

THE

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UNION POST

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FEBRUARY 2011

ELECTION 2011

STRONGER TOGETHER
CONGRESS
Irish Congress of Trade Unions



VOTE FOR JOBS AND GROWTH

HERE'S OUR FIVE POINT PLAN

- 1 RENEGOTIATE IMF/EU DEAL**
- 2 CREATE JOBS, PROTECT JOBS**
- 3 PROTECT PUBLIC SERVICES**
- 4 PROTECT INCOMES**
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'Brave' nurses rally outside Health HQ

THOUSANDS of nurses and midwives have marched to the Department of Health headquarters in Dublin to show their fury at the decision to phase out pay for students working on rostered placement.

Though Health Minister Mary Coughlan has announced a review of the decision, no commitment has been given to reverse it.

Speaking before the February 16 march and rally, INMO general secretary Liam Doran described the move as "wrong and fundamentally

flawed" and that it should immediately be reversed "without equivocation".

The noisy and colourful rally outside the Department of Health offices at Hawkins House was addressed by union officials, student nurse representatives and a speaker from the Union of Students in Ireland.

SIPTU nursing official Louise O'Reilly praised the crowd for their bravery.

She told them: "The people who took the decision to introduce slave labour into our health service are hiding be-

hind a now discredited government.

"They are cowards and you today have shown that you are brave and you are prepared to fight."

Ms O'Reilly reminded them politicians who refused to pledge to reverse the move would be punished by nurses and midwives at the polls.

In his address to the rally, Mr Doran claimed what he described as the nursing family potentially extended to 200,000 voters and predicted that this would influence the outcome of the election.



Nursing a real grievance: INMO student nurses on the February 16 demo

Pictures: INMO

Lessons from the Eircom 'debacle'

CONGRESS has insisted the privatisation of Eircom in 1999 ranked as the "biggest single economic mistake" made by an Irish government – at least until the "disastrous" blanket bank guarantee of September 2008.

The claim was made in a major new Congress report *Privatisation: Learning From The Eircom Debacle*.

Its authors warn that the privatisation of public assets can lead to a massive pay-day for a few while the vast majority lose out.

"The scale of money involved in privatisation can be so large that even a small shaving off the margin can give huge sums to 'insiders'."

The report points out that one

change in ownership at Eircom cost more than €200m in transaction costs – €240m in today's prices.

It also underlines how "popular capitalism" was killed off in Ireland in large part because of the losses incurred by small scale investors in the venture.

"The privatisation of what was once Ireland's largest company failed to deliver on its promise of 'popular capitalism' – half a million investors lost one-third of their money and our telecom sector fell behind the rest of

the industrial world."

Describing 'share options' generally as a "great confidence trick" imposed on stakeholders by executives and boards, the report's authors add: "These can make top executives seriously rich within a few years for simply doing their job."

"It was share options which were the perverse incentive for bad management during the boom, especially in the banks."



The authors also demolish the myth that private sector is better than public sector and claim was "cruelly exposed" in the banking collapse where finance houses were "run into the ground" by "an incompetent elite".

Describing the full privatisation of Eircom as "a major mistake of the Fianna Fail/PD government," the report concluded that "it would be a foolish government that fails to learn the lesson of the [Eircom] debacle."

"But we have had some very foolish governments in recent times..."

<http://www.ictu.ie/publications/fulllist/learning-from-the-eircom-debacle/>

JOBS & GROWTH MUST BE PRIORITIES ICTU SETS OUT KEY POLL ISSUES



JOBS and growth are the key issues in the general election, Congress has claimed.

Setting out an alternative strategy for economic recovery, general secretary David Begg warned that attempts to meet the 3% deficit by 2014 were "economically self-defeating and almost certain to thwart a return to growth."

He was speaking at the February 15 launch in Dublin of Congress' election document *A Better, Fairer Way to Recovery*.

Mr Begg insisted a continuation of the same austerity policies by a new government would have the same disastrous results.

He said: "Four austerity budgets have sucked €20.6 billion out of the economy. And the result? More people out of work, a higher

deficit and the country forced into the arms of the IMF.

"Where is the evidence that more of the same would lead to a different outcome?"

He insisted any new government would have to make jobs a priority and find a way to "lift the debt of private banks off the back of taxpayers".

Mr Begg said we needed to create space in which growth could take hold, by extending the time-frame for fixing the public finances to 2017.

He also warned that a "clearance sale of state assets to pay off bank debt" would mean "surrendering our capacity to restart the economy".

Mr Begg added: "We need to start seeing state companies as potential agents of recovery."

http://www.betterfairerway.org/download/pdf/congress_general_election_2011.pdf

BACKING FOR HOTEL DISPUTE WORKERS



Picture: Tom Clancy/SIPTU

CONGRESS has called on those TDs who voted to cut the minimum wage to explain their reasoning to striking Davenport Hotel workers.

Five employees, all members of SIPTU from Lithuania and Poland, are in dispute with management at the Dublin hotel after they were taken off the work roster for refusing to sign new contracts that cut their pay by almost €1 an hour.

In the Dail debate on the cut last December, Finance Minister Brian Lenihan told TDs: "I want to challenge the idea that persons already employed on the minimum wage will see their income drop automatically."

"Anyone already working under a contract of employment that sets wages at or above the national minimum wage is entitled to continue to be paid those wages unless otherwise agreed between both the employer and the employee concerned."

This point was echoed by Labour Affairs Minister Dara Callery who said: "The legal advice is... that an employee working under a contract of employment setting wages at or above the national minimum wage is already entitled under that contract to continue to be paid that wage unless the terms are altered by agreement between both the employer and employee."

Meanwhile, a succession of politicians, well-wishers and supporters have joined striking workers on the picket line.

On February 21, Labour's finance spokesperson Joan Burton speaking to workers from the steps of the Davenport Hotel, promised her party would restore the national minimum wage to €8.65 an hour if returned to office.

Ms Burton said: "A reduction of up to €40 a week is a lot for someone on the minimum wage."

"These women are anxious to get back to work. They are not responsible for the downturn and the cut of €1 an hour in pay, plus the universal social charge, is a lot harsher for them than a similar cut would be for higher paid workers."

Earlier, Fine Gael leader Enda Kenny had visited the picket line and made a similar pledge.

Ms Burton said that when she had challenged the Mr Lenihan about the position of existing workers on the minimum wage when the legislation was introduced.

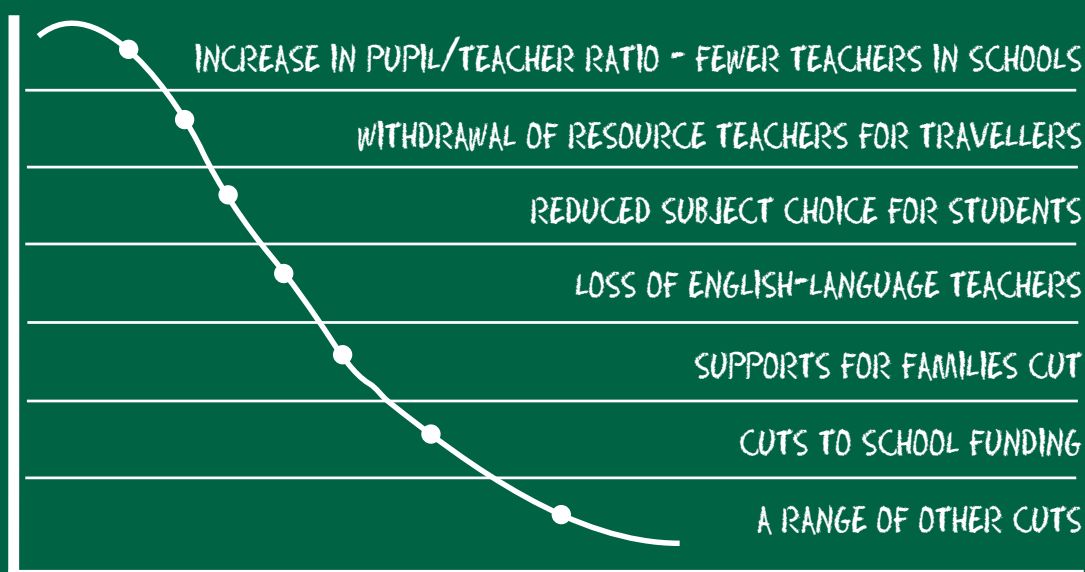
She added that the minister had been "absolutely adamant" in the Dail that existing workers on the minimum wage would not be affected but that "this is exactly what has happened here".

Sinn Féin's equality spokesperson Aengus O Snodaigh also offered support to the workers and joined the picket line on February 21.

Do you want to know who voted FOR minimum wage cut. Here's who: <http://www.betterfairerway.org/minimumwage/>

In 2007, Ireland was investing less of its wealth in education than all but three of 28 OECD countries*

Since then second-level schools have had to cope with:





Policy call: Seamus Dooley

Reforming Fol needs cross-party consensus

THE NUJ has welcomed commitments given by both Fine Gael and Labour to reform the Republic's Freedom of Information (Amendment) Act.

But regional secretary Seamus Dooley called on Fianna Fail chief Micheal Martin to revisit his party's Fol policy in order to set up a political consensus to change the current legislation.

Speaking at a meeting of the union's Dublin Publications and Public Relations branch on February 7, Mr Dooley described the emasculation of the original Freedom of Information Act as political vandalism that ran contrary to the spirit of open government.

He said: "The original Fol Act was a model which earned Ireland international praise.

"Freedom of Information legislation is for all citizens, it is not just for journalists. It also represents an ethos of government and the actions of the Fianna Fáil/PD Government in emasculating the original Act served to undermine public trust and confidence."

Mr Dooley noted that Mr Martin had "genuflected" towards the Fol Act at the launch of his party's manifesto but had failed to address the issue of charges or of the extension of the legislation to cover NAMA and other state agencies.

He added: "I would like to see all-party agreement on the issue of transparency in politics and in this regard welcome the commitments of Labour and Fine Gael to restoring the original Act."

Mr Dooley added that he also welcomed the support of Sinn Féin for reformed Fol legislation.

COMMUNICATIONS

Feedback 'positive' on CWU site revamp

FEEDBACK on the redesign of the new CWU website has been very positive to date, sources at the union have claimed.

The union's NEC tasked the CWU Organising Committee with spearheading a site revamp at the beginning of last year.

The brief was to build in more interactivity without sacrificing the amount of available information – with the new site incorporating a series of established pages, such as the general secretary's circulars.

The revamped site boasts a number of new sections – one of which is specifically for activists.

A CWU source said: "This section was designed as a tool for existing activists and for those who are considering becoming more involved in union activities."

The "Toolkits" page contains a wealth of information for union reps, health and safety reps and even organising reps.

"Having this information on the site for members and potential members alike demystifies a great deal of what work is involved in being a union activist, and will hopefully encourage individuals to become more involved in their union."

Members will already be familiar with much of the content on the site, such as the circulars, *The Union Post* and *Connect* journal, along with news about events and campaigns.

The source added: "A new function has been added that allows users to view a digital version of both *Connect* and *The Union Post*."

"The facility to download a PDF copy of these journals is also still available."

Two years worth of past issues are also available for both *Connect* and *The Union Post*.

It is understood the new site will be updated regularly by Head Office



Facebook pages 'essential tool'

THE CWU has teamed the redesign of its websites with the setting up of two Facebook pages – one for the union (CWU Ireland) and another for its Youth Committee (CWU Youth Committee Ireland).

A union source said: "The use of social networking to reach people has become an essential tool for all organisations. It al-

lows a level of engagement with users not facilitated on most websites through such features as wall posts and discussions."

The CWU has invited members to visit its Facebook pages and is hoping it serves as a useful platform for members to share information with the union and other members.

staff. The source added: "The 'latest news', 'events' and 'campaigns' pages will be used in conjunction with one another to inform and co-ordinate any campaigns, events, demos, etc the union is involved in."

"We'd recommend that members check these pages regularly, as the website will be a vital resource for keeping members informed of union activities in between issues of the *Connect* journal."

THE CWU is now to redesign its call centre website. It is understood the move to develop a separate site reflects the growing number of members of the union employed at call or contact centres.

A CWU source said: "These workers face very specific challenges and the site will be tailored to provide information relevant to those members – and, of course, potential members – working in call or contact centres."

<http://www.cwu.ie/>

MEDIA MATTERS

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State companies

Where the parties stand...

LABOUR

The party is committed to state enterprise and it will use the commercial state companies as a key part of the recovery. It opposes the privatisation of these companies.

Stimulating the Economy

The party's proposed **Strategic Investment Bank** would play a key role in stimulating economic activity. It would:

"Be a key lender to small and medium sized businesses as well as innovative firms. It would also work closely with the Enterprise Agencies to facilitate high-potential firms."

"... support investment in large infrastructure and infrastructure-related projects."

Job Creation

Labour is proposing to establish a Jobs Fund of €500m to grow employment and skills training. It sees clear potential for job creation in the energy sector:

"Labour believes that the right energy policies could deliver 80,000 jobs in various sectors. For example, a National Retrofit Programme of the estimated 1.2 million homes in need of improving their energy efficiency has the potential to employ up to 30,000 construction workers."

Equally, a focus on Innovation & Research would involve merging existing bodies into:

"the Innovation Strategy Agency (ISA)..... whose role will be to stimulate technology-enabled innovation in the areas which offer the greatest scope for boosting growth and productivity."

The party advocates:

"a new industrial policy that will promote and support a number of strategic sectors of the economy, including, but not confined to the following: Cleantech, Creative Industries, Education, Internet Services/ Cloud – Computing, Food, Tourism, Retail Sector."

Non-Commercial Semi State Bodies (NCSSBs)

The Labour manifesto pledges a "spending and waste" audit of the sector:

"...each body being required to justify its continued existence outside of its parent department. Remaining NCSSBs will be required to be properly accountable to the Oireachtas. Labour is proposing a series of amalgamations of NCSSBs that will both save money and achieve greater policy coherence. These include utilities regulation, equality, tourism, industrial development, broadcasting and housing policy."

CONCLUSION

Labour is supportive of state companies and says that it will oppose privatisation. It also states that it will utilise these major companies in a drive to bring Ireland out of recession.

FINE GAE

Fine Gael is committed to expanding some state utilities (possibly with private involvement) but it does support full or partial privatisation of these companies.

Investment in State Companies...

"Under Fine Gael's NewERA plan, streamlined and restructured semi-State companies will invest an additional €7 billion, over and above current plans, over the next four years in 'next generation' infrastructures in energy, broadband, forestry and water."

...financed by Privatisation

"Over time, we...propose to finance the investment programme from the sale of certain State assets. We will only sell State assets, however, if the sale coheres with the following principles:

"The asset is not a monopoly or of strategic importance to the state. We will not repeat the mistake of Eircom by selling off a strategic asset which is a natural monopoly. As a result, we would retain ESB Networks and Eirgrid (which we will merge) and the national electricity grid in majority state ownership along with Bord Gais Networks, Coillte and Bord na Mona."

Worth noting

The Fine Gael manifesto says a "trade sale" of Bord Gais Energy, ESB Power Generation and ESB Supply could raise €4bn, quoting an estimate from Davy Stockbrokers.

Even if the amount raised matched that figure, it would be a once off sum that the state would receive in return for a loss of strategic control

over key areas of the economy.

The manifesto explicitly states that Fine Gael "sees no impediment to selling":

- Bord Gais Energy
- ESB Power Generation (excluding the hydro plants)
- The ESB Customer Supply Companies
- RTE NL (the network that transmits and distributes RTE output - TV and Radio)

Privatising Public Transport

Fine Gael takes a similar attitude to public transport networks. The manifesto says delivery of transport services will be opened up by:

- *"mandating the National Transport Regulator to open up bus routes in Dublin and elsewhere to competitive tendering from alternative providers;"*
- *"opening up the use of publicly owned bus stations to facilitate competition and user choice;"*
- *"commissioning an examination of the feasibility and benefits of terminal competition at Dublin Airport as recommended by the ESRI."*

Local Authority Waste Services

The party wants to open up waste services to bids from the private sector:

"And also making all local authority waste services contestable, and consistent with a National Strategy"

Privatisation in the Public Services

The party manifesto also sees "the opportunity for private tender to deliver back-office activities within the public service."

It continues:

"In each of these, where Fine Gael develops under Reinventing Government, consolidated Public Service delivery, a private sector bid will be developed for some of the service."

Plans for other State Bodies

Fine Gael will appoint a committee to examine the cost base of the semi-States and to recommend ways to reduce costs and improve efficiencies in each company.

The manifesto also says that a Fine Gael Gov-



and privatisation we look at the manifestos

ernment would merge the Competition Authority, the National Consumer Agency (NCA), the Communications Regulator (ComReg), the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) and the Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) into a powerful new Competition and Utilities Commission.

CONCLUSION

While Fine Gael will invest in utility networks under its NewERA holding company – specifically in the areas of water, broadband and energy – the party plans the privatisation of state assets, including key state companies. Indeed, party policy demands a large amount of money from privatisation in order to keep direct taxation “low” for high earners or to pay off national debt and the bank bailout.

FIANNA FAIL

Once committed to state enterprise, Fianna Fail has privatised many state companies and in Government it would be likely to privatise more. This is clear from the loaded terms of reference it set for the Review Group on State Assets. The group – chaired by Colm McCarthy – is expected to report soon. Those terms are worth quoting in full:

1. “To consider the potential for asset disposals in the public sector, including commercial state bodies, in view of the indebtedness of the State.

2 “To draw up a list of possible asset disposals.

3 “To assess how the use and disposition of such assets can best help restore growth and contribute to national investment priorities.

4 “To review where appropriate, relevant investment and financing plans, commercial practices and regulatory requirements affecting the use of such assets in the national interest.”

They are no less than a charter for privatisation.

Over the years Fianna Fail policy has undertaken a huge programme of privatisation: in Government the party has sold off Eircom, Irish Ferries, Irish Sugar, Irish Life, Irish Steel, B&I, INPC, ACC/ICC and Aer Lingus.

But it was the Fianna Fail/ PD privatisation of

Eircom that was the real failure. That sorry tale of asset stripping and value destruction is outlined in Learning from the Eircom Debacle, which has published by Congress. It is available at: <http://www.ictu.ie/publications/fullist/learning-from-the-eircom-debacle/>

CONCLUSION

The Fianna Fail manifesto is poor on detail with regard to the future of state companies. In the past, under Sean Lemass, the party built up this key indigenous commercial sector and saw it playing a major role in the Irish economy. However, since its ideological ‘capture’ by the Progressive Democrats in the 1990s, that attitude has changed dramatically. In addition, the terms of reference for the McCarthy group betray a clear preference for further privatisation of state assets and it can only be assumed that Fianna Fail would maintain that stance, if in government.

SINN FEIN

While it has published few specifics on the role of the commercial state sector, in general the party has been supportive of these important indigenous companies.

Sinn Féin advocates the transfer of €7billion from the National Pension Reserve Fund (NPRF) for a state-wide investment programme (stimulus).

The manifesto makes reference to growing the Agri Food Sector and improving communications infrastructure:

“Augment the current National Broadband Scheme to provide a fibre-optic island-wide network. Fast-track the €435million spend so that it is delivered beginning in 2011 instead of 2013.”

The manifesto also says that:

“Sinn Féin would reverse cuts to public services and social welfare introduced in Budget 2011.”

CONCLUSION

Sinn Féin is also thin on detail on state companies for Election 2011. However, in general the party has been supportive of the sector.

THE GREEN PARTY

While the Green Party is supportive of the public transport sector – which contains a number of state companies – the party supported the loaded terms of reference set for the Review Group on State Assets. It seems to favour ‘competition’ rather than public control of key commercial assets.

The party has a comprehensive policy on Energy, which includes transport. This focuses on alternative energy production and use and would have major implications for the ESB and Bord Gais, although there are few specifics spelt out.

The Green Party’s strong pro-public transport bias would thus be supportive of many state companies. For example, it proposes to:

“Extend the proposed orbital Metro eastwards from Ballymun to Baldoyle to serve this rapidly developing northern fringe area of the city; Extend the city centre Metro south from St Stephens Green to connect at Beechwood station from which point the Luas and Metro trams would share Luas Line B; Extend the Metro south from Cherrywood to follow a direct route to Bray.....”

The party appears to opt for “small co-operative forestry enterprises” that would perhaps challenge Coillte “as part of a decentralised state system.”

CONCLUSION

The Green Party manifesto contains few specifics on plans for state companies. Nonetheless, the policies pursued by the party while in Government – light touch regulation, low personal and corporate taxation, the disastrous bank guarantee – have caused enormous harm.



<http://www.betterfairerway.org/betterfairerway/statecompaniesprivatisation.html>

Fuel debt is major worry for elderly

FUEL debt is a major problem confronting older people in Ireland North and South, experts have warned.

Delegates to a Fuel Poverty conference at Dublin Castle earlier this month were told that between 1,500 to 2,000 excess winter deaths had been recorded across the island in 2009 – one of the highest death rates in Europe.

Though spread across all age groups, the elderly are the most vulnerable because they are most affected by cardio-vascular and respiratory illnesses.

The February 7 conference, organised by Energy Action, was told that though some 90% of the over-65s owned their own homes, many were still at high risk of fuel poverty as they tended to be asset-rich and cash-poor.

On fuel use, 9% of older people in urban areas lacked central heating rising to a staggering 21.5% in rural areas.

Emer Begley, a social inclusion and policy officer with Age Action, said: "Many households affected by fuel poverty are characterised by older people living alone, often widowed, enduring low housing standards, low income and in buildings with low occupancy rates."

"Older people are debt averse and tend to respond to fuel poverty by rationing energy use, as they do other household expenditure, leading to an enhanced health risk."

"Nevertheless, many find themselves sliding into debt."

"As a result of these problems Ireland experiences high excess death rates among older people."

"The risk is heightened by conditions such as cardio-vascular illness, related to outdoor cold and respiratory problems, related to low temperatures indoors."

Ms Begley claimed energy poverty policy must be linked to housing, social protection, finance, energy and health strategies. She added: "We must learn more about energy use behaviour, particularly following implementation of energy efficiency schemes, increase people's awareness of energy use and target households that require support."

DESIGN

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HAITI ONE YEAR ON



Sr Anna Finnegan, of the Medical Missionaries of Mary with Trocaire's Sally O'Neill



Trocaire emergency officer Helen Nic an Rí with six-year-old Christine Lassesse

Trocaire praises union members' generosity

TROCAIRE has thanked trade unionists North and South for their generous donations following last year's Haitian earthquake.

Overall, Irish people gave more than €8m/£6.9m to the Irish charity's emergency appeal.

The January 12 quake killed 316,000 people, injured another 300,000, and left a further million people homeless.

Trocaire regional manager Eithne McNulty said: "Trade unionists joined the rest of the population across the island in responding with great generosity - either through individual donations or through branch collections. It was a really marvellous effort."

Fiona Cook, a programme worker for Trocaire in a devastated Port au Prince, said the impact of the quake

is still very visible one year on with many thousands still living in tents or under plastic sheeting.



She added: "In the coming year, Trocaire will continue to support the rebuilding of safe housing, as well as addressing the psychological impact of the tragedy on the population. We will also turn our attention to those problems faced by the country which preceded the earthquake, such as deforestation and the need to address chronic poverty, particularly in rural areas."

"Of course, the lives lost on January 12, 2010 can never be replaced, but we will strive to improve conditions in Haiti and to reduce the vulnerability of Haitians, and thereby hopefully preventing a tragedy of this scale from ever occurring again."



Students at the Ecole Anne Marie Javouhey in Port au Prince

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u8fmNfuBPm4&feature=player_embedded

ERO review chance to halt attack on wages

CONGRESS has claimed the ERO review announced in the Dail earlier this month is an opportunity to stop the attack on wages in its tracks – and to re-focus the debate around jobs and growth.

General secretary David Begg insisted the outgoing administration had made the attack on lower and middle incomes "a policy priority" with "disastrous results".

He said: "They have deflated the economy to the point of depression and cost us thousands of jobs."

"The attack on the REAs and EROs is part of that campaign and a clear line can be drawn between the cut in public sector salaries, the cut in welfare rates, the cut in the minimum wage and the attempts to demolish key wage setting mechanisms."

"The review now provides an opportunity to end this policy and start focusing on jobs and growth."

Mr Begg also queried the involvement of EU institutions in the process, pointing out that EU treaty law specifically forbade their involvement in wage setting, at a national level.

Jobless fact 'is shocking'

CONGRESS economic advisor Paul Sweeney has blasted the "shocking" fact that more than 26% of skilled workers in the South "have no work when so much needs to be done".

He made his comments after new figures revealed a marginal drop in the Republic's unemployment rate, down from 13.6% to 13.4%.

Despite this small dip in the seasonally-adjusted figures, Mr Sweeney said: "A staggering 115,351 of our skilled craft workers are 'signing on' when Ireland still has major infrastructural deficits."

"The cold fact is that there are a frightening 273,000 fewer people at work today in Ireland compared to 2007. Furthermore, net emigration will be more than 60,000 this year."

Pointing out that jobs were "the biggest challenge" for any new administration, he added: "It [new government] must stop deflating the economy and invest €2bn a year from the Pension Reserve into the real economy for the next three years and renegotiate the so-called 'bailout' of the private sector banks."

Pictures: Jeannie O'Brien/Trocaire



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UNION RIGHTS DISPUTE WISCONSIN



No you're not, Scott



Thousands of University of Wisconsin students skipped lectures to join rally

TENS of thousands of trade unionists, students and their supporters have taken to the streets of Madison – Wisconsin's state capital – in a series of marches over the last few weeks in protest at an unprecedented attack on collective bargaining rights.

It follows moves by state governor Scott Walker to strip government employees of their bargaining rights as well as effectively slashing take-home pay by around 7% through increased health insurance and pension contributions.

The proposal also seeks to end government collection of union subs and requires unions to hold recertification votes each year.

Gov Walker has reportedly insisted there is "really no room to negotiate".

The protests – organised by a coalition of unions, including American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees, the Wisconsin Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers-Wisconsin – have galvanised government workers across the state.

AFSCME president Gerald McEn-

tee dubbed the Wisconsin fight against Gov Walker's so-called 'Budget Repair Bill' "a ground-zero" struggle for organised labour.

An estimated 55,000 demonstrators rallied outside and inside the Capitol building on February 19.

Democratic senators are reported to have left the state to deny the Wisconsin state Senate a quorum needed to consider the controversial proposal.

It is also feared the dispute could spill across state borders in the coming months.

Other Republican-dominated states are thought to be



Gov Scott Walker

keeping a close eye on events in Wisconsin.

Prof William Gould, a specialist in labour law, said he was "sure" Republican governors in other states would seek to "heap the entire burden of the financial crisis on public employees and public employees unions."



The balloon goes up: See how protestors inside the Capitol building in Madison, Wisconsin, above, gave their 'People Power' message, left, some wings...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2X5PVNu1in8>

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Squeezed between price hikes & pay cuts

CONGRESS has claimed the latest rise in inflation in the Republic is part of a "very worrying upward trend" showing the government strategy of driving down wages is wrong and imposes real hardship on many people.

Economic advisor Paul Sweeney said: "People are now being squeezed between the pincers of falling pay and remorseless price rises. Yet the government continues to attack incomes."

"They used to justify this with the claim that prices were falling sharply. But this is the sixth straight month of rising prices."

Mortgage interest hikes, a rise in public transport prices, a jump in commodity prices – in particular oil and food – have all contributed to the remorseless rise in prices.

Mr Sweeney added: "And the government's contribution to this has been cuts in welfare and rising taxes. The heartless cut in the minimum wage must be reversed immediately by a new government."

He said the new administration must also act to reduce 'administrative prices' – prices such as VAT and other charges that it has control over.

Mr Sweeney warned: "The expected rise in interest rates by the ECB later this year will further exacerbate this trend. The fall in disposable Irish incomes will depress domestic demand and the economic recovery further."



Taking the biscuit: George 'Scissorhands' Osborne accepts his prize jammie dodger earlier this month

Osborne scoops top 'tax shirker' gong

CHANCELLOR George Osborne has been named the UK's worst tax shirker after winning more than a third of the vote in an online poll.

Osborne – nominated in the competition for his failure to abolish the domicile rule, dubbed a "tax avoiders' charter by the Tax Justice Network – was awarded his top prize, a giant 'jammie dodger', at a special ceremony on January 31.

Representatives from the contest organisers – False

Economy, the Public and Commercial Services union, including its general secretary Mark Serwotka, the TUC and anti-poverty charity War On Want – joined activists from UK Uncut to present the award at the Conservative party's Millbank HQ in London.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said: "Millionaire George Osborne is the worthy winner of a contest to highlight the unfairness of a system which allows the very wealthy to

get away with depriving our public finances of billions of pounds while the rest of us are told there is no alternative but to slash public services."

Clifford Singer, False Economy campaign director, added: "As the cuts bite, more of us are asking why the very wealthiest are allowed to live their lives to a different set of rules to everyone else – and the finger is pointing at George Osborne."

Check out the top ten shirkers at <http://falseeconomy.org.uk/tax>

IoD's attack on collective bargaining blasted

NIPSA has claimed a proposal to abolish collective bargaining in health and education would wreak "havoc and chaos" in both sectors.

It was just one of 24 suggested "policy changes" in an Institute of Directors 'Freebie Growth' report published on February 7.

Other proposals included abolishing the right to request flexible working and cutting the ratio of public spending to 35% of UK GDP by 2020.

NIPSA general secretary Brian Campfield claimed the IoD was proposing to increase productivity in these important sectors through attacking the rights of workers to be represented collectively.

He said: "In other words, the IoD see trade unions as standing up for workers' rights, and they need to attack the unions in order to depress wages and other terms of conditions of employment of workers."

"The IoD statement itself is suffi-



Campfield: 'Havoc & chaos'



Templeman: 'Growth boosting'

cient proof that trade unions are essential for the protection of workers in all sectors of the economy, both public and private.

"The proposal, if implemented, would in fact damage productivity

and cause havoc and chaos in the health and education sectors."

Defending the proposals, IoD chief Miles Templeman said the report's authors had identified "growth-boosting measures that will cost taxpayers little or nothing" and urged coalition government ministers to "seize the opportunity" outlined in the paper.

However, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber dubbed the 24-point plan "a Thatcherite fantasy".

He said: "Only in the IoD's Thatcherite fantasy world will measures that reduce training lead to economic growth."

"Ending national collective bargaining in the NHS would result in increased costs and bureaucracy,

entrench regional inequality and destroy robust pay systems that have helped ensure women receive fair and equal pay."

"The IoD's real aim is a race to the bottom for pay and conditions in the NHS, and would contribute nothing toward improving productivity or efficiency."

Mr Barber added: "Employers shouldn't see the right to request flexible working as a cost but as sound business sense."

"Workplaces where employees can alter their working patterns to fit around their busy lives and commitments outside the office will feel less stressed and anxious, and so be more committed and productive at work."

THE Irish Airline Pilots Association has expressed its "deep and sincere condolences" to the families and friends of air crew and passengers killed and injured in the February 10 air crash at Cork Airport.

The union also thanked emergency services personnel for their work at the scene and offered "the full expertise and co-operation of its members" into any probe into the causes of the crash.

PHOTOLINE

Experienced photographer specialises in campaigning photography for trade unions and NGOs. For conferences, campaign launches, street demos, May Day parades, magazine and PR photography. Shared commission rates for ICTU conferences.

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Robin Hood Tax campaigner outside bank in Glasgow earlier this month

PAY FAIR SHARE BANKERS TOLD

A 'ROBIN Hood' transaction tax on banks could raise up to \$400bn (£250bn/€300bn) a year to help protect jobs and public services, campaigners have claimed.

It came as a series of actions – timed to coincide with the meeting earlier this month of G20 finance ministers in Paris – was staged across the world to highlight the need for the levy.

Many of the campaigners donned Robin Hood-style hats and tights in a number of media stunts.

In Spain, bands of 'merrie men' protested in 18 cities across the country, while in Germany, Robin and his chums arrived in a stretch limo and 'gate-crashed' a red carpet ceremony at the Berlin Film Festival.

In Paris, 'Monsieur Robin

des Bois' took centre stage at the launch of a new national campaign at the city's old Stock Exchange building, while giant 'final demand' notices were handed in at seven banks across the UK.

Campaigners emphasise that the levy on financial transactions between banks (rather than between banks and High Street customers) is hardly prohibitive and is unlikely to make a dent in finance houses' already massive profits – the tax consists of only a few pence or cents per thousand dollars, euro or pounds traded.

The Robin Hood Tax campaigners have called on countries that levy the tax to keep half of the sum raised for domestic use and split the rest between poverty reduction and tackling climate change.



Picture: Kevin Cooper/Photoline

Campfield: Executive call

NI Executive must take 'robust stand' on cuts issue

NIPSA has called on the Northern Ireland Executive to take "a robust stand" with the UK Coalition Government in defending jobs and services and in better representing the interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

General Secretary Brian Campfield made the comments as more than 250 activists from trade unions and the community sector across Northern Ireland attended a special conference, dubbed 'People's Congress', at the King's Hall, Belfast, on February 5.

Mr Campfield said: "The Northern Ireland Executive must be forced to take a much more robust opposition to the Westminster Government public spending cuts and austerity programme."

"To date, the Northern Ireland political parties have had polite disagreements with the Westminster Coalition Government over the scale and timing of the cuts but are fully co-operating with Secretary of State Owen Paterson to reduce the rate of corporation tax that business pays."

He called on Northern Ireland's politicians to "take their gloves off" and lead an "explicitly critical and high-profile campaign" to press the UK Government to reverse cuts in public spending.

Mr Campfield said: "They should be leading delegations and protests to Downing Street and should be kicking up the biggest row they can."

"Unfortunately, they appear to have surrendered and accepted that there is nothing further that can be done."

"The people of Northern Ireland – especially those in communities most affected by the cuts – must mobilise to force our political representatives to stand up for the people of Northern Ireland rather than sitting comfortably with the UK government."

He added: "We are entitled to expect that our political representatives defend our interests."

The conference, organised by the Northern Ireland Committee of Congress as part of its anti-cuts campaign, heard from a number of speakers, including Queen's University economist Dr Andrew Baker and Prof Eileen Evason of the University of Ulster.

Dr Baker's analysis P12

PCS praises 'inspirational' campaign



Picture: PCS/Jess Hurd

THE Public and Commercial Services union has described as "inspirational" the campaign that forced the UK government to axe its planned privatisation of public forests.

But the PCS warned massive cuts at the Forestry Commission in England and Scotland will severely compromise the organisation's ability to retain a decent forestry estate with protected access and services.

Following last year's spending review, the commission announced plans to cut 500 jobs in England and Edinburgh.

The union – which represents 950 staff at the Forestry Commission – claims it will be impossible to ade-

quately manage publicly-run forests if the cuts go ahead.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka: "The public outcry over the plans to sell off our public forests has been both inspirational and instructive."

"It is clear how much people value our forests as national assets."

"All this could still be under threat however because of the government's ideological choice to slash spending."

"Simply calling off the consultation will not be enough to protect the kind of forests people rightly want, and the government should also now put a stop to the cuts at the commission."

Mark Serwotka:
Sell off outcry

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People's Congress at King's Hall venue

TORY ECONOMIC PLAN RUBBISHED

THE chances of the Tory-led coalition government's economic strategy succeeding are "exceedingly slim", a special ICTU-organised conference in Belfast has been told.

In a key address at the People's Congress event in the King's Hall on February 5, academic Dr Andrew Baker claimed the current policy was based on "fallacious reasoning" and was "utter nonsense".

He told a gathering of trade unionists and community sector representatives from across Northern Ireland that too many people had "too readily" accepted the coalition government's arguments.

But Dr Baker, a political economist at Queen's University, Belfast, said it was important these claims were closely scrutinised – in particular a series of

arguments put forward by Tory policy makers.

The first of these

was the assertion that the UK – like Greece – was risking bankruptcy. In fact, Dr Baker pointed out that there was a gulf of difference between the UK and Greek economies.

The UK – unlike Greece – was not "trapped in a monetary union" and could use exchange rates and interest rates to reduce the cost of the debt.

Also, most of the UK's public debt was owned by UK pension funds "with no interest in destabilising the whole show".

Dr Baker pointed out that the current public debt – 65% of GDP – was not "historically nor comparatively" high.

He told delegates: "For large parts of the 20th century, you had public debt at 100% of GDP... and the UK government never got close to a bankruptcy."

"The amount of public debt across OECD countries as a percentage of GDP is 96%, so the UK is well below the average."

Dr Baker also demolished what he called the "household credit card analogy" which he described as "a favourite of Cameron and Clegg" when they tried "to connect with voters".

This is the argument about balancing the books and making ends meet.

But he pointed out government finances – unlike household finances – followed "trends and cycles".

It was entirely "fatuous", he insisted, to link the two and was also "economically illiterate".

He underlined that tax revenue grows in a boom and shrinks in a slump.

Dr Baker added: "This is exactly as it should be. The government steps in when there is a major downturn and picks up the slack."

Turning to the argument that Labour party spending was responsible for the parlous state of government finances inherited by the coalition, Dr Baker claimed that the deficit was in fact a consequence of falling tax revenue added to the huge bail-out to the banks.

He admitted that the UK's deficit was increasing at a faster rate than other countries in the G7 "but only since the financial crisis broke".

The fact that a quarter of UK tax receipts came from the hard-hit financial services sector meant that "it didn't take a genius to work out the connection".

Because the UK deficit was principally caused by cyclical factors, Dr Baker said it could not shrink the shortfall without growth.

Using the government's own calculations, he claimed 400,000 public sector jobs and 700,000 private sector jobs would go.

The private sector needed to create 2.5m jobs "to fill the hole and reduce the deficit" which was extremely unlikely to happen.

In fact, Dr Baker described the current policy as "macho posturing" and compared it to handing a lump hammer to a child and telling them to use it to fix a problem with a car.

He quipped: "Running round hitting things is likely to make things a lot worse and not solve the problem."

Describing what the Tories were doing to the UK was "a test case... a giant economic experiment", Dr Baker pointed out that austerity measures had never before delivered growth.

He also described the coalition as conducting "a political gamble" in pursuing a cuts policy premised on the fallacy of clearing up "Labour's mess".

Dr Baker concluded that the real tragedy behind the Tory-led strategy was that there was a viable, alternative way out of the crisis.



Demolishing myths: Andrew Baker

Pictures: Kevin Cooper, Photolone

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Amnesty: Activist could still face a forced psych test

UKRAINIAN trade union activist Andrei Bondarenko believes international pressure – including appeals sent by Amnesty International's Urgent Action network – prevented him being forced to undergo a compulsory psychiatric examination in December.

Mr Bondarenko's lawyer lodged an appeal against the forcible examination before the Ukrainian High Court late last year.

Under local legislation, the court is not obliged to notify Mr Bondarenko or his lawyer of the date of the appeal which will be carried out in their absence.

It is understood the trade unionist is still at risk of compulsory examination if the High Court rejects his appeal.

Amnesty International sources have voiced serious doubts that Mr Bondarenko needs a psychiatric assessment – but have said that should an examination take place, it must meet international professional standards as well as being impartial.

The human rights group has called on trade unionists to highlight Mr Bondarenko's case by writing to the Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich as well as prosecutor general Viktor Pshonka and Ombudsperson Nina Karpachova.

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR50/001/2011/en>



Andrei Bondarenko

Picture: Amnesty

ASTI members in Yes vote on Croke

ASTI members have voted to accept the Croke Park Agreement by a two-to-one majority.

The result, revealed on February 8, came after clarification was given in talks between the union and the Department of Education and Skills.

It also follows months of what ASTI described as "intensive discussions" on the details of the Public Service Agreement.

General secretary Pat Kind said: "After a healthy debate and careful consideration of all of the issues, the members have made their decision."



INMO wheels out Trolley Watch app

THE Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation has launched a new app giving access to the latest Trolley Watch figures compiled by the union.

A spokesperson said: "Using the app will allow users to see the total number of patients on trolleys around the country and a breakdown of the numbers for each hospital. A list of closed beds can also be viewed on the app.

"We aim to inform as many people as possible about the trolley situation each day and it is a valuable addition to our Trolley Watch campaign which is followed daily by national and local media, INMO members and the public.

"Downloading the app is simple – go the web-browser on your phone and type <http://m.ino.ie>, then save this page to your home screen."

ICTU launches fair wage site

CONGRESS has launched a support and advisory service to help those affected by the decision to cut the minimum wage in the Republic.

The new service will be provided online at www.fairwage.ie and will also operate a dedicated phone line at 0818 300 900.

Congress legal affairs officer Esther Lynch claimed some employers will try and take advantage of the reduced rate to cut existing workers' wages, even

though this is unlawful.

She said: "The cut of €1 per hour makes no economic sense – it will not save the taxpayer one cent or create one new job."

"It was done for political reasons, to satisfy some of the worst employers in the country and those TDs who supported it should be ashamed."

"The cut needs to be reversed and we are happy all the main opposition parties have committed to reversing it."

"But until a new government does so, there will be some employers who will try to exploit the situation. That is why Congress has set up the new service."

"People who are on the €8.65 per hour rate should be aware that their employer cannot unilaterally cut their wages to the reduced rate of €7.65 per hour. By law, your wages cannot be changed without your consent or agreement."

www.fairwage.ie

STRIKE 25 YEARS ON NUJ chief recalls 'long brutal' year at Wapping

NUJ general secretary Jeremy Dear has paid tribute to "the heroes of Wapping" on the 25th anniversary of the start of the bitter year-long dispute.

On January 24, 1986, Rupert Murdoch's newspaper group moved overnight to a new non-union printworks, leading to the sacking of 5,000 production staff, and sparking a dispute that is widely seen as one of the most traumatic events in media – and trade union – history.

Mr Dear remembered being "literally blooded" as a teenager "one night in 1986 outside Fortress Wapping" as the police were unleashed on strikers and locals alike.

He said: "If the whole trade union movement could replicate the fighting spirit of Wapping today, we might not be facing the job cuts, pay freezes and devastation being wrought on so many of our communities by a new Tory government's cuts."

"While the Wapping strike ended after a long, brutal year, the consequences of Murdoch's actions are still felt in every newsroom, in every media company today."

The introduction of new technology reaped vast profits for media magnates but also destroyed decent working conditions, undermined quality journalism and pared staffing levels back to the bone.

He continued: "The many heroes of Wapping stood against the vision of a compliant, corporate, profit-at-all-costs media. It is a stand a new generation is making again today."

Mr Dear noted that while organising at Wapping remained a challenge for unions, across the industry both the NUJ and Unite had staged what he termed "a post-Wapping comeback".

He added: "Using new recognition laws, we signed hundreds of new agreements, recruited tens of thousands of new workers and began the long haul of addressing the scandal of low pay, long hours and the denial of rights which corporate media demands as it seeks to protect its profits."

"Over the past decade media union members have reorganised – fought, struck, protested, campaigned and organised to resist the corporate media onslaught."



Jimmy Kelly

'Vested interest' slur is slammed

UNITE regional secretary Jimmy Kelly has slammed those politicians and sections of the media that have tarred members of trade unions as some sort of "vested interest" in the election campaign.

He said: "Working people who are members of trade unions make up over 800,000 individuals with individual votes."

"Their interests are those of the vast majority of Irish people. They want security of employment in order to provide for their families."

"They want an equitable system of taxation and social welfare that takes most from those who can best afford it and gives most to those in greatest need."

"They want an Ireland that does not send the best and brightest of its younger generations to the four corners of the Earth."

Mr Kelly described characterisation from some quarters of trade unionists as a "vested interest" that needs to be "dealt with" as "insulting" and



John Douglas & Jack O'Connor "damaging to the whole of society"

He added: "Trade union membership is a right enjoyed by working people throughout the free world. The rights which Irish people have to be represented in discussion and negotiation with their employers are less than those in the UK and the US, despite years of supposedly equal 'social partnership'."

"That needs to change for a fair and equal society, to give individuals greater strength against businesses and corporations."

UNITE has called on its members to support and work on behalf of Labour Party candidates in each constituency.

SIPTU has also called on members to vote for Labour and "parties that support the principles of social solidarity".

Meanwhile, in a statement issued on February 17, Mandate has encouraged its members to vote for parties and independent candidates from the "broad political left".

The union claimed that members' interests would be best served by the election of as many TDs as possible who share "policies and values based on the principles of social solidarity and equality".

General secretary John Douglas said: "These are the parties and candidates who share our interest in protecting and creating jobs."

"And also our interest in reversing the minimum wage cut, maintaining legal protections for workers' terms and conditions, protecting the incomes of those dependent on social welfare, creating access to public services for every citizen and legislating for collective bargaining rights for all workers."

Pictures: SIPTU/UNITE/Mandate



Picture: NUJ

Dear: 'Literally blooded' in dispute



Murdoch: Vast profits

TUC flags up cuts alternative

THE TUC has published a new booklet **Cuts Are Not The Cure** in the run-up to what's set to be the biggest trade union demo the UK has seen in decades.

It is understood hundreds of coaches have already been booked and many trains chartered for the March 26 event in London.

Marchers will set off from Victoria Embankment at 11am and head to Hyde Park for a rally in the afternoon.

Billed as **March for the Alternative**, the demonstration is in protest at the UK government's decision to close the deficit in just four years through cutting cutting £4 in spending for every £1 raised in taxes.

The TUC insists this constitutes a political choice rather than an economic necessity and that this strategy was not put before the voters at the last election.



http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/CUTS_ARE_NOT_THE_CURE.pdf
<http://marchforthealternative.org.uk/>



Scrap May Day plan 'backbench grudge'

COALITION government plans to scrap the UK's May Day holiday and replace it with a 'UK Day' or 'Trafalgar Day' celebration in October have come under attack from unions.

Ministers have denied the move has political connotations and insist it will spread out public holidays throughout the year rather than have them 'clustered' in late

spring, early summer.

The TUC has backed the idea of an **EXTRA** public holiday – the UK currently has the stingiest allocation in Europe – but has slammed any scrapping and transfer of the May Day break as a Tory "backbench grudge".

General secretary Brendan Barber said: "The last thing we need is for the government to mess around with es-

tablished bank holidays that workers and businesses have built their schedules around.

"A few Tory backwoodsmen have a bee in their bonnet about the May Day bank holiday because of its association with International Labour Day.

"In fact May Day is a traditional British celebration dating back to the fourth century."

ICTU chief: Prostitution is 'modern day slavery'

CONGRESS general secretary David Begg has spoken of a "parallel universe" of prostitution – with all its suffering and exploitation – that exists alongside normal civilised society in Ireland.

He joined a number of other high-profile Irishmen, drawn from trade unions, civil society, business and the arts, in supporting calls for the next government to bring in legislation that mirrors Sweden's tough prostitution laws.

This would penalise people who buy sex, while decriminalising those who sell sexual services.

Mr Begg told the February 2 press conference at the Buswells Hotel, Dublin, that an estimated half a million women across Europe were caught up in trafficking at any one time.

In Ireland, at least 1,000 women were involved in prostitution with many of these "suffering greatly as a result".

Mr Begg said: "On average 90% [of these] are women migrants and many have been lured into this activity.

"People are offered good quality work and they suddenly find that that's not the case and they get themselves trapped in a situation where their passports are taken away.

"They are in a strange country. They don't have any money. They don't know anybody and they find it very difficult to get out of that situation."

Describing prostitution as a "modern day form of slavery", he added: "We find it hard to conceptualise how people get trapped like that but



David Begg favoured tough Swedish approach to stamping out sex trade

in life there is a very thin line between being safe and secure and being extremely vulnerable in a situation that you never expected to find yourself in."

Mr Begg claimed there were two options to deal with the problem – either to legalise and regulate the sex trade or "stamp it out altogether".

He pointed to the differing examples of Amsterdam and Stockholm that showed "supply-side solutions" in this area did not work.

In Amsterdam, where prostitution is legal, 20,000 work in the sex industry out of a population of 750,000. In Stockholm – a city of

1.3m – only 200 provide prostitution services.

Mr Begg concluded: "The Swedish approach – also adopted by Norway and Iceland – is the most progressive way of dealing with what is in essence an international human rights problem.

"As in so many other ways, the Nordic countries' approach is best and Ireland would do very well to emulate their experiences."

John Cunningham, who chairs the Immigrant Council of Ireland, claimed the current approach to sex trafficking just wasn't working.

He said: "Women and children continue to be trafficked into pros-

titution in Ireland because it remains profitable.

"Tackling the demand for commercial sex that makes prostitution profitable for pimps and traffickers is the key to preventing exploitation."

TEEU general secretary Eamon Devoy said prostitution could not be considered "work" and pointed out research had revealed the huge harm caused to those caught up in the sex trade.

He added: "Our concern should be to ensure services are in place to assist people involved in prostitution to exit, not to provide a gloss of respectability to their exploiters by legalising or regulating brothels."

Barnardos chief Fergus Finlay described prostitution involving children is a form of child abuse and exploitation.

He said: "Children and young people who become involved in prostitution come from backgrounds that make them particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

"They may have left the care system, experienced homelessness, have alcohol or drug addiction issues or have been trafficked into Ireland for the express purpose of sexual exploitation."

He added: "International research shows the average age women first become involved in prostitution is 14."

Other men who have lent their support to the Turn Off the Red Light campaign include poet Theo Dorgan, writer Peter Sheridan and Ruhama chairperson Diarmaid O Corrbui.

<http://www.turnofftheredlight.ie/>



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INMO launches confidential cuts phonenumber

THE Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation has introduced a confidential phonenumber to back up its Stop Health Cuts Campaign.

A spokesperson said: "This will allow patients, their families, members of the public and staff to tell us where cuts are taking place in the health service."

The union said some of the comments may be published on www.stophealthcuts.ie but emphasised that all details would be kept "strictly confidential".

The spokesperson added: "Contributions to the campaign are greatly appreciated and will help us to bring pressure on government to look after the most vulnerable in our society by providing the type of health service they deserve."

STOP HEALTH CUTS PHONELINE:
01 6640639

Cam blueprint is 'nasty stuff'

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber has called a UK government policy announcement that will open all public services to private sector bidders "a naked right-wing agenda" that takes the country back "to the most divisive years of the 1980s".

Describing PM David Cameron's blueprint, announced on February 21, as a proposal "to privatise everything that moves", he claimed it would be rejected if put to voters in an election.

He said: "Privatisation replaces democratic oversight and accountability with a contract culture that is a job creation scheme for lawyers."

"Public service workers should be very afraid. The real profits will come from attacking their terms and conditions, and will only entrench the longest decline in living standards for ordinary people since the 1920s. This is classic nasty party stuff."



Picture: Amnesty International



Amnesty International

REPORT David Kato

LGBT rights activist murdered

HOMOPHOBIA has increased significantly in Uganda in the last decade, fuelled in large part by the locally-based media.

Amnesty International has voiced its serious concern that sections of the media – in particular tabloid newspapers – have been publishing names, pictures and other details of people they think are LGBT.

Often these have led to LGBT people being targeted by thugs.

Shockingly, one paper is reported to have published pictures along with the names and addresses of what it termed 'Uganda's top 100 homos' under the headline 'Hang them'.

Ugandan law criminalises homosexuality, and Amnesty claims those who attack LGBT individuals do so with impunity.

David Kato, an advocacy officer with Sexual Minorities Uganda, was murdered at home on January 26.

David – who had worked with Amnesty International over many years – had been calling on the authorities to take action to

end the persecution of LGBT people in his home country.

He had also just successfully brought a case against a local tabloid preventing it from revealing the identities of other gay people.

Mr Kato was a leading advocate against the Anti-Homosexuality Bill – a piece of legislation that seeks to increase penalties for homosexual acts in Uganda.

At present the Bill has been shelved, but if enacted, it would inscribe in law punishments of up to three years jail for failing to report a homosexual person; seven years for the 'promotion' of homosexuality; life imprisonment for a single homosexual act or for entering into a same-sex marriage; and the death penalty for so-called 'aggravated homosexuality'.

A coalition composed of 20 Ugandan organisations provides the main voice for LGBT rights over the controversial Bill, and offers support to human rights defenders such as David Kato.

Send a message of solidarity to LGBT organisations in Uganda to:

<http://action.amnesty.org.uk/ea-campaign/clientcampaign.do?ea.client.id=1194&ea.campaign.id=9357>



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ALTERNATIVE VISION MUST BE SET OUT...



Picture: Creggan Enterprises

CREGGAN Enterprises (CE) was invited to speak at the recent People's Congress event in Belfast organised by the ICTU.

Various contributors explored how local communities, trade unions and people most at risk due to cuts in public and community services could come together to promote an alternative to failed government economic policies and to protect commitments made in the Good Friday Agreement on equality and socio-economic rights abandoned and ignored by our politicians.

For those of us who work at the coalface – whether on the Shankill Road or in the Creggan Estate – now is the time to make our voices heard.

As our politicians prepare to take an axe to public services, and to wreak pain and havoc on our communities, it is time to hold them to account.

In fact, I would go further, it is time for us – as local residents, workers, trade unionists and community activists – to set out our alternative and draw up a 'Manifesto for Change'.

It was the unanimous view of the 300 people who attended the Congress that the cuts which will undoubtedly be implemented by the Executive will hit the most vulnerable members of our community hardest.

The pain will be felt most acutely in those neighbourhoods where disadvantage, low incomes and poverty are already most pronounced.

A recent study by the Derry-based U4D – the University for Derry lobby group – sheds some light on the levels of deprivation in the city.

It told us that economic inactivity in Derry is close to being the worst anywhere in Britain, with over half the population of working age – around 40,000 people – economically inactive.

In addition, a staggering 29% of the city's working-age population have no qualifications.

These findings are a scandal. But they do not surprise those of us dealing day-in, day-out with the misery and anguish of social and economic exclusion.

Make no mistake – the 'outworking' of the Stormont Executive's Draft Budget will create **MORE** hardship for many individuals and families in those communities in greatest need.

Creggan Enterprises outlined its view regarding a 'Manifesto for Change', which would help protect the least well off and those in greatest need. This would include:

- Protection for frontline services delivered by community organisations in areas such as community-based economic development, arts,

VIEWPOINT

Creggan Enterprises Secretary/Director
Conal McFeely



Conal McFeely speaking at People's Congress

Picture: Kevin Cooper/ Photoline

health & social care, to childcare, disability support services and social housing.

- Targeted resources for the most marginalised and deprived communities.

- Government protecting and developing local community input into decision-making and service delivery rather than off-loading it to larger national voluntary sector organisations or the private sector.

- A programme of investment for the social economy and public sector works to address infrastructure and social housing needs.

- Support for the development of a greatly

The poorest & the weakest can't be expected to continually bail out those who put profit & greed before the common good

resourced university for Derry with an enhanced capacity so that the city's economy can be regenerated transformed.

- The re-instatement of a proactive Civic Forum as a means of defining and articulating a community perspective to ministers, and as a vehicle for scrutiny and accountability in the absence of an 'opposition' in Stormont.

Over recent months, we've heard promises of more jobs, investment, social inclusion and engagement with those local communities in greatest need.

We have all heard these promises before – it must be election time!

But the fact remains that many people and communities have been abandoned by our government and ignored by those who control the public purse strings.

We should call on those intending to stand for election to make sure that the promises they make when they come knocking on our doors looking for our votes are kept this time.

Here's just some of what they promised in the 2008-2011 Programme for Government:

- "We aim to build a prosperous, fair and inclusive society, supported by a vibrant and dynamic economy and a rich and sustainable environmental heritage.

- "We will strive to ensure that all parts of our region share in sustainable economic and social development and are able to contribute to, and benefit from, a shared and better future.

- "Working together, we can build a shared and better future for all – a society which is at ease with itself and where everyone shares and enjoys the benefits of this new opportunity."

Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me!

We should be calling on all candidates to openly support the protection of frontline services delivered by community organisations and social economy organisations, and to oppose privatisation of public services.

We must stand together against **ANY** cuts to local services, because they mean people losing their homes, going without food, being denied essential healthcare, and pensioners wondering whether they can afford to heat their homes.

It is unfair and unjust to suggest that the poorest, the weakest, the most vulnerable should be forced to pay for the economic collapse while the men in pinstripe suits who walked us into the crisis continue to be rewarded.

The poorest and weakest can't be expected to continually bail out those who put profit and greed before the common good.

The people deserve better.



Sightsavers

**Every wipe
of his eyes
takes Talla
closer to
blindness**



© Jenny Matthews/Sightsavers

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.



If, like Sightsavers, you believe that nobody should go blind needlessly from trachoma, river blindness or cataract, please make a donation today to support our eye care work in some of the most deprived communities in the world.

Euro donations, please call 1850 50 20 20 or visit www.sightsavers.ie

Sterling donations, please call 0800 089 20 20 or visit www.sightsavers.org

Please quote ICTU. Thank you!