods had dropped by more than two per cent, employment levels had only fallen by five per cent.

Mr Steffan characterised the gap between these two macro figures as "indeed quite puzzling" but believed that what he called "internal flexibilisation" had helped soften the blow.

While economic stimulus packages - such as car scrappage schemes - had helped, it was the measures taken by government and firms to secure employment that kept people off the dole queues.

These measures included decreases in overtime hours worked, withdrawal of hours in recession with the ability to 'store up hours' in good times, short-time work, reallocation of employees, and paid leave arrangements.

Mr Steffan added: "Pay and benefit cuts are the last items on the agenda."

He advocated short-time work as one of the more promising policies.

Although costly to put in place - averaging €5 billion last year - Mr Steffan claimed it was significantly less expensive than unemployment.

Mr Steffan told the conference that taking into account the social costs of unemployment, this scheme proves to be even more valuable.

He described it as a system of "burden sharing between employers and employees".

And what is even more interesting is the fact

# OUT OF CRISIS



## DENMARK

# REMOVING FEAR

FORMER Danish PM Poul Nyrup Rasmussen was the keynote speaker at the National Jobs Summit.

Widely regarded as the architect of Denmark's Flexicurity System, Mr Rasmussen, left, was quick to point out that the model he was outlining should be seen in a purely Scandinavian context.

While he did not recommend Ireland copy his nation's economic model, he said the Irish could take inspiration from Denmark's direction and philosophy

Describing globalisation as "an irreversible trend", he claimed no facet of society was exempt from its grasp with once secure jobs now under threat.

He said: "Permanent change is the new dynamic that globalisation has created.

"While the same job may not be promised for the duration of one's life - employment must be promised for the rest of one's life.

"In this way, we must have more interplay between the public and private sector and the focus is on a combination of rights and obligations."

Mr Rasmussen insisted it was possible to combine high competitiveness with social security and claimed the Nordic welfare model had confirmed this.

He underlined the importance of growth, adding: "Active labour market policies require the resources to pursue the strategies they imply.

"Indeed there is an impossible contradiction between high unemployment and high social security. As such, dynamic and productive labour markets are essential."

Referring to his own tenure as prime minister, he said that unemployment stood at 13 per cent

when he came to power. Once the Rasmussen formula was in place, the unemployment rate fell to just 3.5 per cent.

He claimed that resources up to then had been used in a "passive way", with unemployment benefit being paid for up to 12 years.

This was costing the state a lot of money so he decided to combine a new growth strategy with reforms.

Mr Rasmussen said: "Both were essential because you need growth for reform and trust and co-operation are two sides of the same coin."

The most important aim of his government was to "activate people".

This was done through an investment strategy, tax incentives for research and development, education, public care as well as the flexicurity system.

He added: "By creating a new springboard for people the economy not only became more efficient but it became more socially responsible."

The system works because it is based on contracts forged through one on one interviews with the individual workers and is teamed up with an understanding of rights, duties and expectations.

Mr Rasmussen argued that these contracts are of vital importance.

He said: "They make the journey between jobs short, economically acceptable and furthermore expand people's competencies.

"Thus a system of life long learning is put in place.

"Fear is removed and no complete point of departure from the educational system is evident.

"People are able to expand their capabilities and at the same time have security."

# effective

that these mechanisms are based on voluntary agreement. Mr Steffan said that trade unions enjoyed a strong legal protection in Germany boosted by a proliferation of work councils with access to business data.

He said the German model showed that it was essential to put mechanisms in place to "build a bridge over the crisis", adding "once you fall off a cliff, you can't change direction".

Therefore, the primary goal was to keep people in jobs and make use of their skills.

Though German unions still faced problem, ultimately Steffan claimed it was a question of democracy.

He added: "Indeed, democracy cannot stop at the company gate. Mechanisms whereby employees have a bigger say in what is produced and how, is the key element in overcoming this crisis and those that they may face in the future.

"Perhaps democracy in enterprise is a romantic notion, but it has proved an effective solution with regard to Germany's success story in the face of the current worldwide recession."

## HOLLAND

# Trust plays key role

ELCO Tasma spoke about the Dutch experience and pointed out that Holland's unemployment rate was much lower than neighbouring countries.

He felt the key to tackling the recession was social dialogue which he said was deeply rooted in the nation's history and served as a vehicle for successful co-operation between government officials, employers and unions.

Unions were important in Dutch society giving them scope to manoeuvre and during times of crisis - such as the current recession - the ability to put in place schemes which protect employment.

As an example, Mr Tasma said Dutch unions had recently secured an agreement on a plan for education and up-

skilling that affects half the working population. He said a "balance of interests" was a necessity for the Dutch model but that trust was even more important.

Mr Tasma added: "Trust comes by foot but disappears by horse.

"It is therefore of paramount importance that dialogue takes place systematically so as to build of a relationship of trust and reciprocity.

"It can lead to such fruitful results as - no panic and uproar, not radical steps when not needed and relatively mild consequences for unemployment.

"Dialogue, compromise and a balance of interests are therefore all key components of Holland's success in the current recession."

<http://www.getupstandup.ie/learnmore/jobssummit.html>





Protest outside Department of Education, Marlborough Street, Dublin *Picture: Moya Nolan*



*Picture: INTO*



*Picture: TUI*



*Picture: CPSU*



Picket outside Garda HQ, Phoenix Park

*Picture: Conor Healy*



Members of St Augustine's College, Abbesside, Waterford, on the November 24 picket line. Pictured from left: Noreen Twohig, Olive Fitzsimons, Michael O'Sullivan, Frances Moynihan, Caroline Knightly, and Don Mulcahy

*Picture: ASTI*



# PUBLIC SECTOR STRIKE NOVEMBER 24 2009



IMPACT, PSEU and CPSU members mount a picket outside Leinster House  
Picture: Conor Healy Photography



Picture: INTO



Picture: INTO



**PICTURE SPECIAL**



Picture: CPSU



# TUC warns of danger of 'zombie economy'

A 'SLASH and burn' approach to public spending will create a 'zombie economy', TUC general secretary Brendan Barber has warned.

He claimed swingeing spending cuts would increase the risk of the UK suffering a Japanese-style lost decade of poor growth and employment prospects.

Addressing the TUC's Beyond Crisis conference in London last month, Mr Barber said: "The talk is not of nurturing recovery, nor of avoiding mass unemployment, but of paying down our deficit as soon as possible.

"Public spending is the only motor of growth currently available to us. Swingeing cuts would increase the risk of Britain suffering a Japanese-style lost decade, would mean the unwelcome prospect of a jobless recovery, and would lead to the emergence of a so-called Zombie economy.

"Not quite dead - but not exactly alive and kicking either.

"And the consequences would be devastating. Not just the inevitable increase in long-term unemployment, nor just the

loss to the private sector of so much government business, but the huge long-term costs - a lost generation of young people, a rise in social disorder and a sapping of confidence within Britain."

He claimed that the best way forward was not to go for "quick wins now" but to lay the foundations for stability and growth for a generation ahead.

Mr Barber said: "I call on everyone on the progressive centre-left to fight back - to expose what a 'slash and burn' approach to public spending would really mean in practice.

"I want us to win an even bigger intellectual battle - to set out a genuinely progressive vision for Britain's economic future. Showing how, in the post-crash age, we can combine competitiveness with compassion, efficiency with environmentalism, and financial success with fairness for all."

The TUC chief told delegates this was because there was now "a unique opportunity" to forge a new ideological settlement that moves towards low carbon growth and emerging new technologies.

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# NUJ blasts attack on 'courageous editor'



Dooley: Condemnation

THE National Union of Journalists has strongly condemned last month's attack on Sunday World Northern Editor Jim McDowell.

Mr McDowell was beaten up by a number of men at the busy Continental Market outside Belfast City Hall on November 25.

It came less than a fortnight after his car was smashed up outside Craigavon Court House while he was attending a bail hearing involving men facing charges connected to the murder of his Sunday World colleague Martin O'Hagan.

NUJ Irish Secretary Seamus Dooley said the attack represented an assault on a brave journalist who has always stood up against thuggery from whatever quarter.

He added: "Jim McDowell is a brave editor of exceptional courage and he has never been afraid to take a strong stand. Neither Jim McDowell nor the staff of the Sunday World will be intimidated by this type of behaviour - from whatever quarter it has come."

Picture: IMPACT



Picket outside Dublin City Council offices



Picture: Moya Nolan





# PUBLIC SECTOR STRIKE NOVEMBER 24 2009



Tallaght Community School staff on the picket line with ASTI President Joe Moran and TUI President Don Ryan

## PICTURE SPECIAL



Pictures:TUI



Picture:CPSU



Picture: Conor Healy Photography



# PRIVATE SECTOR MANAGERS WERE BOOM 'WINNERS'

SIPTU's Manus O'Riordan, left, has called for a more reasoned debate on the economy.

The union's head of research made the comments at the November 30 launch of an analysis of wage trends since the late 1990s with a particular focus on the period since 2005.

The paper, entitled *Separating Fact from Fiction on Earnings: The Use and Abuse of Statistics*, outlines how the largest single divergence in pay over the past decade has not been between public and private sector workers but between private sector managers and all other groups.

In the more recent period since December 2005 it also shows that while public sector workers had nominal pay increases of 12 per cent, managers in industry enjoyed increases of 13.5 per cent and manual workers received increases worth 5.4 per cent.

However, when inflation and the pension levy claw-back for public servants are taken into account, the only group to beat inflation are private sector managers.

Mr O'Riordan said: "Most of the debate in

the media in recent weeks has been governed by hysteria. In those circumstances the people under attack, in this case public sector workers, tend to react defensively and a rational debate is impossible.

"The problem is that unless we look at what has happened objectively and in some detail, we will not really know how we got into the present crisis, let alone devise a road map out of it.

"The purpose of this study is to look at the facts and establish what happened in the recent past."

"We urgently need to replace the present debate on pay developments, which has been poisoned and bedevilled by both misrepresentations and misunderstandings, with a reasoned alternative that reflects reality.

"Otherwise it will not be possible to reach a sustainable consensus on how to deal with the crisis."

[www.siptu.ie/PressRoom/TheEconomy/FileDownload,11297,en.pdf](http://www.siptu.ie/PressRoom/TheEconomy/FileDownload,11297,en.pdf)

## Archbishop: Deregulated market's 'ruinous legacy'

ARCHBISHOP of Canterbury Rowan Williams has attacked what he dubbed the "ruinous legacy" of "the market as an independent authority".

Speaking at last month's TUC 'Beyond Crisis' conference in London, the Archbishop of Canterbury pointed out that the derivation of the word 'economy' was from the Greek for 'housekeeping'.

He said: "Appealing to the market as an independent authority, unconnected with human decisions about 'housekeeping', has meant in many contexts over

the last few decades a ruinous legacy for heavily indebted countries.

"It has also meant large-scale and costly social disruption even in developed economies; and, most recently, the extraordinary phenomena of a financial trading world in which the marketing of toxic debt became the driver of money-making – until the bluffs were all called at the same time."

The archbishop described taxation as a "potentially sophisticated tool for long-term 'economy' – housekeeping",

adding: "Taxation builds a habitat – already, quite properly, through state welfare provision, but potentially in other less familiar ways."

Answering a question about how to "sell" taxation to the public, Williams replied that "tax is about corporate insurance ... and is the essence of the democratic process".

Williams concluded by appealing to the British Labour movement's "honourable record in its commitment to humane values".

Picture: ITGLWF



## NEIL KEARNEY 1950 - 2009

TRADE UNIONISTS across the world are mourning the death last month of ITGLWF general secretary Neil Kearney.

The Donegal-born veteran campaigner, left, died of a heart attack while on a visit to Dhaka, Bangladesh, on November 19.

The 59-year-old, who worked tirelessly for better pay and conditions for Third World textile workers, was described as an "inspirational leader" in the international trade union movement and a "powerful advocate" for workers' rights.

He also campaigned vigorously against child labour and worked closely with ITUC, the Global Union Federations and the Ethical Trading Initiative.

A Congress source said: "He spoke at our Biennial Conference in Belfast in 2005 and we were very excited about the prospect of him attending future trade union events in Ireland.

"Sadly, those who had not met him will now never have the pleasure. Congress would like to extend our sympathy to his colleagues at ITGLWF, his family and many friends."

Neil Kearney moved to the UK at the age of 17 and took a job in banking. In 1972 he joined the

then National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers, where he was head of the union's information and research department for 16 years.

In 1978, he was elected as a Labour councillor in the London borough of Kensington and Chelsea but later resigned from the party over the Iraq War.

He became ITGLWF general secretary in 1988. During his 21-year tenure he had to deal with the financial fallout caused by the wholesale migration of textile manufacturing to the developing world.

Mr Kearney was particularly adept at mobilising resources and finding international public funding to help workers in developing countries with a particular focus on the elimination of child labour and improving health and safety standards.

He was also a founding member of Social Accountability International's advisory board and was instrumental in developing the SA 8000 ethical standard, a benchmark on workers' rights.

Mr Kearney was a board member of the UK's Ethical Trading Initiative. Three days of mourning were declared in the textile and garment sector in Bangladesh following his death. His wife, Jutta, and his daughters, Nicola and Caroline, survive him.



## STORMONT

# Author dubs NI Exec policy Thatcherism for beginners

ECONOMIC policies at Stormont have been likened to "Thatcherism for beginners" in a hard-hitting new book on Northern Ireland politics.

The *Fall of the House of Paisley* is written by Belfast Telegraph journalist David Gordon, one of the leading National Union of Journalists activists at the newspaper over a number of years.

The book not only covers the departure from office of Ian Paisley and Ian Paisley Jnr, but provides an overview and analysis of devolution in action.

One of its chapters is devoted to the "dodgy foundations" of the Executive in economic terms.

David explains: "There was a feelgood factor here when devolution returned in 2007 but some of it stemmed from the delusions of the housing market bubble.

"There were also signs of what I have described as 'Thatcherism for Beginners' at Stormont.

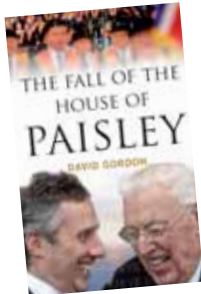
"This involved a zeal for the private sector, simplistic rhetoric about cutting back the public sector and regulations, and antagonism towards environmentalists.

"Then the global downturn arrived, thanks to the private sector banks, and Stormont Ministers were hailing the fact that the public sector would cushion the province from recession."

The chapter of the book dealing with the economy concludes: "It was a sorry sight. The new Northern Ireland was all dressed up, ready for a whirlwind romance with free-market capitalism.

"Sadly, the old chap had been less than virtuous around the world, cavorting in the wrong places and becoming infected with toxic sores. The romance was over."

● *The Fall of the House of Paisley* is published by Gill and Macmillan and is on sale now.



# Wealth gap costs lives

A NEW study has claimed that reducing the gap between the richest and poorest people in developed countries could prevent 1.5 million deaths.

According to researchers from the University of Yamanashi in Japan and the Harvard School of Public Health in the US, even a modest association between economic inequality and health "can amount to a considerable population burden".

They analysed almost 60 million subjects who took part in a series of previous studies.

The findings demonstrate those living in regions with high income inequality are more likely to die younger, regardless of their income, socio-economic status, age and gender.

The paper, published in the latest British Medical Journal, claimed while "the results suggest a modest adverse effect of income inequality on health, this impact might be larger if the association is truly causal."

They concluded that income inequality is an exposure that applies to society as a whole and that 1.5 million deaths could be averted in 30 OECD countries by reducing the gap between rich and poor.



# SHELL FIRE!

AMNESTY activists gathered in Belfast on November 28 to protest at the pollution it claims oil giant Shell has caused through its work in the Niger Delta in Nigeria.

Dressed in white environmental suits and wearing hard hats bearing the Shell logo – and with a fire breather lighting up the Belfast sky – the human rights campaigners were highlighting claims that widespread damage had been done to the environment in Nigeria.

The group says millions of people in the Niger Delta have had their livelihoods destroyed by what it alleges are illegal gas flarings and repeated oil spills.

Water pollution has killed the fish they

rely on for food and income and land pollution has made it impossible to grow crops. Campaigners claim 75% of the area's rural population now have no access to clean water.

Speaking at the protest, Patrick Corrigan, Northern Ireland programme director of Amnesty International, said: "Despite its public claims to be a responsible corporation, Shell continues to directly harm human rights through its failure to adequately prevent environmental damage in the Niger Delta.

"This protest in Belfast is part of Amnesty's worldwide effort to hold Shell to account publicly for its actions."



Pictures: Amnesty International



Congress Legislation and Social Affairs Officer **Esther Lynch** looks at how 'short work' initiatives can provide a cost effective and socially responsible way out of jobs crisis

# Saving jobs and building a future

SOME economists see job destruction as part of a process of innovation and growth, hence, the expression "creative destruction".

But for the vast majority of workers losing their job is a disaster and in circumstances where their job could have been saved, their redundancy is an injustice.

Rising unemployment causes enormous hardship to the unemployed worker and their family but it will also worsen the crisis in cash flow and confidence.

Rising unemployment leaves the unemployed with less money to spend but also greatly heightens a sense of insecurity among those still in a job. It is under these conditions that recession deepens and becomes ever harder to escape.

On a recent visit to Dublin, Professor David Blanchflower spoke of the social consequences of unemployment which he said tended to be consistently understated.

He made the point that we are at risk of losing a whole generation to this phenomenon, noting that ground lost now would be unlikely to be regained over the period of a person's working life.

The reason for this is simple. The longer people are out of work, the more their skills decline and the less appealing they become to employers.

Eventually a mismatch develops between the skills companies need and those that workers can provide.

This in turn causes a loss of productivity in the economy and of course unemployment hits consumer spending which accounts for about 60% of economic activity.

Ireland is heading for an unemployment level of 13% in 2010.

Apart from the social consequences it is clear that the cost of this is the main factor driving the fiscal deficit.

The twin problems of higher welfare expenditure and lower tax revenues means that tackling unemployment logically requires as much or more attention than finding ways to cut other expenditure.

## EU EXAMPLE

Congress has tabled an alternative economic strategy for dealing with this crisis in the form of a 10-point plan entitled *A Better Fairer Way*.

At its core is a conflict with official policy over front-loading and speed of adjustment of the fiscal deficit because we believe it risks a deeper deflationary spiral which will exacerbate unemployment.

However, it also contains a list of seven specific proposals to tackle unemployment directly.

The first of these is an intervention to stop jobs being lost in the first place and it is outlined extensively in the rest of this document.

It is based on a model which has been implemented extensively across the social market

economies of Europe. In fact it is used in 22 of the 29 countries surveyed by the OECD. Germany has 1.4 million workers on this scheme and, through it, has managed to survive the recession with virtually no rise in unemployment and stable consumer spending.

Kurzarbeitgeld, Germany's "short work" program encourages employers not to lay off workers.

If a German employer's production falls, the Government will pay the employer 67% of a worker's salary (60% for workers without children) if the employer keeps the worker on payroll and provides training.

Congress is calling for a shared commitment to reduce job losses, to create jobs and to assist thousands of workers to update and upgrade their skills.

Job protection, far from being jettisoned, should underpin the reform agenda of a more efficient and inclusive labour market. More can be achieved by sharing our efforts and coordinating action to save jobs and tackle unemployment. But what do we propose concretely?

## CONGRESS PROPOSAL

We propose an Irish short-term work programme – *obair gear théarmach* – whereby the state helps companies retain their employees in temporary periods of low demand for their products or services.

It differs from existing schemes in an important aspect – the employer commits to work with and support the employees so that they can undertake one-step-up-training during the time they are not working.

Under this version of the employment subsidy scheme, the employees work a reduced number of hours but these hours are replaced by accredited skills' development.

The scheme will help enterprises retain and develop their productive capacity, by retaining their labour, knowledge and skillbase, thereby supporting a faster return to sustainable growth.

This is a temporary employer subsidy scheme available to enterprises for up to 24 months.

The allowances should be paid six months in advance. This has the added benefit of providing cash to enterprises that are still experiencing problems accessing normal overdraft and credit facilities.

This scheme is available to employers and their employees where enterprises can identify a number of full-time jobs at risk in their company as a result of the current economic downturn, which under better economic conditions would be viable.

To be available for the scheme, employers only need to demonstrate that they are experiencing a drop in demand due to the current recession and that their workforce is willing to work short time

and undertake training. The existing FORM RP9 (Notification of temporary short term work) can be used to identify interest in the scheme.

There are currently 16,000 workers identifiable through the FORM RP9 and on the basis of an average of 50 employees this represents about 300 companies on short-time working at this time.

By approving an employer's application for short-time work allowances, the Government agrees to enter into a three-way agreement with the employer and its employees.

The fundamentals of this agreement are that the employer will not make employees redundant, but instead employees will agree to work and be paid for fewer hours, and Government will compensate employees for around two-thirds of their resulting foregone net earnings (subject to a maximum of €250), as well as crediting the employer and employee with the associated social insurance contributions.

The employer's contribution to the scheme is the time that they invest in making the application under the scheme, the identification of future skills needs and the restructuring of working time in such a way that employees can be trained.

The employee's contribution is one third of their training hours wages and their commitment to participate in the training.

In this scheme the short-time worker is still contractually full-time employed and they receive a wage which comprises of their working hours and the subsidy for the training hours.

For example: a full time worker earning a weekly wage of €500 gross, who agrees to a short time arrangement of three days working and two days training, will receive a reduced wage of €433. (comprising of €300 wages and €133 subsidy).

Family Income Supplement (FIS) is available to workers whose income falls below the amount for their family size. A feature of the scheme is that the employee will know in advance when their employer will require them for work and when/where training will take place.

## TRAINING VITAL

Since temporary unemployment imposes a financial and social cost, the redirection of resources towards training of the workforce can be accountable as an investment in the productive capacity of the enterprise and the workforce of the country.

If this scheme is to work, employers will need to agree to facilitate and support employees to participate in the accredited training opportunities during the reduced working week.

We are asking for a 'pledge' from employers to participate in this scheme. If insufficient progress has been made by end of 2010, the Government should introduce a statutory right for employees to access workplace training.

**UNION POST** Subscribe **FREE** by emailing us at [postsubscribe@btinternet.com](mailto:postsubscribe@btinternet.com)





Picture: Congress

Raising people's aspirations and awareness of the value of skills is central.

Union Learning Reps (ULRs) provide adult careers advice, diagnose skill needs and provide workers with a skills health check and must be a central and available to all workers participating in this scheme.

Further investment in the provision of financial supports to assist Skillnets, FAS, the formal sector and other accredited providers to develop and provide the courses matched to the needs of the enterprise and the workforce.

Resources must be released from the residual National Training Funding investment account to support this initiative.

The European Stabilisation and Adjustment Fund must also be used. The funding for the tailored training courses made available and coordinated locally, involving the local partnerships, and must have flexible time/location possibilities; Skill-

nets is an existing industry-sector approach which has proved successful that should be linked to this intervention.

FAS Baldoyle and Northside Partnership also provide an example of how the training can be developed. Training should be focused on the future demands of the labour market but must also recognise that for some, basic skills and foundation learning are a major priority. Training must be linked to a qualification.

While it is expected that employees will want to participate in a quality training opportunity, however, employees can choose not to participate and will in those circumstances be able to claim unemployment benefit for the days not worked (or work elsewhere).

Finally, the OECD carried out an analysis of the effectiveness of job protection and short work schemes they found:

- By supporting aggregate demand, these

measures have prevented employment losses from being even larger than they have been.,

- Most of these fiscal stimulus packages include labour market and social policy measures to cushion the negative effects of the downturn on workers and low-income households.

- In many cases, the additional funds for labour market programmes are rather limited and this may represent a lost opportunity.

(OECD, *Tackling the Job Crisis – The Labour Market and Social Policy Responses*, Paris, September 2009)

So job protection, far from being jettisoned, is needed to underpin a modern reform agenda of a more efficient and inclusive labour market.

It supports productivity, innovation and access of workers to training by promoting stable employment relations. It makes no sense to put this deal to save jobs and skills on the long finger there is still a Better, Fairer Way.

Produced in association with Congress

**WE'RE HERE TO KEEP YOU POSTED**





Sean Denyer, NLGF Board, Equality Authority chief Renee Dempsey and Ailbhe Smyth, Chair NLGF at the launch of the Burning Issues report which gauged attitudes and concerns of LGBT community in Ireland **SEE FULL REPORT: PAGE 22**

Picture: Emma Loughran

# ISME's wage cuts call is 'out of touch with reality'

UNITE has slammed ISME for being "out of touch with reality and its membership" after the business group demanded cut public sector wages and jobs.

Regional secretary Jimmy Kelly said: "They are completely out of touch with economic reality and with the needs of small and medium-sized businesses in Ireland.

"They have demanded wage cuts of up to 20 per cent and job cuts of 35,000 in the public sector.

"They are so ideologically obsessed, they don't realise that this would decimate their own members who depend on the domestic economy."

According to the ESRI, if the Government gave in to ISME's demands, more than €4.5 billion

would be cut from consumer spending.

Mr Kelly added: "How would that benefit small and medium sized businesses? One of the main drivers in this recession has been the collapse in consumer spending. It is falling at 10 times the rate of the rest of the EU. And now ISME wants to increase that collapse.

"Ask any owner of a small and medium-sized business and they will tell you – they want more people in work and more money in people's pockets to spend.

"But the ISME leadership are so obsessed with attacking workers and trade unions they don't even realise that their demands would force many of their own members out of business.

"It's time the ISME leadership got a grip on economic reality."

## Oxfam survey: Tax the bankers to help poor

A UK survey has shown massive public support for a new tax on banks' financial transactions.

The poll, carried out last month by YouGov for Oxfam, found that almost twice as many people (53%) would support than oppose (28%) the levy as long as any funds raised would be directed towards helping the poor at home and abroad.

Oxfam has been campaigning for the charges - dubbed the Tobin Tax - in the face of a global economic crisis that they claim has pushed 50 million more people into extreme poverty.

The charity's senior policy adviser Max Lawson said: "This is a rare example of a popular tax, the UK public clearly support action to force banks to clean up their own mess. It is not fair to expect poor people in Leeds or Nairobi to pay the price of mistakes made by bankers in London or New York."



# Zimbabwe drive launched

THE NUJ in Ireland has launched a Christmas appeal to help fund independent journalism in Zimbabwe.

The NUJ and the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists are co-operating on a major project aimed at providing journalists with the skills and resources to work independently in a country where freedom of expression is under constant threat.

Irish Secretary Séamus Dooley announced details of the fund-raising drive at a reception in the Irish Aid office in O'Connell Street, Dublin, where he chaired a Trócaire reception in honour of Zimbabwean human rights activist Jestina Mukoko.

Welcoming Ms Mukoko, Séamus Dooley praised the work of the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists and of human rights organisations in Zimbabwe.

He said that strong journalism and a vibrant trade union movement are essential to the development of a democratic Zimbabwe.

Mr Dooley added: "Journalists must be able to research their stories in privacy and safety.

Tyrants fear those who expose the truth.

Tonight we celebrate a woman who epitomises all those who fight for truth and justice. Only last week I had the opportunity to meet Foster Dongozi, Secretary General of the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists at the NUJ Delegate Meeting in Southport.

"Moved by his address and by the report of the NUJ mission to Zimbabwe Irish branches are committed to supporting the project.

"Irish members now have an opportunity to support this project, which is already backed by the British TUC."

The NUJ has donated desktop and laptop computers to help kit out new resource centres in Harare and Bulawayo and we welcome donations to fund this project.

Trade union members who have good quality digital cameras are also being encouraged to donate them for use by ZUJ and its members.

Between now and April 2010 you will hear much more about this project. In the meantime further information is available from

[campaigns@nuj.ie](mailto:campaigns@nuj.ie)





## Human rights activist thanks NUJ for support

A FORMER high-profile TV presenter turned human rights activist from Zimbabwe said that she was “overwhelmed” by the support she received from both union activists and ordinary people in Ireland following her imprisonment by the Zimbabwean government.

Jestina Mukoko was visiting Ireland two months after finally being cleared in the Zimbabwe Supreme Court of conspiring to overthrow the government.

She hit the international headlines last December when she was abducted and illegally detained by state security forces.

During the 12 weeks she was held, Ms Mukoko was tortured and falsely charged with recruiting militia and plotting to oust President Robert Mugabe.

A long time partner of Trócaire, she heads up the human rights organisation the Zimbabwe Peace Project.

The campaign for her release was supported by the NUJ in Ireland.

Ms Mukoko said: “When I was holed up in captivity I had no idea that in Ireland, through the tireless efforts of Trócaire and the NUJ, people were demanding my release. We are grateful for all the support

you rendered to ZPP in its darkest hour.”

Ms Mukoko took part in a series of events during her visit last week including a candlelit vigil against further overseas aid cuts outside Dail Eireann in Dublin, a speaking engagement at a Derry school and a Mass of thanksgiving in Belfast.

In September this year the Zimbabwe Supreme Court ruled in favor of the motion brought by Ms Mukoko’s lawyer that all charges against her should be dropped due to the torture she experienced at the hands of state security agents.

There were scenes of jubilation at the Supreme Court in Harare as Ms Mukoko was granted a permanent stay of criminal proceedings because the government of Zimbabwe had violated her constitutional rights.

■ THIS Christmas one of Trócaire’s ethical gifts is the gift of school lunches for school children in Zimbabwe. This gift will help Trócaire to provide nutritious school lunches to over 24,000 Zimbabwean children every year, often the only good meal they get each day.

Further information is available at [www.trocaire.org/globalgift](http://www.trocaire.org/globalgift)



Festina Mukoko in Belfast with Fr James Boyle and Trocaire’s Eithne McNulty

Pictures: Trocaire

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

# Unions must do more in workplace to help victims

UNITE has called for robust action to tackle the scourge of domestic violence in Ireland.

Speaking on November 25, the UN’s International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the union’s equalities officer Taryn Trainor claimed there was an urgent need for trade unions to do more to tackle the problem.

She said: “UNITE is very concerned that violence against women is increasing and we are committed to making it a campaign priority because domestic violence impacts greatly on a woman’s working life.

“Many abused women suffer physical injuries, sleep deprivation, low morale, poor self-esteem and heightened anxiety levels, all of which draw attention to their performance and can lead to discipline, because of sickness and absence.

She added: “It also leads to women losing their employment and they become more dependent on their violent partners.”

According to recent PSNI statistics, police in the North were called out to a domestic incident once every 22 minutes last year.

Though Ms Trainor acknowledged that unions were not going to eliminate domestic violence completely, they could do more to ensure that women experiencing it “have a safer and supportive work environment”.

She said: “This can be done by encouraging employers to implement domestic abuse policies which support victims and signposts them to outside professional bodies for help.

“It is a welfare issue and victims should be supported by their employers with more flexible sickness/absence policies that recognise the issue which mostly affects women of all ages.

“We are urging employers to be more sympathetic and aware that under performance and absence may be caused by women experiencing domestic violence.”

## CWU chief in Post Bank call

THE Communication Workers Union has welcomed the announcement of a UK Government consultation on financial products and services for the Post Office.

However, the union warned ministers not to limit the scope of the exercise and waste a valuable opportunity.

General secretary Billy Hayes said: “The Government needs to move quickly on this important and popular move to get financial services where people can access and trust them – at the Post Office.

“We’re concerned the consultation provides little vision to truly expand the financial services offered through the post office network, by being silent with regard to creating a Post Bank.

“Much of what is in the consultation already exists or is in the pipeline, for example the current account and children’s account.

“While we welcome strengthening access to credit unions and business accounts, there is no indication of how this will link to the sustainability of the post office network.

“We want to see a directly-owned Post Bank which delivers trusted government-backed financial services through the Post Office.

“The third-party model currently pursued does not return sufficient profits to the Post Office, is not a different choice to high-street banks and will not do enough for the financially excluded.”

# CHOMSKY IN BELFAST

# HOPES AND PROSPECTS

Professor Noam Chomsky, one of the world's leading activists and intellectuals, travelled to Northern Ireland in late October to deliver this year's Amnesty International lecture. This is what he told a packed audience at the Whitla Hall in Belfast...

**H**OPES AND PROSPECTS, regrettably, are not well aligned, even closely. The task is to bring them to closer alignment. Presumably that was the intent of the Nobel Peace Prize committee a few weeks ago. Their choice elicited much surprise and sometimes scorn.

In defence of the committee, we might say that the achievement of doing nothing to advance peace places Obama on a considerably higher moral plane than some of the earlier recipients, whose names I will omit out of politeness.

The New York Times reported, plausibly, that: "The Nobel committee's embrace of Mr Obama was viewed as a rejection of the unpopular tenure, in Europe especially, of his predecessor, George W. Bush".

The prize "seemed a kind of prayer and encouragement by the Nobel committee for future endeavor and more consensual American leadership."

The nature of the Bush-Obama transition is clearly an important question, which bears directly on the realism of the prayers and encouragement. Some light is cast on the matter by the record of the "special relationship" between the US and Britain, just reaffirmed by Hillary Clinton in London, where she came to deliver the message that, in her words, "it can't be said often enough, we have a special relationship between our countries."

Repeatedly over the years, the special relationship has been put to the test, most dramatically during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. US leaders were making decisions that risked nuclear war, placing the very survival of Britain in peril.

They refused to provide the British with any information, on the grounds that Europeans are not capable of the "rational and logical" approach of the bright lights of Camelot, so internal records reveal. President Kennedy warned privately that allies "must come along or stay behind... we cannot accept a veto from any

other power." As the crisis peaked, a senior Kennedy advisor defined the "special relationship" succinctly: Britain will "act as our lieutenant (the fashionable word is partner)." Europeans of course prefer the fashionable word.

The definition captures rather well a primary difference between the Bush and Obama approach to world affairs.

Under Bush, primarily during his more extremist first term, Europe was told frankly that you will do what we say or you will be "irrelevant" – repeating openly what Kennedy said only in private, a useful insight into how much changed in 40 years with a shift from one extreme of the political spectrum to the other.

The brazen arrogance of the Bush administration and its open contempt even for allies did not go over well in Europe. Obama, however, is taking his cues from JFK.

In public, he approaches allies as "partners." If released, the internal record may well reveal that in private the partners are expected to be lieutenants. The Nobel committee's choice reflects the preference of European elites for the Kennedy-Obama posture.

We find much the same when we consider the reaction to public policy pronouncements. Donald Rumsfeld's 2002 Nuclear Posture Review evoked concern and condemnation, but not the far more aggressive stance of Clinton's Strategic Command, which controls nuclear weapons.

It advised in 1995 that nuclear weapons must be the core of military strategy because "Unlike chemical or biological weapons, the extreme destruction from a nuclear explosion is immediate, with few if any palliatives to reduce its effect," and even if not used, nuclear weapons "always cast a shadow over any crisis or conflict." We should therefore reject a "no first use policy," and make it clear that our use of nuclear weapons, even against non-nuclear states, may "either be response or preemptive."

Furthermore planners should not "portray ourselves as too fully rational and cool-headed.... That the U.S. may become irrational and vindictive if its vital interests are attacked should be a part of the national persona we project."

It is "beneficial" for our strategic posture if "some elements may appear to be potentially 'out of control'," a version of the "madman theory" attributed to Nixon. I know of nothing comparable in the public record, but it passed unnoticed.

Much the same was true of the projections of Clinton's Space Command and National Intelligence Council, which warned that "globalisation" is likely to bring about a "widening economic divide" with "deepening economic stagnation, political instability, and cultural alienation" that will lead to unrest and violence among the "have-nots," much of it directed against the United States.

That provides a further rationale for expanding offensive military capacities into space, with the goal of "dominating the space dimension of military operations to protect US interests and investment [with] space-based strike weapons [enabling] the application of precision force from, to, and through space."

That too passed unnoticed in the mainstream, unlike the fear, anger, and protest elicited by the brazen public posture of Bush administration figures.

Similarly, Bush's September 2002 National Security Strategy was harshly condemned for its aggressive militancy and brazen declaration of global dominance.

Within weeks, in the leading establishment journal, *Foreign Affairs*, a prominent political analyst warned that the Bush administration is courting danger by declaring a "new imperial grand strategy [that] presents the United States [as] a revisionist state seeking to parlay its momentary advantages into a world order in which it runs the show."

There was no such reaction, at home or





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abroad, to the Clinton doctrine, which was in fact more extreme. Under Clinton, the US officially reserved the right to act “unilaterally when necessary,” including “unilateral use of military power,” to defend such vital interests as “ensuring uninhibited access to key markets, energy supplies and strategic resources,” without even the pretexts of self-defense on which the Bush neocons insisted.

But the Clinton doctrine was presented quietly, without crudely instructing the world that you are our lieutenants. And it was accepted with polite applause.

The acceptance of the Clinton doctrine is in fact quite natural. Much the same doctrines have been in force since the Roosevelt administration.

From the outbreak of war in 1939, high-level US planners met to consider the postwar era. They recognized that whatever the outcome of the war, the US would become a global power, displacing Britain.

Accordingly, they developed plans for the US to exercise control over a “Grand Area,” as they called it, which was to comprise at least the Western hemisphere, the former British empire, the Far East, and of course Western Asia’s energy resources. In this Grand Area the US would hold “unquestioned power” with “military and economic supremacy,” and would act to ensure the “limitation of any exercise of sovereignty” by states that might interfere with its global designs.

At first, planners thought that Germany might prevail in Europe, but as Russia began to grind down the Wehrmacht, the vision became more expansive, and the Grand Area was to incorporate as much of Eurasia as possible, at least Western Europe, its economic heartland.

The British understood that they were to be lieutenants. Foreign Office officials ruefully observed that guided by “the economic imperialism of American business interests, [Washington is] attempting to elbow us out...under the

cloak of a benevolent and avuncular internationalism.”

The Minister of State at the Foreign Office commented to his Cabinet colleagues that Americans believe “that the United States stands for something in the world – something of which the world has need, something which the world is going to like, something, in the final analysis, which the world is going to take, whether it likes it or not.”

He was articulating the real-world version of what is called “Wilsonian idealism” in the international affairs literature, the version that conforms to the historical and internal record.

Over the years policy has been adapted to changes in circumstances, but the basic thinking has not changed very much, though there are variations, at least in style and rhetoric, sometimes in action.

The stability is not surprising. Policy flows largely from the distribution of domestic power, and its institutional structure had remained rather stable – though there have been significant changes since the 1970s, as state-corporate planners during the neoliberal period have steadily shifted the economy from production to managerial co-ordination and finance, with far-reaching domestic effects, including the current financial crisis and more to come, and with some impact on foreign policy.

**H**OWEVER ONE evaluates the decision of the Nobel peace committee, its concerns were surely valid. The committee particularly singled out Obama’s rhetoric on reducing the threats of environmental catastrophe and nuclear weapons, literally matters of species survival.

There are ways to reduce these threats. As you know, there will soon be a conference in Copenhagen that was expected to address the impending environmental disaster; but as we hear every day, it is becoming steadily more unlikely that decisions will be reached that are at

all commensurate with the severity of the crisis.

One reason is the unwillingness of the rich countries to provide adequate assistance to the developing world, and to control their own destructive reliance on fossil fuels – in part the result of huge state-corporate social engineering programs designed over many years to magnify that reliance, and with it the profits of energy and manufacturing industries.

The estimated costs seem huge, but placing them in context reveals them to be a tiny fraction of GDP. The stakes are enormous, and the prospects dim, unless an aroused public compels the political leadership to take urgent action.

Similarly, there are immediate actions that can be undertaken to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons.

One important step is the establishment of nuclear-free weapons zones (NFWZs). There are now six such zones.

The most recent, which entered into force in July, covers Africa and the associated islands. It still faces challenges. The most severe is that the US has not ratified it, because of a dispute over the island of Diego Garcia, from which the population was brutally and illegally expelled by Britain so that the island could be used by the US and UK as a base for their military operations in Western and Central Asia and as a storage site for nuclear weapons.

The African Union regards the territory as “an integral part of Mauritius,” an AU member, but Britain and the US insist that that it is excluded from the jurisdiction of the NWFZ.

A similar challenge faces the South Pacific NWFZ, which went into effect formally in 1986 but was delayed by France’s insistence on nuclear weapons testing in the region. By now only the US has not ratified it, because it would inhibit passage of US nuclear-powered vessels or naval vessels carrying nuclear weapons, and probably their storage on the US island dependencies, which are also bases for US nuclear submarines. Despite the obstructionism of the US

CONTINUED PAGE 18

# CHOMSKY IN BELFAST

## HOPES AND PROSPECTS FROM PAGE 17

and its British lieutenant, establishment of NWFZs can be a valuable step, nowhere more than in the Middle East.

In April 1991, the UN Security Council affirmed "the goal of establishing in the Middle East a zone free from weapons of mass destruction and all missiles for their delivery..." (Resolution 687, Article 14). That is a particularly firm commitment for the US and UK, which appealed to Resolution 687 in an effort to provide a thin legal cover for their invasion of Iraq, claiming that Iraq had not lived up to its commitment to abolish WMDs.

The goal of a Middle East NWFZ has been widely endorsed formally, and is supported by a large majority of Americans and Iranians.

It is also noteworthy that a large majority of Americans and Iranians, along with the developing countries (G-77, now over 130), agree that Iran has the "inalienable rights" of all parties to the Non-proliferation treaty "to develop research, production, and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination."

When Washington and the media assert, as they regularly do, that Iran is defying the world by enriching uranium, they are defining "the world" to be Washington and whoever happens to agree with it at the moment.

A Middle East NWFZ would cover Israel, Iran, and any US forces operating in the region. With adequate verification, which is not impossible, it would mitigate and perhaps eliminate current tensions over Iran, which threaten to explode into a major war.

But it is not on the agenda. It is dismissed by the US government and both political parties, and is barely mentioned in mainstream discussion.

In the West, Israel's nuclear weapons are not considered a threat, just as our own are not. That is not, however, the view of the US Strategic Command. Its former commander under Clinton, General Lee Butler, holds that "it is dangerous in the extreme that in the cauldron of animosities that we call the Middle East, one nation has armed itself, ostensibly, with stockpiles of nuclear weapons, perhaps numbering in the hundreds, and that inspires other nations to do so."

It should be added that General Butler now extends his concerns far beyond. He writes that throughout his long professional military career he was "among the most avid of these keepers of the faith in nuclear weapons," but it is now his "burden to declare with all of the conviction I can muster that in my judgment they served us extremely ill," for reasons he outlines.

He then raises a haunting question: "By what authority do succeeding generations of leaders in the nuclear-weapons states usurp the power to dictate the odds of continued life on our planet?"

"Most urgently, why does such breathtaking audacity persist at a moment when we should stand trembling in the face of our folly and united in our commitment to abolish its most deadly manifestations?"

The answer to his question lies in our hands. Only an aroused public can end this folly before it ends us.

The Nobel Peace Prize, of course, is not concerned solely with reducing the threat of terminal nuclear war, but rather with war generally, and preparation for war. In this regard, the selection of Obama raised more than a few eyebrows, not least in Iran, surrounded by US occupying armies.

US military expenditures almost match the rest of the world combined, and the US military

is far more advanced technologically.

Nonpartisan budget and security monitors report that the Obama "administration's request for \$538 billion for the Defense Department in fiscal 2010 and its stated intention to maintain a high level of funding in the coming years put the president on track to spend more on defense, in real dollars, than any other president has in one term of office since World War II.

And that's not counting the additional \$130 billion the administration is requesting to fund the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan next year, with even more war spending slated for future years."

Hundreds of US military bases blanket the world, and there has been no move to abandon the plan to move from control of space for military purposes, Clinton's stand, to "ownership of space" for these purposes, the Bush escalation.

There has been near unanimous global opposition to these plans since they were made explicit in the Clinton years, matters that receive virtually no notice in the US outside of arms control and activist circles.

On a brighter note, South America is moving towards integration and authentic independence for the first time since the arrival of the European explorers.

One consequence is that the US has been expelled from its military bases, most recently from the Manta base in Ecuador. But Washington is reacting. It has recently arranged to use seven new military bases in Colombia, as well as two naval bases in Panama, and presumably intends to maintain the Palmerola base in Honduras, which played a central role in Reagan's terrorist wars.

The US Fourth Fleet, which was disbanded in 1950, was reactivated in 2008, shortly after Colombia's invasion of Ecuador. Its responsibility covers the Caribbean, Central and South America, and the surrounding waters.

The reactivation of the Fleet understandably elicited protest and concern from the governments of Brazil, Venezuela, and others.

South American concerns were aroused further by an April 2009 document of the US Air Mobility Command, which proposes that the Palanquero base in Colombia could become a "cooperative security location" from which "mobility operations could be executed" covering half the continent, and potentially linking up with the new Africa commands to form part of the global system of surveillance, control, and intervention.

There is much more to say about all of these programs of militarization, but I will have to put the matter aside here.

Under Bush, the US became by far the world's largest supplier of arms and military training, more than double its nearest competitor, Russia, mostly to the Middle East.

These US programs played a role in 20 of the world's 27 major wars in 2007, the last year for which figures are available.

In its annual session a year ago, the UN General Assembly overwhelmingly passed a resolution calling for regulation of the arms trade. The US voted against it, but was not alone: it was joined by Zimbabwe. Amnesty International welcomed the vote, stating that it "moves the world closer to an arms trade treaty with respect for human rights at its heart, the only way such a treaty can really stop the carnage."

The AI spokesperson added that it was "shameful that the U.S. and Zimbabwe governments have taken an unprincipled stand today against a treaty that would save so many lives and livelihoods."

Also shameful, and dangerous, is that the facts

are scarcely reported or discussed.

One consequence of this "unprincipled stand" is the worst single human rights catastrophe in the world in recent years, in Eastern Congo. It is also rarely discussed.

A cynic, or perhaps a realist, might suspect that silence in this case has something to do with the fact that the atrocities are substantially attributed to US ally Rwanda; and that Western multinationals are reaping enormous profits from the robbery of the region's rich mineral resources, with the help of the militias that are terrorizing the population – an outcome appreciated, unsuspectingly, by the users of cell phones.

Some are in a position to pierce the prevailing silence and to discover something about what is happening in the world.

But that is a privilege denied to most people in highly atomized and fragmented societies, lacking popular organizations or even political parties except as mechanisms to ratify candidates who pass through the filters established by concentrated power – as is the case, dramatically so in the US though other rich industrial societies are not very different.

But an organised public can achieve a great deal, as we see right now in many places.

**P**ERHAPS THE most exciting part of the world today is South America, where, as I mentioned, for the first time since the European conquests the countries are moving towards integration, a prerequisite for independence, and are beginning to address the profound internal problems of societies traditionally dominated by a small wealthy Europeanised elite, isolated from the sea of human misery around them.

They are at least beginning to address what Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan calls "the unheard truth": that "poverty is the world's worst human rights crisis... this generation's greatest struggle."

AI called on world leaders and policy makers to bring this truth to consciousness and act to confront it on World Poverty Day, October 17, which much like World Food Day two days earlier, passed with little notice – in the major US media, nothing.

UN agencies announced that the number of people facing hunger passed one billion, and is rapidly increasing, while the rich countries sharply reduce their contributions for food aid because of the need to support the big banks.

More than 16,000 children die every day from hunger-related causes, Oxfam reports, eliciting little interest from those who solemnly contemplate the "responsibility to protect."

Even the richest country in the world is suffering from these plagues. In the US, a recent study by the National Academy of Sciences reveals, one of six people live in poverty, almost 20% of those 65 or older. Food stamp assistance is currently at an all-time high of about 36 million.

In South America, there are at last serious steps to confront "this generation's greatest struggle."

And other severe human rights abuses. In large measure the driving force is mass popular movements, most dramatically in the poorest country of South America, Bolivia, where the indigenous majority, the most oppressed population of the hemisphere, entered the political arena and elected someone from their own ranks, a poor peasant, Evo Morales.

Still more significantly, the election was not a day on which people pull a lever and go home, but a stage in an ongoing struggle over critically





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important issues: control over resources, cultural rights in a complex multiethnic society, justice, and development in terms that are humanly meaningful.

The contrast with the elections at the same time in the richest country of the world could hardly have been more striking. Traditional elites and their superpower sponsor are not sitting by quietly, but their capacity for intervention has significantly declined in the face of popular organization and activism.

There are many similar lessons from Western history, even in recent years. I did not happen to like the candidates in the 2008 elections in the United States, but nevertheless, 40 years ago, or even 10 years ago, it would have been unthinkable for the Democratic Party to field two candidates, a woman and an African-American.

And whatever one thinks of the Obama administration, it is no small thing for a Black family to be in the White House.

Thanks to the activism of the Sixties and its aftermath, the country has become more civilized in many dimensions: rights of minorities and of women, concern for rights of future generations (the environmental movement), and much else. That includes opposition to aggression: contrary to many illusions, the opposition to the Iraq war has been far greater than at comparable stages of the Vietnam war, and more effective in constraining imperial violence.

One important example is the solidarity movements that arose in mainstream America in the 1980s, many of them church-based, including evangelical churches.

This was the first time in the history of imperialism that large numbers of people in the imperial society went to live with the victims, to help them, even to give them some protection with a white face. The solidarity movement then fo-

cused on the victims of Reagan's terrorist wars in Central America, but has since spread well beyond.

If the Nobel Peace Prize committee had wished to make an appropriate award, it had many options.

It could have awarded the prize to the courageous Palestinians engaged in daily protests against the disgraceful and illegal separation wall cutting through their lands and destroying their hopes for a decent future, joined by some Israelis and by international solidarity activists – among them Ireland's Nobel laureate Mairead Maguire, one of those attacked with tear gas and rubber bullets by Israeli forces at demonstrations at the village of Bil'in, which has become the symbol of this impressive movement of non-violent resistance.

Or to the Norwegian doctors Mads Gilbert and Erik Fosse, who worked at the al-Shifa hospital in Gaza through the nightmare of the US-backed Israeli assault last December-January, to mention just a few.

**T**HE COMMITTEE might well have made other worthy choices, prominent among them the remarkable Afghan activist Malalai Joya.

This incredibly brave woman survived the Russians, the onslaught of Reagan's vicious favorites whose brutality was so extreme that the population welcomed the Taliban, then the brutal Taliban, and now the return of the warlords under the Karzai government.

And throughout, she continued to work effectively for human rights, particularly for women, was then elected with substantial popular support to Parliament, then expelled when she continued to denounce warlord atrocities, and now lives underground under heavy protection. But

she continues the struggle, in word and deed.

Returning to the US, the civilising impact of the activism of the Sixties naturally elicited efforts to restore order and discipline.

One component has been the state-corporate economic programs, which, particularly since the Reagan years, have broken the link between economic growth and social and economic health. Under these programs of financialization of the economy, real wages for the majority have stagnated while the limited benefits system declined, and inequality has soared to unprecedented heights.

That has given rise to a mass of people with real grievances, who want answers to explain their plight, but are not receiving them, apart from far-right radical nationalists, answers with a certain internal coherence though completely crazy: death panels, rich liberals who own the corporations and are giving your hard-earned money away to illegal immigrants and the shiftless poor, and all the rest that one hears on talk radio and at raucous demonstrations.

A common reaction in elite educated circles and much of the left is to ridicule the protestors, but that is a serious error.

True, there is a great deal of nonsense, but the correct reaction is to examine our own failures. The grievances are quite real and should be taken seriously.

If the protestors are getting crazy answers from the hardline right-wing extreme, the proper reaction is to provide the right answers, and do something about them. There are real dangers in letting these calls go unanswered, as recent history shows all too bitterly.

And there are also real prospects, if we follow today's variant of the famous advice of the anarchist labor organizer Joe Hill before his execution: *don't ridicule, organise.*

# Research outlines key goals for LGBT people

DISCRIMINATION and exploitation in the workplace are ranked as the top concerns of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, a new report launched by the National Lesbian and Gay Federation, has claimed.

Burning Issues: Listening to the Voices of LGBT People in Ireland – supported by SIPTU and the Equality Authority – is the first study to provide a comprehensive overview of the attitudes and opinions of the LGBT community on a series of key issues.

The research reveals that equality in the workplace is the most pressing concern of LGBT people in Ireland.

Being able to work in an environment where you can be fully open about your sexuality without fear of discrimination was rated the most important issue in the survey, with an overall importance level of 8.3, on a scale where 1 is least important and 10 is most important.

NLGF chairperson Ailbhe Smyth said: "While equal marriage rights and child protection are the top political concerns, it was hugely significant that harassment and exploitation in the workplace is the number one concern.

"It is shameful that LGBT people continue to be marginalised in the workplace due to their sexuality.

"So many professional LGBT people live in fear that they will be harassed, exploited, or even worse, fired, if their sexuality is revealed.

"This is unacceptable and a taskforce must be established to ensure Ireland leads in Global LGBT equality measures.

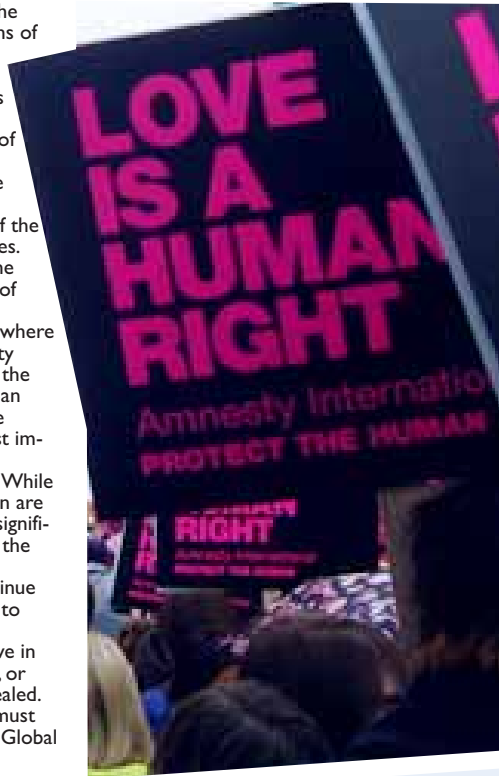
Violence against LGBT people was ranked as the number two concern in the Burning Issues survey at 8.2 out of 10.

Report co-author Dr Sean Denyer said: "Violence against any individual or group cannot be tolerated.

"The fact that young gay or bisexual men ranked this as their number one issue reveals the extent of the problem.

"Homophobic violence has led to deaths in Ireland, it has resulted in the hospitalisation of countless men and women. The Government and the social partners must take steps to stamp this out forever."

The survey also contained a number of open-ended, questions where people could write about the issues of crucial importance to



## **BURNING ISSUES: Marriage rights, workplace equality and homophobic violence**

them in their own words. Gaining the right to access the institution of civil marriage for same-sex couples was raised overwhelmingly as the most important political priority of the LGBT community in the open-ended responses.

A quarter of respondents designated marriage equality as their burning issue, while the Government's proposals for civil partnerships

for lesbian couples and gay male couples were highlighted as the key priority of less than three per cent of respondents.

The participants in the research were particularly critical of the failure of the proposed civil partnership legislation to protect the rights of children who are raised by a lesbian couple or a gay male couple.

One participant in the research emphasised that "our children deserve the same level of protection that other children already enjoy. As adults, we can make our own choices and take the consequences while children find themselves without rights without ever having made any choices themselves."

Another respondent was highly critical of how lesbian and gay people in Ireland are currently "not being recognised as human regarding marriage and adoption".

Yet another survey participant warned the Government that LGBT people will not accept "any legislation that does not include children".

The NLGF has also published a new report on the symposium Marriage Matters for Lesbian and Gay People in Ireland.

A key action that emerged from the May 2009 symposium was for LGBT organisations to build stronger links with the trade union movement in their campaign for equal marriage rights and equality in the workplace.

LGBT workers were encouraged to become active in their local union branches and push the issue of equality to the top of the agenda of their trade union. Alejandro Alder, from Spain's national lesbian and gay federation, stressed the vital role trade unions played in helping the LGBT community in his own country win the campaign for full marriage rights in 2004.

Drawing on his advice, it was agreed that the Irish LGBT movement should work with as many NGOs as possible from across wider society – and in particular trade unions – in order to gain the critical mass needed to win the struggle for civil marriage. The NGLF's Ciarán Ó hUachtáin thanked SIPTU for helping to the publishing of the Burning Issues research and claimed it was an indication of the deepening partnership between the trade union movement and the LGBT community.

● The Burning Issues research report; and the Marriage Matters, Symposium Proceedings can be downloaded from [www.nlgf.ie](http://www.nlgf.ie)

Picture: Amnesty International

# Trade Union TV



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# VETERAN ACTIVIST HONOURED

RETIRED lorry driver Frank Callaghan has celebrated more than 65 years association with the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union at a special Unite ceremony in Belfast earlier this month.

The sprightly 83-year-old joined the union in June 1944 when he was taken on at the Inglis Bakery in the city.

He worked there until it closed in the early 70s before moving to Bass Ireland as a delivery driver.

Since his retirement, Frank has maintained his close links with the union through his involvement with the pensioners' committee.

Recalling his first union meeting, Frank said: "The union men at the time – many of them still using horse and carts – remembered the lockout in 1907.

"Their blood still boiled at the injustices. The union was in their blood and they knew that without it they had no future.

"Their militancy rubbed off on me straight away."

The father of six spent a number of years educating himself with the courses provided by the union and travelled to England where he regularly met with Vic Feather before he took over the leadership of the TUC.

Frank added: "He would always say to us that we should move away from always accepting peas and pies and lift our heads up.

"That advice always remained with me."

To mark Frank's long involvement with the union, his wife Maureen and daughter accom-



Unite's Jimmy Kelly presents Frank Callaghan with a miniature bust of a Brigadista while his wife Maureen and daughter Maeve look on *Picture: Unite*

panied him to a special ceremony at the Unite offices in Belfast.

The occasion was combined with a commemoration marking the lives of Jack Jones and Bob Doyle and their involvement with the International Brigade.

Irish regional secretary Jimmy Kelly presented Frank with a miniature bust of a Spanish Civil War Brigadista. Frank said: "Jack Jones was special man. I spent many a time with him at

Eastbourne. A truly remarkable trade unionist."

Praising Frank's involvement with the union, Jimmy Kelly said: "The commitment Frank has shown to the trade union movement and his comrades as a lay official over these long years is very special and incredibly humbling. The union movement's very existence is owed to the men and women like Frank Callaghan whose commitment we recognise and reward today."

**FEEDBACK EMAIL [braziermedia@btinternet.com](mailto:braziermedia@btinternet.com)**

Each month The Union Post features stories and campaigns from Amnesty International files...



Amnesty  
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## Seven Syrian men jailed for online chats about democracy

A GROUP of young Syrian men have been jailed for having discussed democracy online.

The seven – Maher Ibrahim, Tareq Ghorani, Husam 'Ali Mulhim, Ayham Saqr, 'Alam Fakhour, 'Omar 'Ali al-'Abdullah and Diab Sirieyeh – were jailed in June 2007 after being tried before Syria's Supreme State Security Court. Their "crime" was to have published and discussed pro-democracy articles on the internet, including within a youth discussion group. The men, aged between 24 and 33, were each punished with five-year jail terms, except Ibrahim and Ghorani, who were imprisoned for seven years.

They were convicted of "taking action or making a written statement or speech which could endanger the state or harm its relationship with a foreign country, or expose it to the risk of hostile action". Ibrahim and Ghorani were also convicted of "broadcasting false news".

The men had all denied the charges and disowned supposed "confessions" which they claim were extracted from them under torture. Amnesty believes the trial was unfair and has expressed concern over the torture reports. Human rights campaigners allege Syria has a record of torturing suspects held in pre-trial detention, especially in political cases.

The men's case is seen as part of long crackdown on freedom of expression in Syria, where free speech has been severely restricted for decades. Amnesty claim Syria has no authorised opposition parties or human rights



Five of the seven Syrian men arrested for holding online discussions

*Picture: Amnesty International*

organisations, and critics or suspected government opponents routinely risk harassment, arrest and other persecution. There are now hundreds of prisoners of conscience and political prisoners in jail.

These seven men are being held in Sednaya Military Prison, near Damascus, where conditions are harsh. Amnesty is calling on the Syrian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release the men. You can join Amnesty's call for their release and send a solidarity message via their lawyer as part of Amnesty's annual greetings card campaign

Check out [www.amnesty.org.uk/actions\\_details.asp?ActionID=505#action](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions_details.asp?ActionID=505#action) and [www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=11706](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=11706)



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[braziermedia@btinternet.com](mailto:braziermedia@btinternet.com) Bob Miller 07894305173 Joe Mitchell 07703055302