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UNION POST



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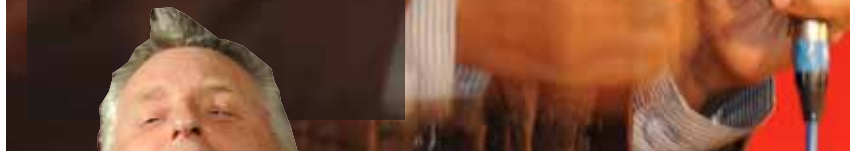
SONGWRITER and activist Billy Bragg and poet Benjamin Zephaniah joined actors Alan Rickman, Tom Wilkinson and Frances de la Tour in headlining a concert in aid of the TUC Aid Haiti Earthquake Appeal earlier this month.

The February 3 event, staged at the TUC's Congress House in London, also featured speeches by Tony Benn and BAFTA award winning film director Ken Loach.

TUC chief Brendan Barber described the concert as a "tremendous example of solidarity in action".

He added: "I'm proud that the international trade union movement has rallied round to support our brothers and sisters in Haiti."

Cuba Solidarity Campaign director Rob Miller, who read out a list of trade union donors who had jointly raised £100,000 for the TUC Aid appeal, told the capacity audience: "This is a fantastic turnout, your support will make a real difference to the efforts of those on the ground in Haiti."



CUBAN doctors are at work in Haiti and a special bank account has been set up to receive donations to help in the relief efforts. Funds, in sterling and euro NOT dollars, can be donated to:
Title: Terremoto Haití (Haiti Earthquake)
Bank: BICSA
Bank Identification Code (BIC) Código SWIFT del Banco: BIDCCUHH
Account number: 01321010770900
Bank Address: Havana, Cuba
Alternatively, donations can also be made through the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. You can check out further details on www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk



Pictures: © Alejandro Gortazar/ Cuba Solidarity Campaign

TEEU shop steward goes on hunger strike

A TEEU shop steward has gone on hunger strike in protest at the continued refusal of Green Isle Foods to accept Labour Court recommendations that could settle the six-month long dispute.

Jim Wyse, who started his fast at noon on February 17, said: "I don't mind what I have to do to resolve this but I do mind how it is affect-

ing my family. They are supportive but they are angry it has come to this. They've put up with six months of hardship, as have the other families involved. Now they are facing into this as well."

On December 4 last year the Labour Court issued a preliminary recommendation "that the parties negotiate a settlement, through an

intermediary if necessary, and if no resolution can be found to revert to the Labour Court, who will issue a further recommendation".

The TEEU accepted the recommendation, but as the company refused to engage through IBEC or any other third party, the court issued a further recommendation on January 5, stating that: "The Court

believes the appropriate redress in this case is that the workers be reinstated without loss of pay and the Court so recommends".

TEEU general secretary designate Eamon Devoy said: "It is clear that Green Isle Foods is totally impervious to conventional sanctions.

"That is why our members are undertaking this grave step."

PORT DISPUTE RESOLVED

A SETTLEMENT has finally been reached in the long-running Dublin Port dispute.

The dispute ended on February 18 when SIPTU officials signed a negotiated agreement – the terms of which had been voted for by workers at the port.

The settlement between Marine Terminals Limited and SIPTU makes reference to the Irish Labour Court's Recommendation of October 12 last year, and the Arbitrator's Findings issued on January 5, sets out agreements on arbitration and problem solving, and commits both parties to building skills and co-operation for the future running of the port.

SIPTU's divisional organiser

Christy McQuillan said: "Our members have been through a very difficult experience regarding their welfare and that of their families over a protracted period.

"The important thing is that hands-on jobs at Dublin Port have been protected and the company has an opportunity to grow and develop the business which will hopefully lead to the creation of further jobs."

He continued: "The agreement also ensures that workers in the company will have union representation and will have access to all the industrial relations procedures of the State.

"The agreement provides for a comprehensive training programme

for the workers returning to work and they will be multi-skilled in all the work disciplines at MTL.

"Great credit is due to the commitment of the International Transport Workers Federation in bringing this settlement about while the solidarity of the communities played its own part during the dispute.

"The termination of the dispute is within the spirit and intent of the Labour Court recommendation of October 2009."

An MTL spokesman said: "Dublin's economic prosperity depends to a large degree on the smooth operation of a modern and efficient port.

"The agreement marks a major step forward in ensuring our cus-

tomers continue to receive the high level of service they are accustomed to. We are grateful to the ITF for their efforts and look forward to working in partnership with SIPTU to deliver on both the spirit and letter of the agreement."

Norrie McVicar, Britain and Ireland co-ordinator of the ITF, which has brokered the agreement, said: "It is no secret that this dispute has been a long and acrimonious one.

"Well, from today that can change. By talking and thanks to the commitment shown by both sides, we can all go forward together and build a healthy and profitable port operation that benefits everyone involved as well as the city and nation that it serves."



Picture: Paula Geraghty

PUBLIC SERVICES CAMPAIGN

Escalation delay

PUBLIC service unions are to delay for a month a major escalation of their national work-to-rule protest to give the Government time to come back to the negotiating table.

The move follows a meeting of ICTU's Public Services Committee on February 15 and came as the work-to-rule by 250,000 public servants in the Republic reached its fifth week.

The campaign is being driven initially by a refusal to co-operate with management reforms across all sectors.

Last month, unions insisted they had been forced to take this course of action after the Government hit their members' pensions, threatened compulsory redundancies and cut public servants' pay

for the second time in little under a year. Speaking after the meeting, Committee secretary Tom Geraghty said the public service unions had identified various ways to escalate the action but emphasised that the plan was not to target the public but to prepare the ground so that they could have a meaningful engagement with Government.

It is understood there has been no contact between the two sides since talks collapsed in December. Unions blame the Government for the failure to reach agreement then.

Last month, the Committee claimed the move to cut public sector pay was part of an overall strategy to drive down ALL wages across the economy.

Penneys staff get 3.5%

WORKERS in Penneys have voted favour of a new set of proposals which will give staff an increase of 3.5% in 2010 as part of the Towards 2016 Transitional pay agreement.

Mandate say that they approached Penneys, which employs about 3,000 at 38 stores across Ireland, last year regarding the payment of the National Wage Agreement and under the auspices of the Labour Relations Commission they have managed to secure a deal with the company.

Rather than paying the first part of the deal in full, Penneys and Mandate have agreed phase one of the NWA will be paid in two separate instalments. The first was a two per cent increase in pay from January 1 with a further 1.5% increase due from June 1.

Mandate assistant general secretary Linda Tanham said: "It is vital that companies in a position to pay the terms of the negotiated National Wage Agreement do so to help get this country back on track by generating more consumer spending."

Pay scales restored

THE INMO and SIPTU have called off strike action scheduled for February 1 at the Mater Private Hospital Group following talks at the Labour Relations Commission.

It is believed management agreed to restore pay scales and allowances withdrawn at the start of the year.

Both unions and management have agreed to enter into talks to hammer out an agreement over outstanding issues.

Meanwhile, agreement has also been reached at the Bon Secours Hospitals after LRC intervention. A

deal brokered on February 5 averted strike action that was due to start on February 8 and saw management agree to suspend pay cuts to staff introduced in early January.

Management and unions – INMO, SIPTU, MLSA and IMPACT – agreed to an independent assessment of finances followed by talks.

INMO director of industrial relations Phil Ni Sheaghda said: "All parties agree to engage in a proactive manner to explore the issues facing both sides."

Congress plays role in INLA decommissioning of arms

THE BODY tasked with assisting the INLA to put its arsenal of weapons beyond use confirmed earlier this month that the republican paramilitary group disarmed. The Joint Facilitation Group, comprising Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Creggan Enterprises, Derry, and the Dutch conflict resolution organisation Dialogue Advisory Group, stated it had "assisted" the Irish National Liberation Army in carrying out the task.

In a statement issued on February 8, the JFG said: "To enable this process to be completed in accordance with accepted international standards, we, the Joint Facilitation Group, transferred the weapons to the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning and witnessed the weapons being put beyond use.

"Due to the confidential nature of the process we cannot make any further comment."

Speaking after witnessing the decommissioning, ICTU assistant general secretary Peter Bunting said: "The talks we had with the Republican Socialist Movement and our witnessing of the decommissioning of the INLA's weapons were consistent with our actions and beliefs as trade unionists.

"For four decades, we have opposed violence while also opposing demonising and marginalising alienated communities and groups.

"This is what we mean when we talk of social solidarity. It is the belief that society is improved when all of its citizens feel that they have a stake in that society.

"That is the primacy of politics, and the more people who are exclusively committed to political



BURC director Brendan Mackin, Conal McFeely, of Creggan Enterprises, and Congress assistant general secretary Peter Bunting at JFG meeting held following the decommissioning move

means, the better for us all."

Welcoming the move, Irish Justice Minister Dermot Ahern said: "This is part of a series of decommissioning events carried out by paramilitary organisations in recent months.

"These events are further positive developments as we look to finally close the last chapter of the conflict and ensure a peaceful future for all the people of Northern Ireland."

Mr Ahern's ministerial colleague

Foreign Affairs Minister Micheal Martin also welcomed the decommissioning.

He said: "This act of decommissioning reinforces the developing consensus that the route to a better future is through the exercise of peaceful politics, based on the rule of law, mutual respect, equality and tolerance.

"These principles are inclusive and do not leave any constituency be-

hind. I would like to express the Government's appreciation to all those who facilitated this decision, especially ICTU, Creggan Enterprises and the Dialogue Advisory Group.

"I would also like to pay tribute to General de Chastelain and the members of the IICD, for their tremendous work over many years in underpinning peace on this island."

€100k raised in ICTU Gaza drive

MORE than €100,000 has been raised over the past year in the Congress-led Gaza Emergency Campaign.

The drive in support of Irish Medical Aid for Palestinians started in January 2009 during the Israeli Army's month-long assault on the Gaza Strip.

Between 1,166 and 1,417 Palestinians and 13 Israelis died during the fighting.

Congress general secretary David Begg said the amount raised showed the deep sympathy the Irish trade union movement felt towards the Palestinian people. He added: "The funding will provide vital help to the many civilians who were severely injured during the Israeli Army's ruthless war against the people of Gaza.

"Our solidarity work with the Palestinian trade union movement continues in 2010 and we have organised an international Middle East conference in Dublin Castle on April



16." SIPTU's Mags O'Brien, Noirín Green of UNITE and Congress' Anne Casey ran the fundraising campaign.

Most of the proceeds were handed to IMAP Chair Mick Lanigan at a special solidarity event in Liberty Hall last June.

The total amount raised was €102,117. Of that, a total of €43,200 came from direct contributions from affiliated unions.

A further €58,917 came from a separate campaign involving artist Robert Ballagh who produced a limited edition print, detail pictured left, to raise funds.

RULING

Lobby spend court move disaster for US workers

A LEADING US trade union has attacked a Supreme Court ruling which will allow unlimited corporate spending in political campaigns.

National Nurses United dubbed the move a "disastrous ruling for American workers and American democracy" and called on Congress to reverse the decision.

NNU chief Rose Ann DeMoro said: "The healthcare debate of the last year has provided a sobering reminder of the already pervasive influence of giant pharmaceutical and insurance corporations.

"The last thing our democracy and political system needs is even more spending and political sway by the wealthiest interests in this country."

Ms DeMoro rejected the view that the Citizens United v Federal Election Commission court ruling could also benefit unions by removing current campaign limits.

She said: "It is ludicrous to think that unions and working people could ever match the spending by multi-billion dollar corporations that hold so much sway in our economic, political, social and cultural institutions."

Ms DeMoro pointed out that, according to the latest figures, the top 160 corporations made a total profit of \$554 billion with the top 10 accounting for \$176.7 billion.

She added: "Equating what unions and working people could spend on campaigns would be like comparing a toy boat to an aircraft carrier."

"Corporate influence peddling in politics already distorts and prevents our democracy and political system."

"Opening the floodgates to unlimited spending is a dangerous prescription for candidates who will be even more beholden to the biggest corporate spenders."

Ms DeMoro added: "The likely result would be more dominance of healthcare policy by insurance and drug giants and less of the public oversight of our air, water, food, and workplaces that is needed to protect consumers and workers."



Rose Ann DeMoro

Picture: NNU

TERRIBLE HUMAN COST OF MINIMUM WAGE CUT



Picture: Congress

SIPTU divisional organiser Patricia King has warned that cutting minimum wage rates will worsen the economic situation and make life unbearable for more than 300,000 working people in sectors such as agriculture, catering, contract cleaning, hairdressing, hotels, retailing and the security industry.

She made her comments at the launch of a campaign to protect the lowest paid workers in Liberty Hall on February 10.

Ms King, pictured above, said that organisations such as ISME and the Small Firms Association were lobbying for cuts of €1 an hour in the current rate of €8.65c.

The rate had not been increased since 2007 and had already been subjected to Government levies that had reduced it to €8.48c.

She said the Government and employers were currently seeking to alter rates of pay agreed for the lowest paid workers through Employment Regulation Orders and Registered Employment Agreements through an amendment to the Industrial Relations Bill 2009.

Ms King added: "People on these rates are already experiencing increases in the cost of living due to rises in items such as health and public transport."

"In areas such as hairdressing and hospital cleaning they have to attain a high level of skills to qualify for the minimum rate in the first place."

"It takes four years to qualify as a hairdresser, yet some employers want to reduce the rates of workers who finally qualify."

"The public is rightly concerned about the need to improve hygiene standards in our hospitals and cleaners are now receiving training that adds enormously to the value of their work, not just for them but for the health services generally and for their employers."

"They are being asked to work harder and to a higher standard than ever before, have to take more responsibility and yet are now being asked to take pay cuts on what are already rates judged to be the minimum on which a person can live in our society."

Ms King said she would be seeking meetings with the Minister for Labour Affairs Dara Calleary, and employer groups to highlight the difficulties faced by those on the lowest rates of pay.

Michael Halpenny, who heads up SIPTU's Legal Rights Unit, claimed the new legislation had not been thought through.

There was an 'inability to pay' section in the existing Act that allowed employers in difficulty to seek exemption from the national minimum wage but it had never been invoked by an employer.

He said: "The new legislation will allow bad employers to undercut good employers for contracts and force down the rate for everyone."

Mr Halpenny noted that the sectors calling loudest for cuts were hotels and catering, which were also the sectors where he claimed there was the highest level of non-compliance with the existing legislation.

US banks 'bought' influence

EVIDENCE has emerged of the extent to which US banks "bought" political influence to create a lax regulatory regime, which eventually led to the global financial meltdown.

The revelations, contained in a working paper commissioned by the IMF, show that Stateside finance houses spent the most money on lobbying, were the biggest risk takers as well as being the worst performers.

Interestingly, the report also flagged up that the banks that lobbied the most also tended to have the most lax lending standards and the fastest growing mortgage loan portfolios.

Reacting to the news, UNI Global Union claimed the finance industry and markets had become "a giant casino".

General secretary Philip Jennings said: "This study shows the banks invested heavily to bring about lax regulation to ensure that the house always wins; the politicians always fold and do the banks' bidding; and taxpayers, customers and bank branch workers are always dealt the losing hand."

He claimed taxpayers had been used to pay off the banks' bad gambling debts, but instead of showing gratitude or contribution, finance executives were

once again pouring cash into lobbying to keep regulators at bay and to avoid taxes on bank bonuses.

Mr Jennings added: "Their lobbying is preventing the necessary regulatory change from happening."

"We want to send a message to politicians that they must stand up for the citizens they represent."

"Taxpayers have lost their jobs, their homes and their pensions and now the banks that they saved are working against them."

www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2009/wp09287.pdf



Picture: UNI Global Union

Philip Jennings: 'Giant casino'

SNIP NUA'S SOFT SELL

COLM McCarthy, the economist who steered An Bord Snip Nua, has revealed it was an exercise in softening up public opinion in advance of an attack on the public sector.

His candid remarks, made in Scotland last month, detailed how the Government had set up the body in late 2008 to sell massive cuts in wages and services.

Mr McCarthy said: "Bord Snip was an absolutely political exercise from the word go – and nothing wrong with that – with the intention of preparing not just technocratic proposals but also



public opinion for a better-crafted set of budgetary measures in the 2009."

He admitted a PR offensive was vital in pushing the programme through, adding: "It's getting public opinion and the opposition parties and the broadsheet media on board and getting them to accept and understand that we're not doing this for fun, that we're in a hole and that the quicker we start dealing with it the better and that there has to be a fiscal consolidation, and all this kind of stuff.

"That's really important and the mechanism they used in Ireland was designed to achieve that objective, as

well as the objective of having a great big menu of cuts for the Government to choose from." A Congress spokesperson claimed Mr McCarthy's comments revealed how the whole Bord Snip project was an "exercise in cynicism".

He said: "What we needed was a clear, honest, root and branch examination of how our society works, of how our public services are funded, and of how we can improve quality of life for all concerned.

"Instead we got – and Mr McCarthy's comment confirm – yet another exercise in cynicism and another display of the contempt with which people in power regard the citizenry. He should be ashamed of himself."

ETUC chief: EU has to get real on jobs crisis

ETUC general secretary John Monks has called on the EU Spanish Presidency to develop "a real strategy" to deal with mass unemployment.

He made his comments before a high-ranking delegation of trade unionists met with Spanish president Jose Luis Zapatero on January 21.

Mr Monks said: "The Spanish Presidency must steer Europe on the path of sustainable growth, of more and better jobs and of social inclusion by way of robust industry policies and ambitious policies for research and development and education".

Attacking the "short-termism" that was ruining economies, the ETUC delegation emphasised to Mr Zapatero the need for beefed up regulations to prevent a return to finance market speculation.

The delegation also clamed the Presidency must also react strongly to the challenge of climate change by building up a green economy in the wake of the failure of the Copenhagen Summit.



Monks: Spanish call

CWU chief backs NI Bill of Rights drive

CWU regional secretary Lawrence Huston has spoken of the vital importance of introducing Bill of Rights legislation in Northern Ireland.

He told delegates at an ICTU-organised seminar on the issue on February 1: "A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland should provide real protection for trade union members who often have no other option, due to family and financial commitments, than to work for anti-trade union or unscrupulous employers."

Mr Huston claimed the CWU had thrown its full weight behind the Bill of Rights campaign "by dint of our real life experiences in call centres, retail outlets and the communications and postal industries".



Economic policies driving Ireland into spiral of deflation

CONGRESS general secretary David Begg has claimed the Government's deflationary policies are driving the economy deeper into recession and predicted they will lead to even higher unemployment and worsening public finances.

He made the comments following the release of new data that showed unemployment in the Republic had risen to 12.7%.

Pointing out that Ireland's jobless rate was worse than either Iceland or Greece, Mr Begg said: "This rise should serve as a dramatic wake-up call to Government – it equates with an extra 111,000 jobs lost since January 2009.

"Over and over again Congress has said that you cannot deflate your way to recovery and now we have the clear evidence.

"If Government persists with this perverse strategy, then a jobless rate of 12.7% will be the best figure we will see this year as thousands more lose their jobs.

"The OECD is predicting a figure of 14% for 2010 and we fear they may be proved correct. "Yet even troubled Iceland has kept unemployment to seven per cent and Greece to 10.4%. Our rate is among the fastest rising in the EU."

He added: "Alone among developed nations, we have no plan to save or create jobs and no economic stimulus package to boost economic activity.

"The latest job losses in the retail sector are confirmation that you cannot cut your way out of a recession."

Public spending 'boosts UK economy'

PUBLIC spending has helped to boost the UK economy in the depths of recession, TUC chief Brendan Barber has claimed.

He made his comments following the release of the latest official borrowing figures which show a public sector deficit on the current budget of £11.5 bil-

lion last December, compared with a deficit of £11.1 billion in December 2008.

Mr Barber said: "The size of the deficit is an inevitable result of the recession and the Government's willingness to fight it.

"Public spending has helped to keep unemployment under 2.5 million – well below the

levels seen in previous recessions – and is steering the economy out of recession.

"Those who say that today's deficit should be smaller should have the guts to spell out exactly how high they think unemployment should go as spending cuts will lead to many more jobs being lost."

Picture: Congress



Picture: Congress

ICTU chief warns time is short to broker deal

CONGRESS president Jack O'Connor has claimed the potential for an "innovative agreement" between Government and public service unions still exists – but raised fears the "time for negotiation" was running out.

He pointed out that any deal involving the reversal of salary cuts teamed with public service reforms would probably only come about if ministers were faced with the inevitability of "immense industrial action".

Mr O'Connor said: "The potential for an innovative agreement still exists.

"However, it will not materialise unless the Government, as the employer, believes it is faced with the inevitability of a determined industrial campaign.

"There is still time for negotiation but it is running out."

Writing in SIPTU's online magazine Liberty, Mr O'Connor predicted "more resolute action" would be required and said the Government would only negotiate a fair deal if "they believe we have the resolve and determination to conduct a campaign of industrial action and strikes on a sus-

tained basis". The SIPTU chief claimed recent talks with the Government had been "sabotaged for reasons unconnected with either public provision or fiscal requirements".

He added: "They fell foul of the business lobby and those on the political Right because agreement would have frustrated their wider objective of cutting pay across the economy."

Mr O'Connor also warned that the drive to slash wages was "by no means" at an end.

He said: "The Government's fiscal plan requires a further cut of €3 billion in 2011 and again in 2012.

"A number of ministers have publicly declared their intention to effect public service transformation on pain of the threat of another savage pay cut next year.

"Indeed, in the absence of a determined industrial response they will impose radical change, dismantling conditions of employment, outsourcing at will, as well as inflicting further pay cuts in 2011 and 2012.

"Consequently there is no alternative but to respond."

UNITE ballot over BoSI job losses

UNITE is to ballot its members at Bank of Scotland Ireland seeking a mandate for industrial action.

Earlier this month the finance house announced it was to close 44 Halifax branches in the Republic with the loss of 400 jobs.

Another 220 jobs at a finance unit at the bank's St Stephen's Green HQ in Dublin as well as 130 posts at a customer service centre in Dundalk will also be lost.

UNITE regional officer Brian Gallagher claimed workers were angry at having to pay the price for "reckless banking practices" in the sector.

He added: "There is a determination to fight to save as many jobs as possible, and to push for an alternative survival plan for the bank in Ireland through its playing a vital role in the third banking force."

FEEDBACK

LET US KNOW HOW WE CAN IMPROVE OUR COVERAGE...

Email braziermedia@btinternet.com

■ THE National Employment Rights Authority claims to have recovered around €2.5 million in unpaid wages over the past year.

Figures contained in its report for 2009 stated that more than 6,000 workers received payouts – averaging €410 per employee – as a result of its investigations.

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SENATE VOTE

ICTU call on Colombia backed

A MOTION in support of the Congress call on EU chiefs to suspend Free Trade Agreement talks with Colombia has been passed in the Senate.

The motion, tabled on December 15 by independent senator Joe O'Toole, was passed on February 3.

Last November, general secretary David Begg wrote to all TDs and Senators asking them for their support in the move.

He told Ireland's politicians: "It is of utmost importance that our Government takes a clear position within the European Union in favour of this demand."

"In the end, this is a question of showing Colombia and the world that crimes against human rights are not to be rewarded."

In December, Yessika Hoyos Morales, a Colombian human rights lawyer, met with the Foreign Affairs Sub Committee on Human Rights in the Dail.

She made a very passionate presentation on the situation in

Colombia, which was followed by an intense debate on the need to suspend the FTA talks until Colombia shows a measure of respect for human rights and trade union rights.

Congress and several Development NGOs also took part in the meeting.

The Sub Committee decided to ask the Minister for Foreign Affairs Micheal Martin to attend a future meeting to discuss his reasons for not fully backing the suspension.

Meanwhile, as previously reported in *The Union Post*, all Irish MEPs have co-signed a letter written by David Begg to the EU Trade Commissioner asking her to suspend the Colombian negotiations.

ICTU also joined with the TUC and ETUC in organising a hearing to highlight the issue at the European Parliament in Brussels on December 9.

A second hearing on Colombia, organised by Fine Gael MEP Gay Mitchell in conjunction with ICTU Global Solidarity, was attended by



Support: Gay Mitchell MEP with Colombian TUC representative Luis Alberto Vanegas

more than a 100 people last month.

The Colombian Trade Union Congress was represented by Luis Alberto Vanegas, who is the director of the organisation's Human Rights Department.

The Colombian government's Vice Minister for Labour was also present.

Mr Mitchell told the meeting: "Trade unionists are killed almost every week in Colombia and that

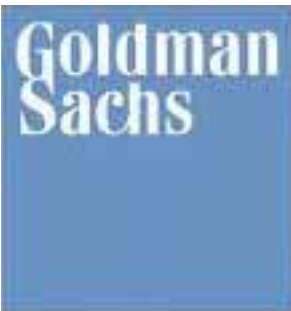
is totally unacceptable." Congress was represented by SIPTU's Michael Dowling, the chairperson of the trade union network Justice For Colombia and the ICTU's Global Solidarity Officer Stellan Hermansson.

It is understood the EU Commission is very close to finalising the deal with the Colombian government.

The Free Trade Agreement will then be voted in the European Parliament.

The European trade union movement and Justice For Colombia is actively lobbying for a no vote.

Similar trade agreements between Colombia and Canada, Colombia and the EFTA group of countries and Colombia and the United States have all been delayed owing to human rights concerns, with President Obama himself publicly citing anti-trade union attacks as the principle reason for his opposition to the deal.



BANK'S BONUS BONANZA SLAMMED

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber has slammed super-rich bankers as "welfare scroungers".

His comments follows top finance house Goldman Sachs announcement that it is to pay staff a total £10 billion in pay and bonuses for 2009.

Mr Barber said: "Goldman Sachs wants us to believe that its bonus payouts are modest. But the truth is that we have set up an international welfare state for super-rich bankers.

"They pay themselves mega bonuses when times are good and expect the rest of us to bail them out when times are tough - even though it was the finance sector that has thrown the world into recession.

"It's time these welfare scroungers paid back through a financial transaction tax that can help fund public services and undo the damage caused by the slump both here and in the developing world."



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WE'RE HERE TO KEEP YOU

POSTED

PDforra: Keep Defence Forces strength at 10,000

DEFENCE forces association PDforra has called on the Irish Minister for Defence Willie O'Dea to maintain number of serving personnel at 10,000

The association, which represents soldiers, sailors and aircrew, claimed payroll cuts of almost €47 million detailed in Budget 2010 could only be achieved with a loss of 300 servicemen and women from the ranks.

General secretary Gerry Rooney claimed the Defence Forces numbers had already fallen from 10,500 because of the embargo on recruitment.

He said: "PDforra are calling on the Minister for Defence to reaffirm Government policy that Defence Forces strength will be 10,000 and provide the funding necessary for this."

"Any other action by Government will be a slight on the members of the Defence Forces who have endured pay cuts, number reductions and provided improved service – most recently during the severe winter weather conditions."

LRD predicts second year of wage freezes

THE UK's Labour Research Department has issued a report predicting that workers will face a second year of pay freezes – despite a creeping rise in inflation.

According to figures compiled by the LRD, the rate of wage freezes is accelerating and now makes up a higher proportion of all salary deals than at any time during the present recession.

In fact, pay freezes accounted for a third of all deals in recent months in the UK.

Lewis Emery, LRD's pay and conditions researcher, said: "It is easy to see that pay will not be the sole or even the main bargaining priority in 2010, although it may be too soon to judge the effects of inflation"

"Maintaining jobs and business continuity is a greater concern, both in the private and public sectors, but with inflation at 2.4% pay will not be neglected either."

Gap between rich and poor 'widest in 40 years'

THE GAP between rich and poor in the UK is wider now than 40 years ago, a new report has claimed. The National Equality Panel paper flagged up "deep-seated and systemic differences" in pay and employment between men on the one hand and women and those from minority groups on the other.

The authors called for policy action and investment in areas such as neighbourhood renewal, taxes and education in a bid to combat inequality.

Acknowledging the challenges raised by the report, UK Equalities Minister Harriet Harman said it underlined the need for "sustained and focused action".

TEEU attack services that make jobless pay

THE TEEU has expressed its concern about the growth of services, both online and in print, that charge unemployed people for advertising their availability for work.

A source said: "This is a very undesirable development, not only does it put unnecessary financial pressure on families it is also contrary to a number of international labour conventions that clearly state that workers should not be charged for their job seeking."

Under the Republic's Employment Agency Act 1971 employers or employment agencies are prohibited from charging a job seeker for any costs associated with their recruitment.

The Department of Social Welfare has also confirmed that no unemployed worker is expected or required to take out adverts to prove they are genuinely seeking work.



Support grows for new tax on banks

CONGRESS has thrown its backing behind a new international campaign to slap a Robin Hood Tax on banks' financial transactions.

Campaigners behind the drive, including the TUC, Oxfam, Barnardo's, Action Aid and Save the Children, believe billions could be raised to fight poverty, protect public services and tackle climate change.

British PM Gordon Brown, German chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the US House of Representatives, and European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso have all spoken out in recent months in support of some form of transaction tax.

Welcoming the initiative, ICTU assistant general secretary Peter Bunting said: "Those of us who believe in tax fairness should back this plan. The international financial trade in elaborate products such as derivatives has been a core reason for the global economic crisis."

"The very least we can expect is for this trade and those traders to make a small contribution for the global common good."

"The only problem with the proposal for a Robin Hood tax is that it is too modest."

The campaign is even supported by some high-profile financiers including George Soros, Warren Buffet and RBS chairman Sir Philip Hampton.

Hundreds of economists have also signed a letter of support.

The Robin Hood Tax would not be levied on banks' transactions with their high street customers, but only apply to transactions between financial institutions.

While different rates of tax would apply to

different types of transaction, they would start at just 0.05 per cent per £1,000/€1,000 traded

But it is calculated that even such tiny taxes would raise hundreds of billions a year given the scale of transactions – equivalent to £6,400/€7,300 a day for every one of the 1.2 billion inhabitants of the world's 30 richest countries in the OECD.

Experts have estimated an international transaction tax system could eventually raise as much as £250bn (€290bn) every year.

The campaign claims that while an internationally agreed tax system is the best way to proceed, the European Union should start extending transaction taxes already in existence, such as the UK's 0.5 per cent stamp duty on shares.

This would both raise much needed money and encourage other countries to adopt the proposal, with modern foreign exchange markets an attractive and easy target for a unilateral tax on sterling and Euro transactions.

The market for financial transactions has exploded in the last decade, and is now worth 60 times global GDP.

Before the financial crisis banking it was the most profitable industry in the world, with profits five times that of the pharmaceutical industry, and three times bigger than the privatised utilities, according to consultants McKinsey & Company.

At the same time the financial sector is not taxed as much as other sectors.

Those behind the campaign are calling for countries that levy the tax to keep half the proceeds domestically and for the rest to be split 50-50 between poverty reduction and tackling climate change.

Picture: RMT



Connecting *you* to

THE internet is only 15 years old yet it has come to permeate so much of what we do.

Many people take the internet for granted as a way to tax the car, book a flight, buy a television licence or simply to buy groceries.

Unions have been slow to embrace the internet revolution. There are by now plenty of websites and blogsites, but it is not easy difficult to join a union online.

There are number of reasons for this, not least of which is the fact that joining a union involves committing to pay a subscription which in turn requires specialist secure software.

However, the web presents an opportunity to help people who are uncertain about which union to join.

While union geography and jurisdiction are well known to union members, they are not as well known to people outside

the trade union movement. Explaining these issues to potential joiners can be as complex (and about as rewarding) as trying to explain the offside rule.

This is where *UNION CONNECT* comes in.

This is a website run by Congress in association with affiliated unions, which aims to take the guesswork out of joining a union.

You go online, fill in contact details and details of your workplace and submit the form. Simple as that.

The *UNION CONNECT* team determines the appropriate union and emails (or posts) you back a membership application form. You fill in the form and return it to a freepost address and that's it.

Like most good ideas its not original. It is modelled on the site operated by the Australian Council of Trade Unions. This

site, which has been in operation for some time allows people to complete joining online.

It also features a common six-month introductory rate of about €4.50 per week regardless of the union joined, following which you go on to the regular union sub.

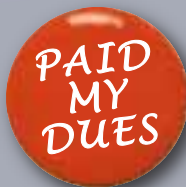
While *UNION CONNECT* mainly deals with queries from the Republic we have also dealt with queries from Northern Ireland.

The busiest day on the site is Monday and the quietest days are Saturday and Sunday, which is a good thing as it means that people leave work-based issues behind them at the weekend!

Another feature of the site is the attraction it holds for migrant workers who tend to be younger, more tech savvy and accustomed to using the web – if for no other reason than to stay in touch with home

People wanting to join a union will often have a major issue in their workplace.

To help in these circum-



who **we** are & what **we** do

www.unionconnect.ie

**support
advice
solidarity**

the right union

stances, another feature of the website is an FAQ based section on your rights at work.

Here we provide basic advice on key issues, both in terms of labour law as written but more importantly on labour law as it is applied by the labour court and rights commissioners.

This is a contrast with the many slick but shallow website operated by legal firms whose main aim is to get the worker into a paid consultation.



The **UNION CONNECT** website is constantly evolving. New sections are being added to the FAQs all the time.

We will be adding a section on the site explaining the union advantage and recent union wins, while at all times aiming to improve the technology.

It will take more time and work to perfect the site but as the saying goes *tosach maith leath na hoibre*

Go online,
fill in your
contact
details
& where
you work

...It's that simple!

NI unions relaunch water charges campaign

THE trade union-based Coalition Against Water Charges has vowed to renew their campaign to prevent the introduction of separate household water charges in Northern Ireland.

The comments came as Stormont Finance Minister Sammy Wilson said the Executive would have to consider introducing water charges next year. Coalition chairperson John Corey claimed unions had played a pivotal role in stopping water charges being implemented in April 2007.

He said: "We will not be standing by and allowing separate household water bills to be imposed on the people of Northern Ireland on a pretext of budget deficits.

"The facts are that the people are already paying for their water through their regional rates and that must continue.

"If the Northern Ireland Executive needs to raise more funding, ministers should instead be addressing the current domestic rate cap and freeze on rate increases which benefit the better off." The Coalition plans to call on all political parties running candidates at the next general election to pledge to resist any attempts by whoever forms the next government to impose separate household water charges or privatisation of Northern Ireland Water upon the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly.

GOT A STORY?

If so, why not email us at braziermedia@btinternet.com

NI poll boost for PO bank

A NEW YouGov poll commissioned by the Post Bank Coalition shows that more than four out of five people (81%) in Northern Ireland believe there is a need for a publicly run bank.

A total of 54% of respondents also said they would be likely to use such a bank at the Post Office.

CWU regional secretary Lawrence Huston claimed the results sent "a clear and strong message" to local MPs and MLAs that people want a bank they can trust.

He added: "The Government has a golden opportunity to make this a reality. It would be a win for the Post Office, a win for communities and businesses, and from these poll results it would be a vote winner too."

ECONOMY

CP: Govt has to rethink tax

THE Community Platform has stressed the need for progressive tax reform over the next year.

Representing a network of 29 national organisations, the group expressed its disappointment at the Irish government's continued emphasis on implementing a cuts strategy.

Anne Costello, of the Community Platform, said: "The publication of the Finance Bill serves as a sore reminder of the Government's failure to use the budget as an opportunity to introduce progressive tax reform measures to address the fiscal deficit.

"Instead they choose to go down the route of introducing a series of savage cuts that will have disastrous implications for the most vulnerable in society including the unemployed, low earners, carers, lone parents and struggling families."

Following a February 4 meeting of the Community Platform, Ms Costello said members had reported the "cumulative impact" of the last budget on vulnerable families.

She added: "The Platform questioned the Government's understanding of the human impact of the cuts and warned that in the long run the Government will pay far more to undo the damage that has been inflicted on Irish society over the last 18 months."

The group has identified alternative and fair revenue-raising opportunities that could have been implemented, including the standardisation of tax reliefs at the lower level and the abolition of tax shelters for the wealthy.

■ **THE ban on promoting teachers to posts of responsibility for certain admin duties is ripping the heart out of schools, Education Minister Batt O'Keeffe has been told. Sean Cottrell, director of the Irish Primary Principals Network, made the comments at the IPPN conference held in Saggart, Co Dublin, last month.**

He told Mr O'Keeffe, a guest at the conference: "I'd like to know how you would cope, minister, if every time an assistant general secretary retired or went on maternity leave or resigned, they were not replaced. Your department would grind to a halt very quickly."

Coalition: Job guarantee call

A COALITION of labour market experts has called on the UK government to introduce a Universal Job Guarantee for anyone out of work for more than 12 months.

In a letter to UK Work and Pensions Secretary Yvette Cooper, the group – which includes pressure groups Demos and Open Left Project, former Cabinet minister James Purnell and top academics Prof Paul Gregg and Prof Richard Layard – warned against a repeat of the last two recessions, when unemployment was allowed to spiral out of control.

The coalition reminded Ms Cooper that periods of long-term unemployment increase the prevalence of mental health problems, relationship breakdown as well as the scourge of alcoholism, debt and homelessness.

Mass unemployment can also devastate entire communities and damage prospects for future job creation as local demand is reduced.

To counter rising long-term unemployment, the coalition called for the introduction of a Universal Job Guarantee for those on Jobseekers' Allowance for over a year.

The letter claimed that employment delivered through such a guarantee – which would pay the minimum wage and last for at least six months – was the best way to give people the kind of genuine work experience that employers want.

Research shows why it's good to be in the union...

A NEW TUC guide has highlighted the advantages of being in a union – particularly during an economic slump.

Entitled *The Union Advantage*, the booklet details how union members receive higher wages, longer holidays, better sickness and pension benefits and are much more likely to be able to work flexibly.

The authors cite official statistics showing that unionised workers in the UK earn 12.5% more than those in a non-unionised workplace, taking home on average £13.07 an hour compared to £11.62.

In addition, it shows the benefits of union organisation in terms of gaining access to learning, training and improved health and safety.

Interestingly, the guide also sets out to

demonstrate the value of unions to employers.

It notes that the UK Department of Trade and Industry estimated employers save between £72 million and £143 million in recruitment costs as fewer employees leave work when they have the union as a "voice".

www.tuc.org.uk/organisation/tuc-17340-f0.cfm

■ THE TUC has launched a new telephone helpdesk to encourage trade union recruitment. The join-a-union line – **0870 600 4882** – gives callers information on the appropriate trade union for them to join based on where they work, the job they do and if a union is recognised by their employer.



Picture: CNA

US study flags up benefits

A NEW study has underlined the many advantages of being a union member in the United States.

Research by the Center for Economic and Policy Research has revealed that unionised workers in each of the 50 US states and the District of Columbia receive better pay and benefits than their non-union counterparts.

The report, titled *The*

Unions of the States, looked at union membership rates, size of the union workforce as well as wage and benefit advantages for union workers.

While union membership rates vary widely – from more than 25% in New York and Hawaii to under five per cent in North Carolina and South Carolina – no matter what the size of the union workforce, the difference being

in a union made was clear in every state.

The report's authors based their findings on information drawn from the US government's monthly Current Population Survey. They found that union members are likely to earn 15% more an hour, have a 19% likelihood of having employer-provided health insurance and are 24% more likely to have an employer-sponsored retirement plan.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Memorial Day marked in UK for first time

THE UK will officially recognise Workers' Memorial Day on April 28 this year.

The event, marked as a national day in 19 countries across the world, is formally known as the International Day of Action for Safety and Health and Work.

It commemorates thousands of people who have died, been seriously injured or made ill through their work.

The announcement was made by Work and Pensions Secretary of State Yvette Cooper on January 28 and follows a government consultation on the subject.

In a statement to the Commons, she said: "This is a tribute to all those who have campaigned long and hard, including bereaved families, trade unions, campaign groups, and many other organisations and individuals.

"For the first time, the UK will join countries across the globe in remembrance of all those killed at work and for the families they have left behind, and the many more who have been harmed. It is also a spur to greater efforts to improve health and safety for today's and tomorrow's working population."

Since 1989 trade unions in the UK, USA, Asia, Europe and Africa have organised events on and around April 28. This date was chosen as it is the anniversary of the Occupational Health and Safety Act in the USA and also commemorates the day that 28 people were killed in a construction accident in Connecticut.

Welcoming the move, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "We're pleased the government has taken the step of recognising Workers' Memorial Day.

"It has been an important date in the trade union calendar for many years and we look forward to working with ministers to increase its profile."

The TUC has called for minute's silence in UK workplaces at noon on Wednesday, April 28.

Workplace death stats challenged

PRESSURE group Families Against Corporate Killers has welcomed the UK government's decision to mark Workers' Memorial Day from this year.

In a statement the group reminded ministers that the purpose of the day was not just to remember the dead but also to "fight for the living".

Last year 180 people were killed at work in the UK, according to government figures, but FACK spokeswoman Linzi Herbertson claimed the real number was far higher.

Estimating the real figure "may be up to 1,500 a year", she said: "FACK members cannot understand why some workers killed at sea, or in the air, or on the roads, or through work stress suicide, plus all the members of the public killed by work activities, are not included in the official figures.

"It's time to come clean about the real extent of work-related harm and its almost totally avoidable nature and for government to subject employers to stringent enforcement action and directors held to account for their decisions."

Govt must act to save IT jobs

THE Irish Bank Officials' Association has described multinational banking group RBS's move to cut more than 200 IT jobs in Belfast and Dublin as "not acceptable" and called for Irish Government intervention on the issue.

General Secretary Larry Broderick, right, said: "Given the Irish Government's stated position that technology jobs are key to the future of the Irish economy, we are calling on the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment to make representations to the British Government, which now owns 84% of RBS, to seek to retain these IT jobs in Ireland.

"Since RBS received substantial incentives to set up its operations in Ireland, it is not acceptable that they can just walk away and abandon these highly skilled and committed staff - who have performed to a consistently high level."



ICTU backs policing and justice deal

CONGRESS assistant general secretary Peter Bunting, above, welcoming the February 4 agreement on policing and justice, has called on Northern Ireland's politicians to roll up their sleeves and start dealing with the economy.

He said: "The devolution of policing and justice is to be welcomed. The deal identifies 30 measures including legislation which will be unclogged.

"This unclogging of the system is essential in order for the Northern Ireland Executive to take firm and fast action on the economy.

"It is crucial that the primacy of politics is seen to work and is seen to deliver, especially on the economy and we sincerely hope that the promise of a new US-backed investment conference delivers on what this society needs most - more high-quality and sustainable employment.

"It is essential that all of the parties who have signed up to this deal now continue in the spirit of co-operation we saw this morning and work together to address all of the outstanding issues, such as jobs, action on sectarianism and a comprehensive Bill of Rights for all of the people of Northern Ireland."

Picture: Congress

Workers vote backs DAA survival plan

MANDATE members at the Dublin Airport Authority have voted overwhelmingly in favour of a €40 million cost reduction programme.

Under the deal 275 permanent and 100 temporary jobs will go across the three airports run by the DAA.

A severance package consisting of 6.75 weeks pay per year of service has been agreed.

According to the union, the survival plan also contains innovative elements including an Employee Recovery Investment Contribution Scheme.

Under this scheme, money will be deducted from salaries, but when targets are met in the future, employees will get a 50% or a 100% payment to cover the contributions they have made. The deductions will also be restored after the company has returned to a reasonable period of profitability.

Other parts of the package include:

- A pay freeze until mid 2011,
- Reduction in overtime rates,
- A €1m once off fund will be set aside and paid to participating staff if the agreed cost recovery target is met.

Mandate assistant general secretary Linda Tanham claimed the agreement was an example of how companies and trade unions could work together to achieve "sustained progress".

She said: "A huge amount of credit should be given to these workers who have voted for the temporary reduction in their incomes and terms and conditions in order that the future of the DAA is safeguarded.

"It shows that when proper consultation with workers and their representatives is meaningfully engaged in, Irish workers and trade unions will behave in a reasonable and responsible manner."

TRADE unions INTO and IMPACT have held talks on the putting in place of work to rule directives in primary and special schools.

The discussions centred on the unions' response to pay cuts and proposed pension changes imposed by the Government in Budget 2010.

It was agreed any actions taken should seek to minimise the impact on the educational outcomes of pupils. The unions also agreed there should be a "common sense" approach to individual situations and that union reps should be available to clarify matters.

SIPTU: Bitech job losses 'devastating'

SIPTU has called the decision to close Dunleer firm Bitech Engineering with the loss of more than 200 jobs "devastating" both for workers and for Co Louth.

The move by owners Glen Dimplex follows a protracted series of talks between management and unions last year over a change/cost reduction programme.

The programme - which would have seen job losses, swingeing 20% pay cuts and changes to terms and conditions of employment - was overwhelmingly rejected by workers in December.

SIPTU organiser John King pointed out that workers at the plant were already earning less than the average industrial wage and that the proposals tabled by management were unacceptable.

The closure of Bitech will also have a significant knock-on effect on its suppliers. Mr King added: "This is a devastating blow to the workers and to the Louth area." SIPTU has vowed to explore whatever opportunities exist to may save as many of the jobs as possible.



HAITI SOLIDARITY



CTH (Confederation des travailleurs Haitiens) management team, pictured centre, with general secretary Loulou Chery and trade unionists from Dominican Republic



Trade union volunteers prepare bags of food aid for distribution

PICTURE SPECIAL

THESE pictures show that medical supplies and food aid from the international trade union movement is making a real difference on the ground in Haiti.

Thanking the ITUC for providing emergency aid, local trade union leader Loulou Chery said: "It's important that the solidarity that has grown out of the emergency continues."



Dominican trade unionists unload supplies donated by the ITUC



Medical staff at CTH's training centre, Port au Prince

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

TRÓCAIRE EMERGENCY APPEAL

HAITI: OVER 50,000 PEOPLE HAVE DIED AND THOUSANDS MORE ARE HOMELESS



Picture: Reuters / Alan Heston

Urgent help is needed to support the millions of people affected by the recent earthquake in Haiti. We are working with international and local partners to provide food, shelter, clean water and other basic needs. We will also continue to fund long-term development projects throughout the region.



**HELP THE PEOPLE OF HAITI
PLEASE MAKE A DONATION NOW**

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Visit www.trocaire.org

UNISON launches public services defence drive

UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis has slammed any attempt by the Stormont Executive to slash its health, social care and education budgets.

He made the comments during a visit to the union's Belfast HQ on February 12 – in which he also launched part of a major UK-wide UNISON campaign to defend public services.

Mr Prentis queried why when other governments across Europe were spending more on public services, the local administration should be seeking to cut back on theirs.

He said: "Not only does this not make sense, it is guaranteed to widen inequality in a society which crucially needs world-class public services upon which to build its future."

Pointing to recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation findings that showed growing inequality across the UK, Mr Prentis added: "These findings are at their worst in Northern Ireland where not only are we dealing with a society which has the highest economic inactivity rates in the UK, unem-



UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis during Belfast launch of public services campaign

ployment is growing faster and the level of poverty, particularly child poverty is untenable.

"It is now estimated that half the population exists below an acceptable minimum income."

Against this bleak backdrop, he flagged up UNISON's award-winning West Belfast Greater Shankill project in the health service which helped secure 150 jobs in the sector for local people.

Mr Prentis said: "People who never thought they would get a

chance to prove themselves now speak about a renewed dignity. They report that their children are now seeing hope where before there was none.

"All this for tiny amounts of public funding and an enormous personal contribution from public employers and workers alike.

"In the climate of cutbacks such projects are the very beacons of hope which face extinction."

Mr Prentis warned that it was clear that drastic cuts were to

come and underlined to those gathered at Galway House that there was no guarantee the 'block grant' from the UK Treasury would be protected or uplifted.

"This places the very fabric of society in Northern Ireland in jeopardy and is guaranteed to deepen economic recession."

But he vowed UNISON would be at the forefront in defending public services and the role they play "in creating a fairer and more equal society".

'At our absolute best when backs are to the wall'



UNISON regional secretary Patricia McKeown spoke about members' fears for the future in the face of swingeing cuts to public services.

She said: "It's characteristic about our members that they are even more worried for the people they serve – the young, the elderly and the frail."

Ms McKeown claimed anxiety levels were skyrocketing and this was "manifesting itself in a way we haven't seen in the last 40 years".

She said: "We are seeing members of staff from management grades through professional grades right through to frontline service actually breaking down.

"People are moved to distress and tears be-

cause they are not able to deliver what needs to be delivered in this society – and yet we know worse is to come."

But Ms McKeown pointed out she had a firm belief in how UNISON members would respond to attacks on health, education and in the voluntary sector.

She added: "We've lived through this before, but we at our absolute best when our backs are to the wall.

"When people dare to disrespect the members of this union and the vital services they provide, that is when UNISON finds all of the inner strength, all of the additional resources needed to take the campaign on."

Pictures: UNISON



CONGRESS is spearheading a Pensioners' Manifesto, to focus on issues affecting older people in Northern Ireland, in the run-up to the UK General Election, slated for April or May. The drive – in partnership with Age Sector Platform, Age Concern, Help the Aged and the National Pensioners' Convention – highlights a series of key demands. These are: ● A commitment to the eradication of pen-

sioner poverty; ● An increase in the winter fuel grant to reflect the high cost of home heating; ● The provision of improved access to quality social and long-term care to maintain dignity in advanced years; ● An end to unfair discrimination where it adversely affects the opportunities, goods and services available to older people. Sign petition at www.ipetitions.com/petition/nipensionersmanifesto/

Pictures: Kevin Cooper



UNIVERSITY and College Union regional secretary Monica Gallagher, above, speaks at the Northern Ireland launch of the union's UK-wide Make Education Count campaign last month.

The event, supported by the UTU and the INTO, was held in Stormont's Long Gallery on January 20.

Invitees were given a statistical breakdown outlining how some parts of Northern Ireland lagged behind others when it comes to educational success.

UCU's Jim McKeown said "Educational profiles for Northern Ireland's 18 political constituencies indicate that where you live in Northern Ireland affects your educational outcomes. UCU – supported by UTU and INTO – wants to work with political representatives to address these educational imbalances and inequalities at a local level."

UTU chief Avril Hall Callaghan, below left, and Frank Bunting, below right, also spoke at the meeting.



WARNINGS ON 'BRAIN DRAIN'

THE Government has been accused of adopting a 'Yellow Pack' approach to 2,000 highly-qualified research staff at Irish universities.

Flagging up the prevalence of short term contracts and low pay, SIPTU Education Branch organiser Chris Rowland said: "The Irish Government policy of creating a 'Knowledge Economy' is seriously undermined by its 'Yellow Pack' attitude towards talented young researchers.

"They are expected to compete with the world's best while denied any security of employment.

"This approach is not only counter-productive but unsustainable if we are to attract and retain our best people.

"They are also affected by the severe pay cuts and pension levies inflicted on other public servants, although it is none of them will receive pensions based on their current contracts."

She claimed most researchers on temporary contracts earn between €30,000 and €40,000.

Ms Rowland added: "As a result of its short sighted approach, the Government is in danger of creating a brain drain that will be hard to reverse.

"These researchers are, for the most part, on fixed term and/or contracts of indefinite duration that are dependent on external programmes subjected to regular reviews.

"Government policy is actually ensuring that fourth level research is not a career option for these talented young people and its short sightedness will have damaging long term consequences.

"Current policy appears to be based on the belief that world class research can be achieved without consideration for researchers as people who need reasonable working conditions and job security to perform at their best.

"Instead they are treated as a luxury that the state cannot really afford, while at the same time the taxpayer is supposed provide billions to bail out bank and pay their executives top dollar for anything but world class performances."

LEADERS of the Republic's four teachers and lecturers unions met last month to review work to rule directives – the first phase of a combined drive against public service cuts.

The directives, issued by INTO, ASTI, IFUT and TUI, cover parent teacher meetings and staff meetings after school hours and the taking on of additional responsibilities.

They also cover duties where promoted posts have been suppressed, in-service education without substitute cover and the rolling back of some changes made under recent national agreements.

Following the January 25 discussions, a spokesperson said: "Members of all the unions are extremely angry and frustrated at the effect of the pay cuts and the unions are determined to respond to this."

THE Association of Teachers and Lecturers has warned a generation of young people could miss out on the chance of a university education if swingeing cuts are implemented.

The warning followed comments made last month by David Lammy, Minister of State for Innovation, Universities and

Skills, in which he played down the impact such cuts would have on the sector.

ATL general secretary Mary Boustead said: "We don't believe David Lammy's reassurances that the scale of cuts being considered in higher education can be made through efficiency savings.

"There is a real risk that a generation of young peo-

ple will miss out on the opportunity to go to university.

"It seems that when it comes to cutbacks there is less government concern about academics leaving UK universities to work in Europe or the USA than there was about bankers decamping overseas if their bonuses were cut, although the risk is greater."

Trade Union TV



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