

THE

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UNION POST

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DECEMBER 2011



**UK and NI
public
sector
workers
in mass
pensions
stoppage**

**PICTURES & REPORTS
PAGES 8,9,10 & 11**

BUDGET FAILS THE BUDGET 2012 JOBLESS

CONGRESS has claimed Budget 2012 failed to lift the "dead hand of austerity" from the economy and warned it has "done absolutely nothing for jobs".

General Secretary David Begg said the proposals outlined on December 5 and 6 "contained nothing that would help breathe new life into the economy and kick-start growth."

He added: "Without growth we are going nowhere and will

CONTINUED P3



BUDGET REACTION PAGES 2&3

NI's prog for govt 'too little, too late'

THE Northern Ireland Committee of Congress has expressed disappointment with the Stormont Executive's Programme for Government, describing it as "too little, too late, too slow and too timid".

Assistant general secretary Peter Bunting said: "We already have more than 110,000 people looking for work, with fewer than 5,000 vacancies.

"The timid plan to 'promote' 21,000 jobs over the remainder of the Assembly term won't come close to matching the demand of young people entering the job market - at a time when a quarter of the young are without work."

He pointed out that there were no "contingencies" contained in the document for dealing with 30,000 public sector workers likely to lose their jobs "in the name of austerity" and because of "the Tory cuts mania".

Calling on the Executive to pressurise the Westminster government to adopt a Plan B for growth and investment, Mr Bunting added: "The PfG contains nothing more than a series of micro-policies. There is no grand vision and little hope for thousands of families across Northern Ireland." SEE COMMENT PAGE 17

Chancellor offering us permanent austerity...



Osborne: 'Values'

TUC general secretary has lashed UK chancellor George Osborne's "stubborn determination" to stick to an unworkable "Plan A" that is locking the UK into "permanent austerity".

He made the comments in response to the chancellor's autumn statement on November 29.

Pointing out that all of Osborne's pre-election assumptions had proved to be wrong, Mr Barber said: "Growth has



Barber: 'Austerity'

stalled, the eurozone has crashed, the structural deficit is bigger than previously thought and unemployment continues to rise as the private sector fails to take up the public sector slack.

"The chancellor's stubborn determination to stick to his Plan A despite the evidence that it is not working and won't work in the future means that we are locked into permanent austerity."

Mr Barber said the chancellor's refusal to back a Robin Hood tax on bank transactions "while making nurses pay... speaks volumes about his values".

He added: "Public servants are no longer being asked to make a temporary sacrifice, but accept a permanent deep cut in their living standards that will add up to over 16% by 2015 when you include pay and pension contributions."

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SIPTU

It's a budget that just won't work

SIPTU general president Jack O'Connor has warned that taking another €3.8bn out of the economy while failing to invest a similar amount for growth will not lead to economic recovery.

He said: "The biggest problem with Budget 2012 is that it won't work. It is not possible to take €3.8bn out of the economy on top of more than €20bn over the previous four years without further depressing economic activity, no matter what way it is done.

"The key challenge facing the government is how to find a way of leveraging as much money into the economy as the budget takes out of it.

"This can be done through imaginatively incentivising the private pension funds to invest 5% of their balance sheets - the equivalent of €3.5bn - in the

domestic economy and augmenting it through €2bn of what remains of the National Pension Reserve Fund. This would generate tens of thousands of jobs. If this is not done, the figures for Budget 2013 will be even worse.

"The second problem with the budget is that the burden of adjustment is still falling disproportionately on those least able to bear it, although the balance is better than previously.

"Those at the top of the income spectrum should and could contribute more."



Jack O'Connor: Growth warning

UNITE

Budget that will 'damage Ireland'

UNITE has slammed as government spin claims that Budget 2012 was fair and suggested it could "hardly have been designed better for those seeking to protect personal wealth".

Regional secretary Jimmy Kelly said: "Measures such as the VAT rise, the flat-rate household charge and carbon tax increases will hit hardest those who can least afford it."

He also warned that such measures would be "the vehicle of their own failure" in addressing the economic deficit.

Mr Kelly said: "Cutting spending and raising tax other than on the most wealthy will stunt any growth before it begins to take hold.

"Tax receipts will be lower, unemployment higher and recovery longer as a result of this latest

austerity budget."

He added: "It is a budget for the wealthy few. It will damage Ireland."

Mr Kelly also pointed out that the ability to pay the household charge in instalments did not de-

tract from its "inequity". The USC changes were, he admitted, "at least a gesture towards greater equality in a tax that was unfairly conceived in the first instance".

He said: "The greater proportion of budget measures are regressive and will impact negatively on low-income groups - both those at work and those on social protection income.

"Unite and others put forward alternative proposals that would have made our country a better place with a brighter future and still reduced the deficit in a way that austerity cannot."



Jimmy Kelly: Pro-wealth budget

IMPACT

USC change is welcomed

IMPACT has welcomed the increase in the Universal Social Charge threshold, which means 330,000 people earning less than €10,000 will no longer pay.

However, the union also expressed disappointment at the lack of measures to tackle unemployment, although it gave

backing to the finance minister's indication he was to explore union suggestions that €70bn worth of existing Irish pension fund resources could be invested in job-creating infrastructure projects.

IMPACT also joined with other unions in welcoming increases in capital gains tax

and capital acquisition tax, but insisted the government had missed an opportunity to introduce a wealth tax.

It slammed VAT increases and claimed that other tax changes could have eased the burden on lower income families.

Budget fails our jobless

FROM P1

continue to bump along the bottom without any prospects for recovery.

"In addition, the failure to target the better off and high earners means the burden of adjustment is not being fairly shared.

"But it is the failure on the jobs issue that is critical as that issue will determine how quickly we can emerge from this crisis."

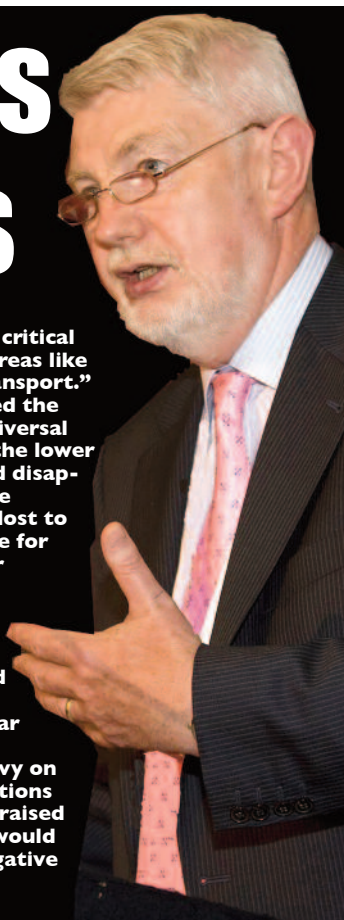
Mr Begg said the one bright note was the government's commitment to probe an idea put forward by Congress to incentivise investment by private pension funds in major job creation projects.

"This has the potential to create in the region of 100,000 jobs and significantly boost competitive-

ness by enhancing critical infrastructure in areas like broadband and transport."

He also welcomed the changes to the Universal Social Charge for the lower paid but expressed disappointment that the "opportunity was lost to increase the charge for those earning over €100,000".

Mr Begg said the increase in VAT was regressive and would add to inflation. "It would have been far better to place a temporary 2.5% levy on profitable corporations which would have raised more money and would not have had a negative impact on jobs."



MANDATE

It's a double whammy on lower paid

MANDATE accused the Irish government of targeting workers on lower and middle incomes in Budget 2012.

General secretary John Douglas claimed VAT increases as well as hikes in carbon and other stealth taxes when combined with cuts to welfare payments, such as Child Benefit, represented a "double whammy" hit on lower income workers.

He said: "VAT is going up by 2% and the price increases brought about by this change will hit those on lowest incomes the hardest as they spend nearly all of their incomes. In addition, the introduction of the annual household charge, increases in carbon tax and public transport fares will hit many people who are already struggling to heat their homes and travel to and from work."

Mr Douglas said the government had also failed to sufficiently tackle the unfair nature of the Universal Social Charge.

"Mandate acknowledges the government has removed workers earning up to €10,036 a year from the USC net – an increase from the previous €4,004 threshold.

"However, we believe they should have gone much further and set the threshold at €16,016 a year or €308 a week.

"Unfortunately, the current government has missed the opportunity to right the wrong done by the last government and give lower paid workers a significant break at this difficult time."

CPSU

The USC is 'still unfair'

CPSU general secretary Blair Horan has welcomed the fact Budget 2012 didn't contain income tax increases for ordinary workers but expressed disappointment that the minister did not go further on the Universal Social Charge.

He said: "The USC impacted very severely on all low-paid workers earning up to €27,000 last year, with a single parent on €27,000 seeing their tax contribution double overnight.

"The change announced by the minister will help low income atypical workers but will have no effect for full-time workers on the minimum wage. This is still unfair and needs to be addressed."

Mr Horan also backed the move to grant additional mortgage relief for first-time buyers between 2004 and 2008 and changes to improve Research & Development capacity for indigenous industries.



Blair Horan

We need urgent jobs plan

CONGRESS has called for a major investment and job creation programme to be put in place to combat the scourge of joblessness in the Republic.

The December 12 call came as official figures confirmed the number of people at work continues to decline as unemployment increases.

Congress chief economist Paul Sweeney claimed the Irish government must now focus all its energy on getting people back to work.

He said: "We urgently need a major new jobs plan. The continued imposition of austerity is decimating the economy and the recent budget will only serve to make the situation worse. It will cost us more jobs.

"The latest figures confirm a very worrying and dangerous trend, with

long-term unemployment rising to 56.3% from 47% last year.

"That is quite shocking and indicative of the huge damage being done to both economy and society by current policies.

"We need a major programme of investment and job creation. In advance of Budget 2012, Congress put forward a number of proposals about how jobs could be created and how investment initiatives could be funded.

"While government has expressed interest in attracting investment from private pension funds, as we suggested, they now need to move on initiatives like this as a matter of urgency."

He added: "There will be a huge social and economic price to pay if we fail to act now."



ICTU calls on govt not to repeat failed neo-liberal approach

CONGRESS president Eugene McGlone has warned the Irish government the country's economic difficulties will not be eased by "further impoverishing the people" or by attacking social welfare.

He made his comments from a platform outside the GPO to thousands who had gathered at the end of the Dublin Council of Trade Unions-organised March Against Austerity on November 26.

Pointing out that there was "still wealth in this country", Mr McGlone told the crowd that the better off "must be forced to shoulder a fair portion of the responsibility" to help resolve the situation.

"Our top 1% own 28% of all the wealth in the country – 34,000 of whom own €130bn in financial and housing wealth. And the average holdings for adults in the top 1% is €3.8m."

Referring to Congress' pre-budget submission, he called on the government to first off "do no further harm" but to concentrate on promoting investment, employment and growth.

Mr McGlone said: "In our submission – which we have backed up



Mandate contingent unfurl their banner against the backdrop of Jim Larkin's iconic statue

with hard evidence – we have urged the government to take a number of measures in relation to tax, such as to introduce a wealth tax."

These measures included reducing residency rules for tax reasons and shutting down loopholes allowing taxes to be levied only on declared profits.

Mr McGlone said Congress had also argued that high-earners should pay a minimum tax of 35%.

He described the Congress proposals as a "far better alternative"

to the "slash and burn politics which have so far been the only response from this and the last government".

Congress had, he said, presented the proposals to the Taoiseach and Tánaiste, but added that the big question was whether they would listen or once again "repeat the same failed neo-liberal agenda which has done so much damage to the fabric and lives of the people".

INTO general secretary Sheila Nunan also spoke at the rally. She told the crowd she feared

that ordinary citizens faced the prospect of "digging even deeper into their pockets" to bail out the bankers, speculators and developers.

And she warned that colleges would soon be the privilege of the wealthy.

Ms Nunan added: "This budget must not add educational poverty to its list of shame."

"Make no mistake, every euro cut from the education budget reduces children's prospects, harms their futures and risks recovery."

Speaking after the rally, DCTU president Phil McFadden said the rally gave working people the opportunity to call on the government to rethink any cuts it was going to make in the budget.

He said: "People are feeling really let down over the last two years. The government are not going after the people that can pay and won't pay – and that's the big problem."

"It's not a public-private sector fight. It's a working class fight and the government needs to listen."

Lucia Fay, a SIPTU activist in the Fair Deal for Cleaners campaign, claimed the day had been an opportunity for "ordinary workers to come together with one voice".

She added: "We need a budget that puts people first – a budget for jobs and growth."



INTO delegation at the DCTU-organised pre-budget protest. Right: young marcher gets 'into the swing' of things



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AGENCY WORKERS

New EU rules show unions fighting back

MANDATE has called on all employers in the Republic to adhere to new rules granting equal treatment for agency workers.

General secretary John Douglas – who is also Congress vice president – said: “This is just one example of how trade unions are fighting back to protect vulnerable workers, such as agency workers.”

He said unions would fight all attempts by government and employers to drive down pay and conditions in a “race to the bottom”.

“The employers had argued that equal pay and conditions for agency workers who perform equal work would cost jobs and increase business overheads.

“Unions, including Mandate, argued strongly that equal pay and equal conditions for equal work is a principle the trade union movement was not prepared to compromise on.”

Mr Douglas also called on agency workers who have not received their legal entitlements since December 5 to contact a union immediately.

He added: “We urge all workers to join a union and fight back for respect and a decent income.”

Change hailed as ‘milestone’ on equal rights

CONGRESS president Eugene McGlone has welcomed the coming into force of the Agency Workers Directive earlier this month and claimed it brought “an end to the days of exploiting workers based on how they are employed”.

He described the directive, enforced since December 5, as “another milestone in the battle for equality in the workplace”.

Workers employed through an agency are now entitled to the same pay as other workers in the same employment.

Mr McGlone explained that Congress had made it clear to both the Republic’s enterprise minister Richard Bruton and employer representatives that ICTU would not agree to any measures that undermined the rights of agency workers.

He added that it was a matter of deep concern that the Northern Ireland Assembly was intent on imposing an agreement brokered between unions and employers in the UK, with regard to agency workers employed in the North.

He claimed Congress had repeatedly voiced objections to its imposition.

“Congress believes that any such agreement is contrary to the purpose of the Agency Workers Directive and has sought legal advice with a view to mounting a challenge to the intention to impose this serious disadvantage on agency workers in Northern Ireland.”



Pictures: Paula Geraghty/Kevin Cooper

Participants stand in silence to remember colleague *Sunday World* reporter and NUJ activist Martin O’Hagan who was shot dead in 2001. Congress president Eugene McGlone, below left, spoke at the conference



THE NUJ has held a special trauma conference in Belfast examining the experiences of journalists who have worked through the Troubles in the North and other conflict zones.

The one-day event, titled *NUJ Journalist Safety – the Northern Ireland Experience*, was dedicated to the memory of *Sunday World* reporter Martin O’Hagan and occurred two days after the 10th anniversary of his murder on September 28.

Participants – many of whom knew Mr O’Hagan personally – stood in silent tribute to the slain journalist, who was secretary of the Belfast & District branch NUJ at the time of his death. Journalists later took part in a series of workshops sharing their own, often moving, stories of conflict journalism and the impact it has had on their lives.

MANDATE

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Letters of freedom... activist's thanks for school campaign

By Fiona Dunne

A FORMER political prisoner in Colombia has thanked in person those who campaigned for her release – among them two second-level students from Co Kerry.

Rosalba Gaviria Toro – a trade union and human rights activist – flew to the Republic earlier this month as a guest of Congress and campaign group Justice for Colombia Ireland.

Ms Gaviria Toro was detained and imprisoned without trial by Colombian authorities in March, 2009, before being released without charge in June 2011. A leader of the Women's Movement for



Students Ellie Gudgeon and Annie Cooper with Rosalba

Peace & Human Rights, Ms. Gaviria Toro arrived in Cork on December 4 where she met with trade union activists and members of the Cork Council of Trade Unions.

The following day, she travelled to Pobalscoil Inbhear Scéine, in Kenmare, where she was welcomed by school principal Dermot Healy and Anne Piggott, the teacher who had encouraged her students to get involved in the ICTU/JFC Ireland prisoner release campaign.

Students Ellie Gudgeon and Annie Cooper chose to take on Rosalba's plight as part of their school project. Their actions later proved to have played an instrumental part in securing Ms Gaviria Toro's release.

She wrote directly to the two girls from Villa Cristina Prison in Quindío, Colombia: "I look forward to

meeting you and thanking you in person." More than 400 letters, signed by fellow students and teachers, protesting against Ms Gaviria Toro's imprisonment without trial were sent to the Colombian embassy in London.

Speaking through an interpreter during the visit, Ms Gaviria Toro claimed the letters were an extremely important part of the international campaign to secure her release.

She said: "I think it was one of the main things that helped me, and visiting the school to express my appreciation is my main mission in Ireland."

A leading member of Fensuargo, the agriculture workers' union, she pointed out that trade unionists, student activists, community leaders, human rights defenders and academics who oppose the governing regime are imprisoned in Colombia.

Later on December 5, Ms Gaviria Toro travelled to Dublin where she met the president and vice-president of Congress, officers of Justice for Colombia Ireland and members of ICTU's Global Solidarity Committee.

She detailed the dire situation suffered by trade unionists and human rights defenders in Colombia and thanked both or-

ganisations for their help in campaigning for her release. However, she added that the plight of fellow trade unionists was never far from her mind and asked everyone not to forget the many trade unionists – including colleagues from Fensuargo – who were being held without trial

During her time here, Ms Gaviria Toro also met with the Congress GPC and officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Her primary mission is to keep the plight of under-threat Colombian trade unionists and human rights defenders to the forefront of world attention.

It is vitally important that continuing focus is put on the Colombian government at international level to stop the abuse of human rights, to free political prisoners and to end anti-trade union violence.

This can be done in a number of ways but it is up to Irish trade union leaders, members and activists to work towards this end in solidarity with their Colombian brothers and sisters.

On December 6, Ms Gaviria Toro addressed a packed public meeting in Dublin's Liberty Hall on the difficulties facing trade unionists and human rights' activists in her native land.

Colombia is the most dangerous country in the world to be a trade unionist, with more than 4,000 activists and officials murdered in the last 20 years by right wing paramilitaries or by government forces. More than half of those murders have taken place since 1991.

Many trade unionists are also jailed without trial, though in some cases some are convicted and face up to 40 years in prison for so-called crime of "rebellion".

MORE INFORMATION:

<http://www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity/>
<http://www.justiceforcolombia.org>



Rosalba Gaviria Toro, centre, met with senior Irish trade unionists during her visit to the Republic earlier this month

Pictures: Congress

November 30 Public sector strikes



AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE



...15,000 pack Belfast city centre as 2m workers take strike action on pensions...

TENS of thousands of public sector workers across Northern Ireland and hundreds of thousands across the UK took part in the largest action in a generation on November 30.

Teachers, nurses and classroom assistants joined civil servants and local authority workers to brave the cold, stand on picket lines and attend rallies during the day of action on pensions.

British PM Dave Cameron, who laughably described what was the greatest mobilisation in decades as a "damp squib", was slammed by TUC general secretary Brendan Barber, who called on him to stop "the war of words" and get back to serious negotiations.

Rallies were held across Northern Ireland, but the biggest was in Belfast, where 15,000 strikers and supporters converged on City Hall.

Assistant general secretary Peter Bunting read out a NIC-ICTU statement in support of the strikers.

He praised them for "nailing the lie" that they were being brainwashed by "alleged trade union militants".

In fact, he suggested, the "real extremists" were the specu-

tors who had "gambled billions" to "sate their greed" and those politicians who were now making ordinary people "pay for the conduct of the pampered elite".

"The same elite who have awarded themselves 50% pay increases in the past year and who receive £22bn of taxpayers' money in tax relief for their 22-carat gold-plated pensions, far more than the cost of providing public servants with a basic pension."

Mr Bunting claimed the loss of one day's pay was worth it because "if the Tories get their way, public sector workers will have one day's pay docked, every single month, for ever to pay off the bankers' debt".

Slamming the "poisonous ideology" of the Tories and the "pathetic" Liberal Democrats, he said the only people standing in their way "are here today" and in "towns and cities across Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, the regions of England and in the shadows of the City of London".

Mr Bunting said millions of people across the UK and Northern Ireland were now saying "enough!"

"We beg no longer, we en-

CONTINUED P10



NIPSA general secretary Brian Campfield managed to attract support from an unexpected quarter...





Congress assistant general secretary Peter Bunting delivers a message of support from Northern Ireland Committee to public sector strikers



UNISON 'fat cats' from RVH took a prominent position on the platform outside City Hall



SIPTU chief Jack O'Connor &, right, NIC-ICTU's Kevin Doherty



NIPSA dawn patrol at Stormont

PCS adopt 'hands off' approach

November 30 Public sector strikes



FROM P8

treat no more, we petition no more. We defy them!"

He added: "We are the many – they are the few."

Ryan Wilson, speaking on behalf of civil servants, said the government would not be allowed to "steal our future and the future of our children".

Describing himself as "a worker from the younger generation", he had this message for the politicians:

"We know what's going on, we can see you eroding

our job prospects, our pensions, our quality of life, our very future and we will not simply stand by and allow you to do this."

Mr Wilson told the crowd that the trade union message to the political class was simple.

"Collect the £123bn in unpaid tax by the super rich, then there won't be a financial crisis, and stop squeezing those ordinary families that every month are in danger of falling into

poverty." He concluded by vowing: "This fight starts now!"

Michael Dornan, who spoke on behalf of transport workers, slammed the lies that had been peddled in the media about public sector workers.

He said: "Standing up for what you believe is right – it is not a crime."

Teacher Mary Cahillane told the crowd: "We want to teach, we want to educate our pupils but we

want to do it for a living wage and for the pension that we were promised.

"We don't want to work until we are 68. If I am working until I am 68, it won't be a case of the pupils forgetting their homework, it will be a case of me forgetting that I gave it to them!"

In her speech, health worker Stephanie Greenwood said: "We will not stand by while the millionaires steal our futures.

We will not be accepting so called pension reform and we will not accept health and education cuts."

Calling on local politicians to "get a backbone", she added: "Remember how we voted you in. Remember there is no such thing as a safe seat. You will not rely on traditional patterns for much longer.

"If you are not prepared to defend the Welfare State, and the National Health Service, then we will..."



FBU thumbs-up up for public sector strikers, above. ICTU president Eugene McGlone, left



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Some of the inventive placards on display on November 30 where more than 25,000 public sector workers marched through central London



US NURSES SUPPORT STRIKES

CAMPAINING US union National Nurses United led a series of solidarity actions across the States on November 30 in support of striking UK public sector workers. Rallies were held outside the British embassy in Washington and at UK consulates in Boston, Chicago, Orlando, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. The nurses, many sporting UNISON and NIPSA placards and flags, were joined

by members of other unions, including United Steel Workers, Teamsters, AFT, ATU, SEIU and AFL. Speaking outside the embassy in Washington DC, local nurse Rajini Raj said: "We're here in support of the more than two million people striking in Great Britain today. "We know an injury to one is an injury to all even if there is an ocean between us." Nurse Zenei Cortez, after

delivering a letter supporting the strikers to the San Francisco consulate, said: "Even though we all live in different parts of the world, we are all fighting for the same issues." NNU executive director RoseAnn DeMoro in a letter to Sir Nigel Sheinwald, the UK's ambassador to the US, called on the British government to stop its attempts to make public sector workers "pay more and work longer to receive a smaller pension

when they retire". She continued: "This attack on the people who provide patient care at the National Health Service, teach school children, and provide essential public services is unconscionable." NIPSA general secretary Brian Campfield said NIPSA members greatly appreciated the solidarity demos. "The response from branches and members who saw the photos of the solidarity action was that they were uplifted by the demos staged such a distance away in solidarity with their cause. "It is clear that workers in any country have much more common interest with each other than with other interests or forces in their society. "Long may such solidarity continue." Desi Murray, of the California Nurses Association and one of organisers of the LA protest, is a former secretary of Belfast Trades Council.



Inaugural CWU forum charts path for call centre workers

THE Communication Workers Union held its first Call Centre Forum last month, bringing together workers from, among other employers, An Post, American Airlines, O2, Siemens and Vodafone.

The November 12 event was staged to help forge strategies to encourage employers to operate "according to the principles of quality employment".

It was also held to coincide with UNI Global Union's annual Call Centre Action Month.

Participants gathered at Jury's Croke Park Hotel, Dublin, were asked to put together a Call Centre Charter looking at breaks, leave, pay, benefits, targets and health and safety.

CWU organiser Fionnuala NíBhrógáin said: "The purpose of this exercise was not simply to talk about existing laws, it was about the ideal conditions that we would all hope to work under in a call centre environment.

"All these standards are being compiled into a charter for call centre working. This document can be used to engage with employers to adopt these best practices and to recognise where there is room for improvement in workplaces."

Ms NíBhrógáin went on to add that all the participants agreed that the day was a great success. The event was held against the back-



drop of major changes in the sector both in the Republic and internationally.

She said: "Large numbers of Irish jobs are being 'off-shored' and those jobs that remain are under increasing pressure for ever greater productivity.

"This pressure causes many problems for workers, including unreachable targets, poor work-life balance and the stress and health issues that result.

"We believe call centre workers are no different to other workers and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect in the workplace."



Pictures: John Chaney/CWU



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TUC conference told Irish experience is proof austerity doesn't work



WHAT has happened to the Irish Republic is "proof cuts won't work", Congress assistant general secretary Peter Bunting warned a gathering of English trade unionists last month.

He told delegates at the Northern Public Service Alliance conference in Newcastle upon Tyne on November 12 that austerity "strangles demand and growth".

"The solution to a crisis of neoliberalism," he pointed out, "is not a more intense and concentrated dose of the same medicine."

Mr Bunting outlined the climate of fear that has gripped people in the Republic since the 2008 crash.

"For most people fear manifests itself in the loss of personal economic security. People are afraid of losing their jobs, afraid of losing their homes, afraid they won't have a pension when they retire.

"These fears are not in any sense irrational. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence to give them credence and there are individuals in all socio-economic categories – workers, professionals, business people, pensioners and students – who are hurting very badly and who

need help." A series of austerity budgets had hit public services in the Republic – "cutting into muscle" – leading to a cumulative 20% reduction in GDP since 2008.

He told delegates gathered at the Newcastle Civic Centre that a further €9bn is to be slashed from

Something is missing here – the sense that we live in a democracy

budgets over the next four years.

"This level of retrenchment is profoundly mistaken in economic terms. Domestic demand has fallen by 21% since 2008. Retail sales in May were 5.2% below the same month in 2010, the 45th consecutive month that they have fallen."

Mr Bunting warned that price paid for this level of austerity was "potentially... a lost generation".

He said: "The young are bearing the brunt of the crisis. You are most likely to be unemployed if you are young.

"That is true in the Republic of Ireland, it is true in Northern Ireland and it is true across all of the regions of the UK.

"It is true in Greece, Italy, Portugal, France and especially Spain, with almost half of the under-25s out of work."

Referring to recent events in Greece and Italy where Papandreou and Berlusconi had been replaced by technocrats, he warned delegates, "something is missing here – the sense that we live in a democracy".

Democratic governments seemed, he said, to be at the mercy of the bond markets.

Mr Bunting added: "We could be reaching the stage where markets and democracy are becoming incompatible.

"What is emerging is a series of crises, separate but all connected. Banking crises, fiscal crises, sover-

eign debt crises, growth crises, austerity crises, political crises, democratic crises – a whole series of crises of legitimacy.

"Something is in its death throes – either the spirit of social solidarity or the dogma of neoliberalism.

"We cannot stand idly by and hope it is the latter. We must be agents of change and grapple with the reality we face."

It was up to those who favoured social solidarity to convince the public that the "cosy consensus supporting the indefensible" was wrong.

He told delegates: "There are things that we can do to fix our economy and society that Cameron and Clegg and Osborne and Alexander would never think of doing.

"This is a long haul. We are in an argument about the economy and its future, but also about the values which shape our society.

"We are fighting an ideology which did not ever deserve to succeed, and has, in recent years, failed even on its own terms."

Use private pensions funds to drive growth-generating capital projects

CONGRESS has claimed key infrastructural projects could be saved by attracting investment from some of the €75bn currently held in Irish private pension funds.

Official Fergus Whelan made his comments at a pensions seminar in Liberty Hall, Dublin, on November 10.

A major cut in capital spending by the government was, he said, bad news for jobs and growth but pension funds could be persuaded to invest in-

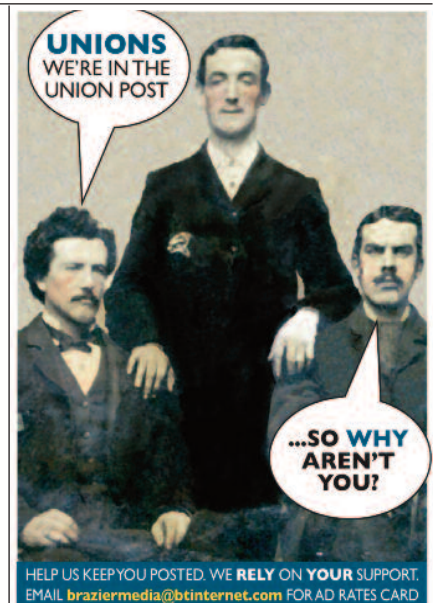
stead. "All that is required is the creation of an appropriate risk-sharing investment vehicle that would attract a small portion of the €75bn of Irish workers' pension money that is currently invested internationally and stimulating economic growth and job creation everywhere but here.

"We could save major job creating, growth generating capital projects that have been abandoned by government, such as the DIT campus, Metro

North or DART Underground.

"The investment vehicle could be gradually expanded to cover many more hospitals, schools and other socially necessary infrastructure."

Mr Whelan added: "We need smart, innovative and creative strategies to get ourselves out of this crisis. And this proposal could help tap a major new source of funding to get people back to work and kick start the recovery."



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Ohio vote derails anti-union laws



AMERICAN unions have hailed last month's referendum victory in Ohio as a "game changer" after voters decisively rejected state governor John Kasich's punitive attack on public sector workers.

The November 8 ballot saw 61% of Ohioan voters reject a Republican-backed law that sought to ban the state's 350,000 government workers from going on strike as well as limiting collective bargaining in the public sector.

Earlier this year, the state

legislature had narrowly approved the controversial move.

This sparked state-wide, union-organised demos that mirrored similar popular protests in Wisconsin and Indiana.

One commentator claimed that the law offered unions only "collective begging".

Under the Ohio state constitution, it is possible to force a public vote on legislation and by the summer activists had managed to collect nearly three times the number of signatures needed

to do so. International Association of Fire Fighters President Harold Schaitberger called the vote "an absolute momentum-shifting victory for the labour movement".

He said the fight for union rights would now switch to Wisconsin, where activists are set to collect signatures to force a recall vote on anti-union Republican governor Scott Walker.

Walker will be forced to stand for election again if campaigners collect 500,000 signatures.



Gov John Kasich: Drubbing at polls



Solidarity Forever! Workers overjoyed at vote

Pictures: CEA

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Picture: Moya Nolan/INTO

INTO 'friends' honour national bard

WORLD-renowned poet Seamus Heaney received a special honour last month from his former union, the INTO.

The award, honouring the Bellaghy-born Nobel Laureate's contribution to literature, was presented at the union's conference in Athlone on November 19.

Heaney, who taught at Carysfort College of Education in the 70s and 80s, met up with many of his former pupils, now primary school teachers, at the event.

INTO president Noreen Flynn told the 400-plus audience that teachers wanted to emphasise the

joy of reading but feared this could be lost in the rush to assess standards.

She added that teachers looked to figures such as Seamus Heaney for inspiration.

Ms Flynn, a former student of the poet's, spoke of the affection in which Heaney was held and of his lifelong association with primary teachers.

To honour his contribution to literature, she presented him with a first edition of Mairtin O Cadhain's 1949 book *Cre na Cille*.

In response, Seamus Heaney said

there had been many good days but described this presentation as "one of the best days yet" because it was what he called "domestic and intimate".

He appeared genuinely delighted to be back among what he called his "Carysfort friends".

Having outlined how his aunt Sally, a primary teacher with books by Hardy and Kipling, had a formative influence on him, Heaney went on to read a number of his poems. It was an emotional affair.

Starting with *Digging* which he summarised as "moving from the

spade to the pen", he then recited *Mid-Term Break*, a poem taught to most Irish pupils. Heaney quipped the audience would know it by heart and as if to prove him right many could be seen lip-syncing the poem along with the author.

Others were looking for tissues to wipe their eyes.

The poems *Alphabets* and *Valedictory Verses* which he wrote for the graduation ceremony in Carysfort in 1988 – "the year the college was taken out of play" – brought the reading to a close, followed by a standing ovation from his former students.

Irish journos asked to complete online survey

A SURVEY of Irish journalists about media ownership and diversity is being conducted in advance of a major conference *Media Diversity: Why does it Matter?* being held in Dublin in February.

The online, multiple-choice questionnaire takes less than five minutes to complete and the strictest confidentiality is assured.

Results of the survey will be revealed at the conference.

Complete the survey at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/PW7M9QN>

Training event for CWU young members

THE CWU's Youth Committee has held a special training event to help young members build up their confidence when dealing with employers.

The YC has the stated aim of influencing CWU policy "from the grassroots up to reflect the particular needs and views of young members and to encourage their greater involvement across all branches and sectors of the union".

Training, spread over two days, was held at IBOA House, Dublin, in October.

The first sessions covered

presentation skills, and members were given the opportunity to present to the group and to receive feedback on their performances.

Youth Committee's Barry Gorman said: "The training obviously worked as all the members present overcame their nerves to give confident, assured presentations."

The second day covered the more practical side of representation by giving members an understanding of grievance and disciplinary processes.

All aspects of procedures

were discussed, including SI 146 and the concept of natural justice.

Members role-played various scenarios to give them an understanding of what to expect in a real-life situation. CWU organising intern Casey Sweeney said: "The training was extremely informative and the participants seemed more equipped to handle G&Ds in their respective workplaces."

The CWU plans to continue providing extensive training to the members of the Youth Committee.

CWU NI POLITICAL SEMINAR P16



CWU NI young activists with general secretary Billy Hayes, national officer Simon Sapper, YAC chair Ryan Case, regional secretary Lawrence C Huston and guests

CWU holds first NI political seminar for young members

THE Communication Workers Union has hailed as an “outstanding success” a political seminar held last month for young members of the union in Northern Ireland.

Assistant secretary Simon Sapper, one of the organisers, said the CWU had staged the three-day event as “youth activity” in the region had “historically been patchy” due to the “dispersed nature of the population”. Participants who gathered at An-Creagan

visitor/residential centre in Co Tyrone on November 18 included young CWU activists from across Northern Ireland as well as youth officers from Congress and members of the union’s National YAC.

A range of discussions were held, debating issues surrounding youth unemployment, union-busting activities in the UK, public sector cuts and the economy.

Representatives from local political parties also attended and faced tough questioning about their policies in a special panel discussion.

CWU general secretary Billy Hayes described it as “an excellent opportunity for young activists to engage with the Northern Ireland Assembly members on current issues of concern”.

CWU regional secretary Lawrence C Huston said the seminar had been “extremely encouraging”.

“The content of the weekend agenda had clearly engaged our young members in the need to play a much bigger role in the day-to-day affairs of the CWU.

“There is no doubt that these young members are the future of the union. There is clearly a need for the region to now build on this initiative.”

Mr Huston added: “It was disappointing that a number of our postal delivery young members had been unable to get release from Royal Mail to attend.”



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Social enterprises or private wealth?

THE publication of the new Programme for Government by OFMDFM at Stormont, will result in us being all be told by politicians that these are challenging times, that we cannot ignore the financial constraints, economic challenges and other issues facing the regional economy.

The PfG will focus on economic recovery; therefore, we will see the scramble by many of our political and business leaders towards supporting a reduction in corporation tax, which is a coded message for cutting public and community services.

We will also be told that we must be competitive. But what does 'competitive' mean?

Competitiveness and the lowering of corporation tax will be sold as a panacea for all our economic ills, putting us in line for much greater levels of investment, leading to more and better jobs.

I would argue, and positively fear, that both will have a completely different outcome – the widening of the chasm between rich and poor, between the 'haves' and 'have nots'.

Newly-elected Irish president Michael D Higgins has vowed to lead Ireland in a transformation away from values based on private wealth and has called for a greater connection between the person, the social, the community and the nation.

His analysis is correct because many citizens north and south are suffering from the fallout from the financial crisis caused by those who put profit and greed before the common good.

There are quite a few examples of very different social and economic systems where the emphasis is put on each of us giving our best as a member of a trade union or community group, united by 'the common good'.

In the early 19th century, the Welsh social reformer Robert Owen set up 'villages of co-operation' in New Lanark in Scotland.

This initiative influenced the Rochdale Pioneers, who embraced the co-operative ideal, took these ideas forward and made them real.

Ireland has made its own contribution, producing the 19th century moral economist and social scientist William Thompson (a Corkman, described by James Connolly as the first Irish socialist) and a century later, Horace Plunkett, the founder of the Irish Farming Co-operative Society.

The social economy movement throughout Ireland has made immense strides forward since

The lowering of corpo tax will be sold as a panacea... but it will widen the chasm between rich and poor

William Thompson.

Its strength lies in the essentially democratic nature of its organisation and in the fact that it does not involve the exploitation of those who work for it or those who use its products and services.

Why is it that we still allow governments, the banks and large private-sector organisations – which were responsible for the recent global financial disaster – to dismiss the social economy movement (that's you and me, by the way) as a bit-part player when it comes to the economy?

Ask yourselves this: what would happen if the social economy went on strike and all the services it provided – formally and informally – were withdrawn? It would be disas-

trous. The fabric of society would unravel.

But there remains a major bias against those involved in advancing the social economy. It is viewed with suspicion and hostility. There is a mind-set held by many politicians, academics, so-called consultants, and in the mainstream job-creation agencies, that the private sector model is still best.

The North West has long suffered from high unemployment and major deficiencies in economic infrastructure that are much more severe than in other parts of Northern Ireland containing large urban areas.

These deficiencies relate, in particular, to transport, higher education, health and tourism support.

These infrastructure deficiencies have a relationship to economic weakness that exists in the North West.

Over the past 50 years, the trade union movement through promoting the social economy has played a significant role in developing community well-being, inter-community activity and peace building by addressing the issues of poverty, unemployment and social exclusion.

The global economic crisis caused by corporate greed means that change and reform is now necessary. Experience tells us that the best change and reform comes from within communities, not from above.

It is important that we continue to foster and grow social enterprises and protect public services. Most will emerge as a result of the energy, drive and commitment of the community, of workers and of voluntary groups.

The big question remains – will the PfG further impede the social economy sector or will it recognise, support, and allow it – or even better, assist it – to realise its full potential? Or will it continue to champion the private wealth model – to dismantle both the community and public sectors?

ECONOMICS

TUC flags up £65bn 'growth gap' over finances

THE UK's faltering economic performance over the last 18 months has left a £65bn "growth gap", a new TUC report has claimed.

The report published last month compares the current state of the UK economy with the government's fiscal forecast at the time of the emergency budget in June 2010.

It shows that poor GDP growth, lower than expected tax receipts, rising unemployment and higher welfare spending is likely to leave the economy around £65bn smaller by 2015.

According to the TUC, the government's austerity programme, which has contributed to the slowest economic recovery in a century and sent unemployment to a 17-year high, will result in an extra £123bn of public borrowing by 2015.

The report also highlights the self-defeating nature of the government's austerity measures.

A total of £83bn of spending cuts and £29bn of tax rises is only expected to cut the deficit by £56bn as welfare spending soars and tax receipts fall.

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "The government's self-defeating austerity programme is becoming an increasingly costly mistake.

"Not only has it choked off the recovery and sent hundreds of thousands of people on to the dole, it is failing to meet its own central objective of eliminating the deficit."

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Mandatory pensions needed for private sector

UNITE has called for mandatory pensions for all private sector workers in the UK – similar to a scheme that already exists in Australia.

Regional secretary Jimmy Kelly said: "During the past 20 years we have seen many private companies withdraw from pension schemes to shore up profits or share-

holders' dividends.

"This has to stop and we need to factor in these payments in our economy. Workers should not be penalised to a life of penury when they retire."

And speaking before the November 30 strike, he pointed out the "truly absurd" situation that

meant a typical public sector worker would have to "work three lifetimes" to earn a Cabinet minister's pension.

He added: "Equally ridiculous is that, according to one report, the boss of Barclays is on 75 times the average pay of the bank's staff, representing a pay rise of 4,899% over 30 years."

Characterising Northern Ireland as "a society governed by the rich for the rich", he pointed out that company bosses' excessive wages and bonuses were being "mirrored" by excessive cuts and job losses in the public sector.



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blindness



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Talla is just five. He has trachoma, a painful eye disease which can lead to a lifetime of blindness. Repeated infections cause the eyelashes to turn inwards and slowly and painfully every blink damages the eye and leads to blindness. Trachoma can be treated effectively in its early stages with a course of ointment costing just 50p – but for millions of people this is still too much.



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