

THE

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# UNION POST

NEWS YOU CAN USE

JUNE 2009



## SHOP TACTICS: MANDATE CALLS 3 DAYS OF STRIKES IN DEFENCE OF TESCO WORKERS P6

# TAKING STAND ON SOCIAL EUROPE



### Labour lawyers' plea to EU chiefs

LABOUR lawyers from across Europe have issued an unprecedented declaration in a bid to protect workers' rights.

They fear a series of recent court rulings have threatened the whole idea of a Social Europe and tipped the balance in favour of big business.

More than 130 legal experts have signed an open letter to EU chiefs José Manuel Barroso and Jan Fischer in which they call for a "clear, unambiguous and legally binding confirmation" of the social rights of workers. Meanwhile, ETUC chief John Monks has also called for a "robust social agenda" for Europe. **FULL STORY: P4**



Monks: social agenda

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# MARKET EUROPE

YOU'D think we'd have learned our lesson by now, or at the very least, learned not to repeat the grave errors of the past.

A failure to give proper and due weight to social development, allowing the requirements of business to trump the needs of people and believing "the market" would behave in the best interests of wider society – these are the factors that crashed the global, the European and the Irish economies.

Indeed, a senior Irish minister recently tried to absolve his own Government of any responsibility by claiming: "It just happened, we hit a wall" – an uncanny echo of Bart Simpson's "I didn't do it, it was like that when I got here." Doh!

The minister's Simpson Economics are wrong: we hit a wall alright, but the freewheeling, free marketeers were at the wheel when we did and every single one of them drunk on narcotic neoliberal nonsense.

You would therefore expect – as at the scene of any car wreck – a degree of humility, an acknowledgement of errors made and a clear commitment to pursue a different path in the future.

Yet, as this as issue of The Union Post reveals, over 130 – and the number is growing daily – EU labour law experts and specialists are sufficiently alarmed by the lack of any such self-awareness on the part of the

EU leadership (and that includes Ireland) that they have issued an open declaration in defence of Social Europe (see page 4). Hopefully, their courageous action will galvanise many others into action.

It was Market Europe that caused this problem, at an EU level. This was best exemplified by the original Services Directive, the proposal that would in one fell swoop have destroyed over a century of social and workplace gains and dragged all standards to the level of the lowest common denominator.

But the Services Directive was defeated and it was trade unions that led the charge on that battle.

In truth, that utterly crazed proposal – which subordinated society to commerce – was the highwater mark of the freemarket zealots. That tide has now gone out.

Therefore it is clear that in order to clear up the mess created by the market, the values of Social Europe must be re-asserted, as John Monks of the ETUC has made very clear in recent days.

That penny does not appear to have dropped yet in Brussels, but drop it will and must.

As regards the "guarantee" on workers' rights, let me be clear: it is very welcome to see an Irish Government become so exercised over this issue, but it



# VERSUS SOCIAL EUROPE



**FROM MADRID TO MERRION STREET... PICTURE SPECIALS**  
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would be our preference that Government would concentrate that collective energy on upholding and vindicating workers'

rights at home, as opposed to trumpeting its own virtue abroad. In terms of protecting and advancing workers' rights,

our main argument has never been with Brussels, but with Dublin. And that remains the case.



Picture: ETUC

**I'M LISTENING, ARE YOU?**  
ETUC chief John Monks, left, closely follows a speech given by European Commission president José Manuel Barroso. Mr Monks has expressed disappointment at EU draft guarantees on workers' rights

# Labour lawyers take stand on future of Social Europe

MORE THAN 130 lawyers and experts have called for action from EU chiefs to protect workers' right.

The unprecedented declaration follows growing fears that recent legal rulings at the European Court of Justice have eroded fundamental social and employment rights.

The lawyers want commitments that business rights are not given precedence over the rights of workers.

They urged European Council president Jan Fischer and European Commission chief José Manuel Barroso to take the social dimension more seriously in "the interest of the future of Europe".

## IMPLICATIONS

The EU chiefs were also warned in a letter to have "full regard to the implications of a failure properly to do so".

An accompanying declaration, signed by 132 legal experts from across Europe including Senator Ivana Bacik and Trinity Prof Gerard F Whyte, stated that:

- The current financial and economic crisis has put workers and workers' rights under severe pressure;

- Major decisions of the European Court of Justice had created serious problems for the effective protection of workers' rights, and

- The outcomes of the European elections had signalled an increase in anti-European, nationalist and xenophobic sentiments, amid fears of social insecurity.

The declaration called on European Council to make a "a clear, unambiguous and legally binding" confirmation of the fundamental social rights of workers and their representatives.

It underlined that these rights should not be subordinated to "internal market freedoms and competition law" but rather "should be fully recognised as necessary pre-conditions for the sound and sustainable economic and social development" of the EU and its member states.

Meanwhile, the European Trade Union Confederation has claimed EU draft guarantees on workers' rights just do not go far enough.

The guarantees, drawn up in the wake of the Irish people's rejection of Lisbon last June, were part of a raft of measures put in place to persuade those who had voted No that their interests would be looked after in a rejigged treaty.

In a downbeat assessment following the June 16 meeting with European Commission president José Manuel Barroso, ETUC chief John Monks said he was "intensely disappointed" with what was on the table.

He added: "The key principle of European trade unions is to ensure the fundamental rights of workers are above the market and competition law and not subordinated to them."

Mr Monks claimed this key priority for unions was not reflected in the document that he had seen and which is to go before the European Summit.

Warning that "people's social anxieties" were likely to be increased rather than diminished because of this, he called on the European Council to adopt a new social protocol.

He added: "The EU needs a robust social agenda to defend employment and promote social justice and solidarity as a protection against the excesses of financial capitalism."

Reacting to the news, Congress general secre-

tary David Begg said it should be understood that the struggle to protect Irish workers' rights is primarily focused on Ireland.

He added: "We have always made clear that our greatest argument is not to be had with Brussels, but with Dublin it is not bureaucrats in Brussels that deny Irish unions full legal rights - that is the work of Dublin."

The European Council agreed last December to provide a number of guarantees to Ireland in exchange for a commitment to hold a second referendum before the end of 2009.

Among other issues to be addressed was a renewed commitment to the "high importance attached to social progress and the protection of workers' rights".

## BALANCE

The Irish government in particular hoped a strong declaration on workers' rights would co-perfasten unions' support for a Yes vote.

However, over the past year, the European Court of Justice has delivered several judgments which have called into question the balance between business rights to free movement within the EU on the one hand and employees' collective rights on the other.

Mr Monks said: "We've had four cases in the ECJ in the last few months that have emphasised the freedom of movement over workers rights."

"There needs to be more balance when it comes to the rules of the single market and the rights of workers. If an individual Polish worker comes to Ireland on his own he is entitled to equal pay for equal work compared to Irish workers, but if he is posted to Ireland by an employer the same protections do not necessarily apply."

## NIC-ICTU's call for action after racist attacks

THE Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions has called for a structured response to the wave of racist attacks that forced 115 Romanian migrants from their homes in Belfast.

Assistant general secretary Peter Bunting said: "The immediate concern is for the safety and wellbeing of these workers and their families. These people are among the most vulnerable members of our society, working dirty and sometimes dangerous jobs for the minimum wage or less." He claimed it was not the time to

point the finger at local "host communities", adding: "There is no evidence these attacks are organised, and the overwhelming majority of the diverse community of south Belfast is supportive of Romanians in their plight."

Mr Bunting said: "Resourcing local communities to assist in the work of integration and building trust ought to be seen as an investment in infrastructure which is as important as roads and bridges. It is time for a political response which addresses community cohesion, intercultural integration and builds solidarity

across all sectors of our diverse society.

"There are also important lessons which can be learnt from our divisive past, such as from those who work to diffuse tensions around the [sectarian] interfaces across Belfast.

"Finally, we need to educate the public as to the benefits which migrant workers bring to Northern Ireland, how our economy, our culture and our quality of life is enhanced by pluralism, tolerance and solidarity across the language groups and races, as well as across the sectarian divide."

# Widespread pay cut claims rubbished by new CSO data

CONGRESS economics advisor Paul Sweeney said new data released by the CSO has cut through "unfounded assertions" there have been widespread pay cuts.

He added these claims – made by those he called "stockbroker economists and employers' organisations" – are simply not backed up by the facts.

The Central Statistics Office figures, published on June 12, showed hourly labour costs in industry rose by 5.4pc last year with overall earnings rising by 4.5pc in the year to December 2008 and by slightly more in financial services.

Mr Sweeney said that while there is considerable retrenchment in employment and earnings this year, indications are that a considerable number of employers are paying the terms of the November 2008 agreement on pay.

And Industrial Relations News – a trade magazine widely respected for its accuracy – recently pointed to 90 significant cases of wage increases in 2009.

IRN, citing information gathered by Hay consultants, reported that 53pc of Irish organisations and 37pc across Europe have implemented a wage freeze but also that "compulsory salary cuts", mandatory reduction of hours, benefits and unpaid leave "are being widely avoided in Ireland and the rest of the world as a way to reduce costs".

This suggests anecdotal evidence of widespread pay cuts in Ireland are wide of the mark and may be being confused with falls in remuneration because of factors other than basic pay, such as bonuses and overtime.

Mr Sweeney also hit out at the way in which the issue was being reported.

He said: "On June 11, 12 and 13, The Irish Times business pages carried assertions from stockbroker economists that earnings are falling.

"But the latest data published by CSO on the June 12 showed earn-

ings rising in 2008 by a substantial 4.6pc in the year.

"Yet the Times carried a report from The Economist in ALB's subsidiary, Goodbody Stockbrokers, telling us that 'wage costs fell sharply'."

Mr Sweeney asked where this stockbroker economist was getting this information from and wondered why business pages of newspapers seemed to be "in thrall to these economists when they are uttering such erroneous opinions".

He blasted those who had pipped up the boom to sell loans for their parent companies "with forecasts and bluster".

Mr Sweeney's view is that while some firms are cutting wages, most are freezing (with union agreement where the case is proven) with some paying the agreed increase under the existing agreement.

He cautioned against the deflationary impact of widespread wage cuts.

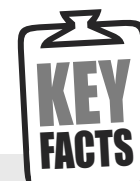
Mr Sweeney added: "It is sufficient that domestic demand will fall with more than 300,000 fewer people at work in the Irish economy by next year from a 2007 peak without compounding the problem with wage deflation.

"What the economy needs is an economic stimulus and this is not forthcoming in Ireland,

a small open economy in deep financial crisis thanks to the bank bosses and their builder pals and poor regulators,

He added: "But it is vital that the deflationary impact of cuts and tax rises is not added to with unnecessary wage cuts."

Mr Sweeney admitted that inflation was falling at 4.7pc officially but added: "If you do not have a mortgage, your personal inflation fall is much lower. Energy and mortgage falls made up most of this fall but energy prices are rapidly rising and interest rates won't fall any more, so don't expect this deflation to continue."



## KEY FACTS

### CSO figures

- Hourly earnings (exc bonuses) rose by 4.5pc in industrial sector and by 4.6pc in financial sector
- Number of those employed in industrial sector fell to 220,000 between last quarter of 2007 and last quarter of 2008 while employment in the financial sector actually grew by 2,700 to 84,400



# STRIKE NOTICE AT **TESCO**

MANDATE has served strike notice on food giant Tesco Ireland over claims it has breached an agreement on working hours.

Some 19 stores across the country will now be hit if the action goes ahead.

Workers at the stores voted overwhelmingly for strike action following a ballot – with 95 per cent of Mandate members in favour.

The union told Tesco Ireland chiefs this course of action was necessary because of the company's breach of a 2006 agreement on a 'banded hour contract' system.

That deal enabled workers to gain some stability in their income and placed staff into categories of working hours with an employee entitled to work in bands of five hours.

This meant that some workers, for example,

were put on a band of 25 to 30 hour contracts yet the union claims Tesco Ireland is unnecessarily reducing hours for these workers below the minimum of 25 provided for in the contract.

Mandate say this is in breach of the agreement.

The union has informed Tesco chiefs their members will go on strike on July 2 followed by two more days of strike action on July 9 and July 10. Mandate officials also confirmed action may be continue following these strikes but insisted they remained available to meet with the company in a bid to resolve the issues in dispute.

Mandate assistant general secretary Linda Tanham said: "Some of our members are losing out on more than €100 per week due to unreasonable and unnecessary cutbacks in working hours and it should be remembered that some of

these are already low-paid workers.

"This is of particular concern when you consider that the company made approximately €250 million in profits last year in Ireland alone and more than €3.1 billion internationally."

Mandate claim that Tesco is using the recession to reduce the living standards of workers in the pursuit of even more extravagant profit margins.

Ms Tanham added: "We are all facing difficult times and it's clear from Mandate's perspective that we have to behave reasonably and responsibly if a company is in financial difficulty.

"Having said that, we will not accept companies playing off the recession and we will fight to maintain and improve the living standards of our members."

**STRIKING STORES...** Arklow; Ashbourne; Bloomfield; Carlow; Crumlin; Gorey; Greystones; Killarney New Street; Longford; Naas; Navan; Newbridge; Omni; Poleberry; Rathfarnham; Roscrea; Roxboro; Tralee Manor; Wicklow

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# Battlelines drawn over US union law

DESPITE the best efforts of big business interests and a range of anti-union front groups to smother it at birth, the Employee Free Choice Act continues to gather support from across a wide spectrum of American society and on both sides of Congress.

If passed, the pending legislation introduced into both chambers of the Congress on March 10 would give workers a fair and direct path to form unions through majority sign-up, help employees secure a contract with their boss in a reasonable period of time and toughen penalties against employers who violate their workers' rights.

Currently all the power is skewed in favour of the employer under provisions contained in the National Labor Relations Act.

Bosses control the information workers receive and, according to US superunion AFL-CIO, "poisons the process, intimidating, harassing, coercing and firing people who try to organise unions".

Penalties for such behaviour are so minimal, many companies treat them as just another cost of doing business.

The Employee Free Choice Act means that if a majority of employees in a workplace vote to form a union by signing authorisation cards, which are then validated by federal government, the employer will be legally required to recognise and bargain with the union.

At present many employers use stalling tactics to stop workers from getting a contract or house agreement.

In fact, recent research showed a year after a successful union election, 52 per cent of workers' unions still did not have a contract and two years after some 37 per cent had still not achieved recognition.

One AFL-CIO source said: "The law is about restoring to working people the freedom to improve their lives through unions. More than half of people who don't have a union say they would join one tomorrow if given the chance."

"After all, people who have unions earn 30 per cent more than people without unions and are much more likely to have health care and pensions."

"With a free choice to join unions, working people can bargain for better wages, health care and pensions to build a better life for their families."

"With the economic pressures on working people today, the freedom to pursue their dreams is crucially important."

Despite a recent poll that showed 73 per cent of the American public backed the Bill, business interests and lobby groups are far from giving up the fight.

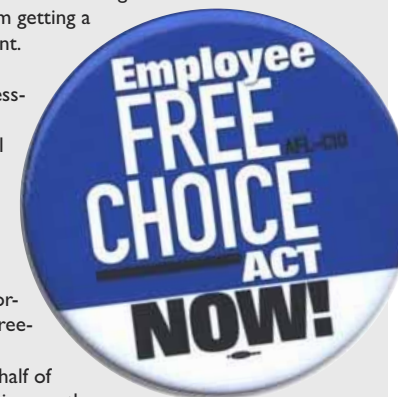
Right wing anti-union groups are pouring tens of millions of dollars into defeating the Bill.

The Chamber of Commerce alone has put \$20m-\$30m into the fighting fund against the Act which is major irritant for the super-rich.

Recently, former Wal-Mart chief Lee Scott said: "We like driving the car, and we're not going to give the steering wheel to anybody but us."

While billionaire Sheldon Adelson called the Act "one of fundamental threats to society", the other being "radical Islam".

Not to be outdone, it was reported Forbes Magazine national editor Mike Ozanian said the Bill should be called "the anti-free choice, pro-slavery bill".



**WEBLINK** Get more information at [www.aflcio.org/joinaunion/voiceatwork/efca/](http://www.aflcio.org/joinaunion/voiceatwork/efca/)

# FIGHT BACK WITH MANDATE THE CAMPAIGNING UNION

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# BUILDING A FUTURE

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## Breen ruling is a major victory for Fourth Estate

THE National Union of Journalists has hailed the court decision not to order journalist Suzanne Breen to hand over notes to the police "as a landmark victory for journalism and civil liberties".

Judge Thomas Burgess refused the application at Belfast Recorders Court on June 18 which would have forced the Northern Editor of the Sunday Tribune to hand over notes, computer equipment and other material following publication of stories relating to the Real IRA.

NUJ President James Doherty, praised the courage of Suzanne Breen and her editor, Noirin Hegarty in standing up to PSNI.

James said: "At last week's hearing Suzanne and Noirin proudly stood by the NUJ code of conduct and this ruling is justification of their stand. Journalists everywhere will join with me in congratulating them on the outcome."

"This is a victory not only for Suzanne, but for all journalists and the right to do our job free from fear or coercion. The Fourth Estate should never become a lapdog for a police state."

## Report hails standards at second level schools

A MAJOR study has revealed that Irish second-level education service is performing well by international standards.

OECD's Teaching and Learning in Society report, published earlier this month, found "outcomes reflect high levels of commitment and professionalism among post-primary teachers in Ireland."

ASTI general secretary John White claimed the findings meant parents can be assured their children were accessing a high quality of education in Irish second-level schools.

However, he said the research also underlined some key concerns of the union. It found only 73 per cent of teachers were employed on a permanent basis in Ireland compared to 96 per cent in Denmark and 90 per cent in Norway.

Mr White added: "The vast majority of newly qualified teachers cannot secure permanent teaching posts for many years, and this is set to worsen when education cuts kick in this September."

## Labour Court referrals shot up 28% last year

THE overall number of cases referred to the Labour Court in the Republic last year increased by 28 per cent on 2007.

Figures contained in its annual report showed a total of 18,853 referrals were made to all four state bodies involved in resolving workplace disputes. These include the Labour Relations Commission Conciliation Service, the Rights Commissioner Service and the Employment Appeals Tribunal.

The report, published on May 28, noted a change in Labour Court caseload from finding resolutions to industrial disputes to complaints of breaches of employment rights.

Chair Kevin Duffy said: "From a situation where disputes coming to the Court were, in the main, about sharing the fruits of success, over recent months they are more likely to be about influencing the results of the economic downturn on workers and their employers."

# Euro unions in vow over jobs crisis

TRADE union chiefs have vowed to fight the return of mass unemployment in Europe as well as redouble their efforts to secure a more equitable society.

In a joint declaration at the European Trade Union Confederation conference in Paris on May 28, leading trade unionists called for:

- More and better jobs teamed with an European recovery plan
- A renewed fight against social exclusion by putting in place stronger welfare systems
- An end to market short-termism
- Better pay and stronger collective bargaining, and
- Solidarity as a protection against the excesses of finance capitalism.

The authors of the Paris Declaration claimed that Europe "was at a crossroads" with jobs being shed at a level not seen since the 1930s.

They laid the blame for this development squarely on the dominance of the neoliberal economic model over the last 30 years.

The declaration stated: "Too many at the top of the overblown financial services sector indulged in a modern day version of alchemy."

"Long term prudence was ignored as greed and speculation became the order of the day in Wall Street, London and other major financial centres. The result before the crash was rapidly

rising inequality, the growth of precarious jobs and pressure to cut the influence of welfare states, worker rights and collective bargaining."

The declaration stated that ordinary people were now looking to governments to restore the democratic balance that had been ceded to the markets over the last few decades.

And, the authors claimed, the European Central Bank must also be involved in promoting growth and be committed to full and better employment – "not just price stability".

Calling for a move towards developing a Europe-wide industrial policy based on innovation, research and sustainable development, it continued: "The ETUC is demanding that 'never again' must financial capitalism be allowed to inflict a comparable crisis on the world, on Europe and on workers; and that never again can growing inequality receive the encouragement, indifference or neglect of democratic governments."

The declaration concluded: "The twin aims of this declaration are fight the crisis and win the aftermath. Its ideas need wide dissemination and debate as the disaster made in the financial world hits Europe hard."

"But European trade unionism must seize the moment and win a better, fairer society, and a stronger, more integrated, social Europe."



Read full text on [www.etuc.org/IMG/pdf\\_Paris\\_Declaration\\_FINAL\\_EN.pdf](http://www.etuc.org/IMG/pdf_Paris_Declaration_FINAL_EN.pdf)

## Nearly half off sick with back

HALF of all sick days off work in Ireland are caused by back pain, arthritis and work-related muscle strain, new research has revealed.

The Fit For Work? report, published by the London-based Work Foundation in association with Arthritis Ireland, also found that spending on illness and disability benefits had shot up by 500 per cent between 1998 and 2007.

Researchers showed that musculoskeletal disorders, or MSDs, affected twice as many people as stress and took up to a third of all GP visits costing the economy an estimated €750 million each year.

The report, launched on May 8, argued that work was good for health and called for the adoption of a policy that focused on capacity rather than incapacity when dealing with employees suffering from MSDs. Arthritis Ireland chair Prof Oliver

Fitzgerald, a leading rheumatologist, said: "Work is unambiguously good for our health. Fit For Work? highlights the huge impact MSDs have on the economy and the general health of our workforce."

"Early intervention and access to the right kinds of treatment are crucial."

"In some instances, Irish patients with MSDs can wait for as long as four years for treatment."

The report claimed that up to 80 per cent of Irish adults will suffer from significant back pain at some point, while two-thirds of employees regularly suffer from pains in the neck, shoulders or upper limbs.

There are currently 714,000 people in Ireland with some form of arthritis though researchers pointed out this was still below the EU average.



Derry workers stand in silence in memory of Kevin McDaid Picture: Martin McKeown

# Our stand against sectarian hatred

NORTHERN workers came together last month to express their revulsion at yet another senseless sectarian murder.

Catholic community worker Kevin McDaid was kicked to death by a mob in his home town of Coleraine on May 24.

Hundreds gathered in Waterloo Place, Derry, on May 29 for the event which was addressed by Mark Langhammer on behalf of the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU.

Assistant general secretary Peter Bunting said the thoughts of the trade union movement were with Mr McDaid's family as well as with relatives of Damian Fleming who was also injured in the attack.

He added: "Kevin McDaid was an example of the active citizenship which communities in Northern Ireland need to function as bet-

ter, more humane places. People such as Mr McDaid deserve to be recognised and celebrated. The tragedy is that he is now being mourned instead."

ICTU president Patricia McKeown said that while society is riven by sectarian hatred "there can be no moving forward".

She described Mr McDaid's murder as a "sectarian hate crime of the worst degree" and called for a clear response from the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly.

Ms McKeown added: "Words of condemnation must be matched in actions and resources particularly at community level to challenge sectarian divisions if our society is to move forward."

Community workers also staged a lunchtime vigil at Belfast City Hall on June 2 to show support for the McDaid family.

CHALLENGING 'US AND THEM' Pages 20 & 21

## Probe into role of civil society

THE Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK and Ireland, an independent commission set up to strengthen civil society, is running two open surveys and wants to hear from you. The questionnaires were developed to inform the Inquiry's work on a number of issues.

### ● The Marginalisation of Dissent

This relates to the role of civil society in enabling dissent. A key theme that emerged from the Inquiry's recent futures work raised concerns about the marginalisation of dissent across the globe. The purpose of the research is to explore the following issues – the degree to which people believe dissent is marginalised or suppressed; the ways in which dissent is enabled/inhibited; and what practically needs to be done and by whom to enable dissent.

### ● Civil society associations and their application of social & new media

This survey looks at how civil society organisations are using social media, which tools they favour, and what they hope to achieve by using them.

Researchers want to get an improved insight into the use of social and new media from civil society organisations to see how they can better stay ahead of the curve.

The findings of the Commission will be presented in the autumn.

To take part in the surveys go to: [http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/civil\\_society](http://democracy.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/civil_society)

Contact [morven@carnegieuk.org](mailto:morven@carnegieuk.org) for further information about the Inquiry.

# Finance chiefs 'knew of skills deficit'

IMPACT has claimed the Department of Finance identified a range of skills shortages in 2003 but failed to recruit staff to fill the gap.

National secretary Louise O'Donnell, speaking at the union's Civil Service Division conference in Portlaoise on May 21, said more staff were needed in economics, financial management, pensions, statistics, law and IT.

She claimed the department had "behaved like a small child in the playground" over its refusal to draft in new finance and economics experts after losing a third-party adjudication on the issue.

Ms O'Donnell said: "Despite acknowledging the need for these specialists, they wanted to fill the necessary posts with more generalists in the standards civil service grades. What successful business would operate like this?"

"IMPACT fought this at arbitration and won. The department responded like a small child in the playground. It took its ball away and went home, refusing to recruit the specialists it had itself identified as vital to an effective civil service."

"We can only speculate what contribution the trained economists, pensions experts, lawyers and financial managers would have made in avoiding the economic meltdown that the department subsequently presided over – and for which all workers and citizens of Ireland are now paying a heavy price."

"But we can be sure that if they had employed more of the relevant professionals to warn and advise at that stage, we would probably not be facing the slash and burn policy that's currently being applied across the public sector."

## TUC WEBLINK

To keep in touch with what's happening on the UK trade union scene sign up to receive the TUC's month e-bulletin, titled In ToUch. You get bite size summaries of the main news from the TUC and useful links to the fuller stories. Just visit [www.tuc.org.uk/the\\_tuc/index.cfm?mins=267](http://www.tuc.org.uk/the_tuc/index.cfm?mins=267) for details of how to receive the bulletin to your in box and to view back issues.

**Labour calls for 2 year ban on taxi licences**

THE LABOUR Party has called for a two-year moratorium on the issuing of new taxi licences as well as a return to regulation of services.

In a document, titled Hailing a New Taxi Service: A High Quality and Fair Taxi Industry For All, the party claims since the industry was deregulated in 2000 the number of taxis on the road has grown ten-fold.

Against the backdrop of the Goodbody review which recommended no freeze on taxi numbers, transport spokesman Tommy Broughan said: "We believe that the current system of regulation is not working, either in the interests of customers or drivers. Urgent reform is needed so that a high-quality services can be developed and maintained." As well as the temporary moratorium, the party wants:

- Rigorous programmes of entry, licensing and quality service standards
- A strict enforcement and regulatory regime
- A long-term market demand evaluation for regulating the sector, and
- Making taxis wheelchair accessible

THE four main taxi unions have condemned death threats made against taxi regulator Kathleen Doyle. It was reported that she had received a number of threats including a bullet through the post. In a joint statement, the Irish Taxi Drivers Federation, National Private-hire and Taxi Association, the National Drivers Union and SIPTU, called on anyone with information to contact the Garda.

**Disabled workers will be hit hardest in recession**

THE TUC has claimed the experience of previous recessions has shown that disabled workers can expect to be disproportionately affected in terms of redundancies.

Deputy general secretary Frances O'Grady, speaking at the TUC's annual disability conference last month, warned delegates there could be a reversal of the progress made in increasing employment rate among disabled workers over the past 10 years.

She said: "The TUC is absolutely determined disabled workers will not be victimised by welfare reform; that they should not suffer unfairly in this recession; and that they must not be disadvantaged by the business lobby's misplaced belief that equality is somehow a luxury we can no longer afford."

**Hike in numbers of NI firms going insolvent**

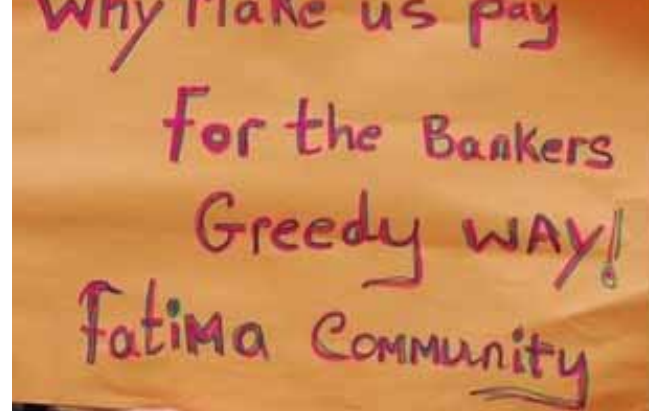
NEW figures have shown that 57 firms in Northern Ireland have become insolvent in the first quarter of the year – a 35 per cent hike on the same period last year.

And data, compiled by consultants PricewaterhouseCoopers, showed the biggest increase was in voluntary liquidations with 23 firms opting to go to the wall while 34 companies were liquidated on the orders of the court.

A PwC spokesman said there was "a clear upward trend" in local insolvencies and predicted the situation would continue to deteriorate over the current quarter.



**FURY AT 'SILENT**



**CATASTROPHE'**

THOUSANDS of community workers and their families marched on the Department of Finance in Dublin to protest at claims hundreds of million of euro will be slashed from the community sector budget.

It is believed the National Drugs Strategy will suffer a 17 per cent cut in funding while the allocation for Community Training will be reduced by 40 per cent.

The June 3 march followed a packed meeting at Liberty Hall where the "savage" cuts was discussed by representatives of community organi-

sations, many of whom are now threatened with closure.

Impact branch secretary Una O'Connor claimed community groups were being hit by a double whammy as charitable donations have also been hit by the slump.

Describing the situation as a "silent catastrophe", she added: "Many organisations are now in crisis. Many will not be here at the end of the summer let alone the end of the recession."

**PICTURES: EVELINA SADUIKYTE**



# Survey shows trade union reps make the best citizens

TRADE UNION reps are eight times more likely than the general population to engage in voluntary work and give more of their time to community organisations, new research has claimed.

The study, titled Unions in the Community: A Survey of Union Reps, was carried out by Prof Gregor Gall, an industrial relations expert at the University of Hertfordshire, on behalf of the TUC.

It found that eight per cent of reps are school governors, while five per cent are trustees or sit on the governing bodies of local organisations.

Another 19 per cent are volunteers in local community bodies such as sports or social clubs, with one in five reps spending up to five hours a week on community activities.

The report calls on unions to build on these links in order to recruit new members and to forge cross-organisation campaigns.

Nearly three-quarters of the reps questioned thought unions could be doing more to boost their role in the community further. TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said there were 200,000 union reps in the UK working to make

their workplaces safer and fairer places to be.

He added: "But their good work does not stop at the factory gate or the office door. Union reps also play a vital role in their local communities, from helping out at local sports clubs to sitting on school governing bodies.

"Unions reps are undoubtedly good citizens and are likely to give up much of their time helping others. Their efforts in their local communities are also bringing many people within the reach of trade unions, possibly for the first time."



## FOR THE FALLEN HEROES

Hong Kong-born MLA Anna Lo lays an Amnesty International wreath on the steps of Parliament Buildings at Stormont to mark the 20th anniversary for the Tiananmen Square massacre. The wreath of red flowers – with a dedication to all those who lost their lives – was placed beside a crumpled bicycle, a potent symbol of the brutal crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators. Ms Lo said: "The events of June 4 1989 shocked the world's conscience. Today is a moment to remember the victims and to stand up for justice."

# Aer Lingus sale 'tragic error'

SIPTU general secretary Joe O'Flynn has called the privatisation of Aer Lingus "a tragic mistake".

In a May 26 speech to councillors in Limerick, he said the government had been warned keeping just a minority stake in the national carrier would not protect it.

He added: "We said at the time that it was vital for Ireland as an open economy on the periphery of Europe with important transatlantic links to North America, to maintain public ownership of the national airline.

"We warned that keeping a government minority share would not protect it adequately from predators or ensure that the broader national interests would be protected when commercial decisions were being made.

"Regrettably our stand has been vindicated by subsequent events and no part of the country knows it better than Limerick, Shannon and the mid-west generally." He cited the New Zealand experience where the national airline had been



## Hard landing: Sell-off was mistaken

privatised in the 1980s. The Kiwi government had to re-nationalise in the following decade "to restore its competitiveness and connectivity with the wider world".

Mr O'Flynn added: "We already have commentators from across the political spectrum debating the need to re-nationalise Eircom in order to restore our broadband connectivity to something approaching international standards.

"I wonder if we may not have to look at aviation next? Certainly the reduced frequency of flights to North America has not helped keep jobs in the mid-West as we all know to our cost."

THE government has been accused of not grasping the seriousness of the threat to jobs in the aviation sector.

SIPTU branch organiser Pat Ward claimed ministers displayed "paralysis and a lack of political will" on the issue.

He added: "Their only priorities seem to be balancing the public finances and bailing out the banks. Meanwhile the jobs of highly skilled workers are being abandoned."

Mr Ward made his comments after it was confirmed SR Technics had confirmed it had sold off essential kit, including the Auxiliary Power Unit and landing gear equipment.

He said: "In many respects the problems we face flow from the drift of government policy over the past 12 years. They slashed taxes and hoped speculators and 'fast buck' deals would generate enough revenue to keep the show on the road. The privatisation of Aer Lingus was part of that drift and the dire problems we now face in places like North Dublin and the Mid-West are among the consequences."



Mandelson: New legislation

## UK Parliament to outlaw blacklisting

THE British government is to introduce new rules preventing union members being barred from jobs through the use of secret blacklists.

It follows revelations in March that 40 UK-based construction firms had subscribed to a database used to monitor and vet workers in the building trade.

The database is no longer active having been shut down under data protection laws. Business Secretary Lord Mandelson said: "People should not be victimised at work or denied access to employment opportunities because of their trade union membership.

"Evidence from the Information Commissioner showed there was a problem. There is already legal protection against the misuse of people's personal details. We now plan to strengthen the law by introducing new regulations to outlaw the compilation, dissemination and use of blacklists in this way."

Under the Employment Relations Act 1999, the government has the power to bring in regulations prohibiting the blacklisting of workers for their union membership or activities.

But following a consultation exercise in 2003, it decided against tabling the required regulations because they thought there was no evidence blacklisting still took place.

Welcoming the announcement, construction union UCATT however said it was disappointed the process still had to be dragged through a fresh consultation process.

General secretary Alan Ritchie - who was blacklisted - said: "Blacklisting should have been outlawed 10 years ago. The government was mistaken in believing there was no longer a problem. Our members were all too aware that blacklisting still occurred."

UCATT is demanding the delay in framing the legislation doesn't let those firms involved in blacklisting off the hook.

Mr Ritchie added: "Those companies involved broke existing laws. They are serious crimes and these firms deserve the maximum possible punishment."

SIPTU chief Jack O'Connor has accused those in the media who dub unions an obstacle to progress of being "disingenuous".

He said: "The unions have never been opposed to public service reform, contrary to the image portrayed by sections of the media.

"It is as much in the interest of union members that we have a good, efficient, well-managed public service which is not top heavy, as it is in everybody else's interest."

He described as "a nonsense" the claim public service jobs were secure against a backdrop of an exchequer shortfall of 15.6 per cent in 2010. Mr O'Connor added: "There is also a threat to the levels of pay that people may take as sacrosanct, but nothing is sacrosanct in a economy that is collapsing."

## EMPLOYMENT

### Increase in dole numbers in the North

THERE was another hike in the number of people out of work in Northern Ireland in the first quarter of this year, new figures have revealed.

Some 49,000 are now jobless in the North, representing 6.1 per cent of the workforce – a rise of 7,000 on the previous quarter and up almost 11,000 on the year.

Northern Ireland, however, remains below the UK average of 7.1 per cent, a point underlined by Stormont Enterprise Minister Arlene Foster.

She said: "This is undoubtedly a very challenging time for Northern Ireland businesses, as global economic conditions

continue to impede product demand and growth. We have not been alone in experiencing a deterioration in labour market conditions. Most UK regions and EU countries have also recorded large increases in their unemployment figures.

"However, the current Northern Ireland rate remains below both the UK and EU averages."

She added that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment was implementing a wide range of programmes through the Invest NI initiative which would offer "practical support and advice".



## '4.2m jobless in UK'

THE TUC has revealed the real unemployment rate in the UK stands at 4.2 million - twice the official tally of 2.1 million.

The claim is based on an analysis of data taken from the Office for National Statistics' monthly labour force survey and covers an internationally agreed definition of what constitutes unemployment.

The International Labour Organisation defines the unemployed as those who want a job but do not have one, have looked for work in the last month – or are waiting to clock on in the next two weeks.

The labour force survey also studies people of working age who are "economically inactive" – those outside the labour market because of early retirement, long-term sickness or because they are looking after a family.

According to the figures, 2.1 million people who fell into this category said they wanted a job.

TUC's senior policy officer Richard Exell said: "The ILO definition of unemployment means there are plenty of people who do not have a job but still want one. For various reasons they may not have been looking recently, or may not be able to start work straight away, so they are classed as economically inactive even though they really want paid jobs."

# 30,000 faced redundancy in South over the last year

ALMOST 30,000 workers in the Republic were made redundant in the year to the end of April, new figures have shown.

The data, released by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, revealed an increase of nearly 154 per cent on the same period last year.

Figures for April alone showed 7,232 employees lost their jobs compared to 3,114 in April 2008.

A breakdown of the yearly tally pointed to an increasing number of women being made redundant - up from 29 per cent of the total in March to 35 per cent in April.

The biggest losses were in the services sector with 2,570 redundancies.

Manufacturing and engineering were hard hit in April with the loss of 1,905 positions, while the building and civil engineering sectors were also

impacted with 1,601 job cuts. And figures released by the Central Statistics Office last month seem to back up the gloomy employment picture.

There was an increase of 113 per cent (166,452) in short-term claimants on the Live Register for the year ending in April.

And the number of long-term claimants shot up by nearly 43 per cent (21,273) over the same period.

Meanwhile, a prominent social justice campaigner has called for government action to save thousands of families from a life of poverty resulting from unemployment.

Sister Stanislaus Kennedy claimed the country was facing a social crisis if nothing is done.

She added: "If one in six of us are unemployed, then very few families in this country will be unaffected. For some families, the consequence will be poverty that will reverberate for generations."

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# END TO CEAD MILE FAILTE



MIGRANT workers and their supporters, angered by controversial changes to the work permits system, have protested outside the offices of Tanaiste Mary Coughlan.

Under the new rules which came into effect on June 1, migrant workers on permits who are made redundant will be prohibited from taking up a new job unless it has been publicly advertised for two months.

Migrants Right Centre Ireland chairperson Fr Bobby Gilmore said: "Changes to the work permit rules will make it virtually impossible for people currently on permits who are made redundant to get another job, regardless of how long they have lived and worked here."

"Many people and their families will

be forced to leave Ireland or will have no other choice but to stay and work informally." He claimed the new provisions would cause "enormous hardship" and "create another excluded group" in Irish society and that the message it would send to migrants was "You are disposable".

Fr Gilmore added: "It seems as if Ireland's 'Céad míle fáilte' has turned into 'slán abhaile' to the many migrant workers who have made Ireland their home."

Yaiz M., a migrant worker from Malaysia, added: "I have been living in Ireland for the past nine years with my wife and two children. I recently lost my job and I am worried what will happen to my family, especially with these new work permit changes."

MIGRANT Rights Centre Ireland has called on state agencies to forge closer links with organisations on the ground to ensure the proper identification and protection of victims of human traffickers.

MRCI's Edel McGinley, speaking at the June 10 launch of the National Anti-Human Trafficking Plan, said: "Forced labour is happening across Ireland. These workers are exploited and threatened to such an extent that they live in fear and are not free to leave. We must double our efforts to ensure the real victims are protected not criminalised."

She called for close collaboration between NGOs, service providers and state agencies "to ensure proper identification, adequate protection and access to redress".

## Forced to live in a 'twilight world of fear'

UNITE has claimed migrant workers face a "twilight world of fear and anxiety" because their undocumented status can leave them open to exploitation by unscrupulous employers.

With more than 800,000 workers denied status in the UK alone, Unite believes there is a serious risk of entrenching a three-tier labour force which will in turn drag

down terms and conditions of employment across the country.

Deputy general secretary Jack Dromey said: "Undocumented workers inhabit a twilight world of fear and anxiety, constantly looking over their shoulder, believing they have to accept shoddy treatment from their employers. Their abuse is a stain on our society."

"Unless the UK acts to address

the 'status mess' that has accumulated over the decades, then exploitation among migrant workers will become entrenched – and it will drag down the conditions of workers across the country."

He described immigration authorities strategy of hunting down and deporting 800,000 people as not just immoral, but

impractical. Mr Dromey added: "Deportation would take a generation and cost a fortune, so why pursue this approach?"

"Barack Obama has grasped the nettle in America. Undocumented millions might now become full citizens of his brave new world, paying taxes to rebuild a continent."

"Surely this is an approach we could benefit from here too?"

# Written off: foreign workers face bias when job hunting

MIGRANT workers face higher levels of job discrimination in the Republic than elsewhere in Europe, a new report has found.

The Equality Authority study, carried out with the Economic and Social Research Institute, found that a majority of Irish firms were twice as likely to give an Irish person an interview than a foreign national with the same qualifications.

In the 'field experiment', the first of its kind in Ireland, researchers sent pairs of matched CVs in response to 240 separate job adverts.

The two fictitious applicants had equivalent qualifications, skills and experience – all gained in Ireland. The only difference was the name at the top of the CVs. Researchers found that candidates with Irish names were twice as likely to be called for interview than those with foreign names.

Discrimination was found to be consistent across the three minorities tested (African, Asian and German), three occupations (lower administration, lower accountancy and retail sales) and different business sectors.

The Equality Authority's acting chief executive Richard Fallon said: "Everyone recognises how cultural diversity has become the norm in the Irish workforce in recent years."

"It has provided us with unique opportunities, learning, leadership, innovation and creativity. These are the very qualities we need to drive our economic recovery."

"The findings of this study don't just highlight a loss of equality of opportunity for non-Irish job applicants. They also point to a needless loss of business opportunity if we choose not to look to the skills behind the names on job applications."

The research was outlined in the Discrimina-



“ Cultural diversity provides qualities we need to drive our economic recovery ”  
Richard Fallon

tion in Employment report.

The study, carried out between March and October last year showed:

Irish applicants were called to interview 78 times while minority candidates were invited 38 times, giving a ratio of 2.05 – Irish people were twice as likely to be called back.

In the case of Irish versus African applicants only, the study found 18 Irish applicants were called back compared to just five applicants with African sounding names.

When it came to Asian names, just seven were called back compared with 19 applicants with

Irish names. Eighteen Irish names got a call back compared to three with German sounding names. The report suggested a number of measures to help reduce discrimination.

These include the provision of more information for employers and workers on the equality laws and the introduction of random audits of hiring practices.

If employers were required to keep all records of job applications for 12 months and to justify their hiring decisions, it would reinforce the pressure to adhere to good practice. Visit [www.equality.ie](http://www.equality.ie) to read the full report.



## UNISON spells out its opposition to Bill

UNISON members lobbied Northern Ireland's political representatives last month over the new Borders, Immigration and Citizenship Bill.

The event at Stormont Castle saw the handing over of a petition calling on MPs to vote against the bill, particularly those parts which would increase the time migrant workers have to wait before they can apply to be settled UK residents. UNISON organiser Nathalie Donnelly

said: "If this bill is successful, migrant workers who keep our public sector running, delivering care in our hospitals, nursing homes and schools will continue to be denied basic rights and entitlements afforded to other members of society for even longer."

The bill would abolish the 'indefinite leave to remain' status, replacing it with a new category of 'probationary citizenship', during which mi-

grant workers would have no status and no access to social protection.

Migrant workers are already vulnerable before they obtain a settled status and it is difficult for them to challenge their employer should they encounter any trouble at work.

Their status depends on their work permit, but there is no safety net if they lose their job as they have no recourse to public funds.

Keep track of the new Bill's progress through Parliament at <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2008-09/borderscitizenshipandimmigration.html>





The Tudors actress Sarah Bolger with Barnardos chief Fergus Finlay at the launch of *Written Out, Written Off*

## Barnardos report slams educational inequality

IRELAND'S leading children's charity has warned educational inequality remains stark with each child's outcome at school still largely determined by their family's social and economic status.

Launching its *Written Out, Written Off* report on educational disadvantage last month, Barnardos chief Fergus Finlay flagged up the key role the classroom plays in breaking the cycle of poverty.

One in three pupils from disadvantaged areas continue to leave school with severe literacy difficulties and significantly more children from disadvantaged backgrounds leave school before the Leaving Certificate than those from better-off families.

Mr Finlay said: "It is unacceptable that as a society we are allowing poverty and disadvantage to continue from generation to generation when it is proven education can play a key role in giving children the tools to break that cycle and create better opportunities and futures for themselves.

"Recent cuts in education are likely to exacerbate this cycle and can only be viewed as a false economy that will cost Irish children and society much more in the long term."

Barnardos' director of advocacy Norah Gibbons said early intervention was vital if children from deprived backgrounds were to fulfil their potential.

She added: "When the education system fails a child and they leave school early it affects all aspects of their future life - employment opportunities, health and risk of

involvement in crime.

"Early school leavers are three to four times more likely to be unemployed than young people who have been able to remain in school longer and benefit from education.

"They are also more likely to report poorer health, long term illness and to experience anxiety or depression. With the proper educational supports, these children could be given opportunities that would make all the difference to their lives."

### FACTBOX

- Early school leavers are three to four times more likely to be unemployed than young people who have been able to remain in school longer and benefit from education
- The majority of Irish prisoners have never sat a state exam with over half having left school before the age of 15
- Early school leavers are more likely to report poorer health, long term illness, experience anxiety or depression and are 4.5 times more likely to be in receipt of a medical card

The report also highlighted the high cost to the state of teenagers leaving education early.

Mr Finlay said: "The amount paid in Jobseekers Allowance to the total number of unemployed early school leavers is estimated to be as high as €19 million per week.

"It is clear that supporting children to stay in school has serious cost saving implications for both individuals and society."

Speaking after the launch, ASTI general secretary

John White claimed the study provided conclusive evidence of the benefits to society of investing in education.

He said: "Young people who leave school without a qualification are more likely to be unemployed, have higher incidences of physical and mental ill-health and more likely to depend on medical cards for significant periods of their lives. The increase in class size and reductions in funding for schools, especially the removal of the grant for school books, means that such students - and their families - will be particularly hard hit in September."

## Unite drafts in Obama's internet A-team..



UNITE has opened a cyber front in the battle to secure workers' rights.

The union has drafted in Blue State Digital - the same group of experts who spearheaded Barack Obama's presidential campaign online - to advise them.

The consultants are focusing on showing the union how to run effective e-campaigns. It appears the secret lies in getting union members to communicate with each other.

A spokesman said: "We're trying to get members to communicate with pals.

"It's about getting people to network and not just be passive receivers of run-of-the-mill emails from the general secretary."

Earlier this year, Unite launched a new interactive website which is currently averaging 19,000 hits a day.

Joint general secretary Tony Woodley said: "Unite is using online strategies to mobilise its members to fight for jobs and to give them a voice during the recession."

A website has also been launched which the union claims is receiving an average of 19,000 hits each day.

In one section of the site members can recount their own experiences of the recession.

Mr Woodley added: "The stories people have told us are astonishing and tragic. We're proud to give them a voice."



Obama: Netted election victory

## Probation officers face increased risk at work

PROBATION officers are facing an increasing risk of violence at work, an IMPACT conference has been told.

Mary McDonald, of the probation officers branch, raised the issue at the union's civil service divisional conference in Portlaoise last month. She called for a safety audit of all workplaces in the light of the threat posed by some clients.

Brian Horgan also told delegates that proba-

tion officers had noticed "a gradual shift in the type of offender we are working with". He said: "It's a shift towards a greater number of high-risk clients who are a product of recent societal changes." Mr Horgan claimed drug use and the carrying of weapons was now a "common feature" and it wasn't unusual to meet clients who wore body armour to appointments.

He added: "Neither it is unusual now to learn that clients have met a violent death as part of

an ongoing battle between rival gangs and drug related feuds." He called for:

- Specific protocols to assess the risk posed by violent clients, sex offenders and those convicted domestic violence offences
- Pre-emptive policies to guard against attacks on probation officers, and
- The putting in place of a system to identify high-risk clients and to share information with relevant services

## APPEAL TO MINISTER



NIPSA general secretary John Corey, far left, at a protest in support of the sacked traffic attendants in Downpatrick

NIPSA has called on Stormont Regional Development Minister Conor Murphy to back its campaign to have Belfast traffic attendants reinstated after their sacking in April.

A union delegation met with the minister on June 9 and urged him to intervene with NSL Services following the dismissal of 26 wardens for taking part in a half-day stoppage.

General secretary John Corey, who headed up the NIPSA team, told Minister Murphy the response by NSL Services to the April 3 walkout was "wholly wrong and inappropriate".

He said the traffic attendants had "legitimate grievances" which local management had at first seemed ready to address.

Mr Corey claimed it appeared the firm's headquarters had then insisted on formal suspensions and subsequent dismissals. He accused NSL Serv-

ices of showing "no regard or respect" for the sacked wardens involved and of displaying "scant regard" to "good and proper employment processes".

The Department for Regional Development is responsible for traffic control and the multimillion pound contract was awarded to NCP - now NSL Services - in October 2006 after work was contracted out of the public sector.

That deal is up for renewal in 2010.

NIPSA argued strongly that this was a public service that should never have been privatised in the first place.

Mr Corey also told the minister of his "extreme disappointment" at the DRD's failure to intervene to resolve the issue at an early stage and said he had personally contacted the department on April 3. Responding the representation, Mr

Murphy, inset, made it clear he wanted to see all of the issues resolved and confirmed that he had sought legal advice about the contract between the DRD and NSL.

He insisted that there were limitations placed on what he could do, but confirmed he had written to the NSL chief executive seeking assurances that issues raised by traffic attendants were being addressed and that the appeals process against the dismissals would be dealt with "fairly, openly and transparently with proper representation".



## Messages of support can be sent to [sackedtrafficattendants@nipisa.org.uk](mailto:sackedtrafficattendants@nipisa.org.uk)



### JIM LARKIN GIVEAWAY

We had a great response to the Jim Larkin First Day Cover readers' offer in association with An Post. The lucky winners were: John Carty, Galway; Jim Owens, Belfast; Keith Kerrick, Cork; Helen McGowan, Belfast; Hugh Doyle, Dublin; Mike DeSilva, Dublin; J McGurk, Belfast; Dick Duff, Cork; Frank Fehilly, Cork; Damian McArdle, Dungannon; Patricia McMenamin, Letterkenny; John King, Drogheda; C Mitchell, Ballymena; Roger Clifford, Lisburn; Ray Hughes, Belfast; Andrea Holmes, Dublin; Martin Hill, Belfast; Jim Quinn, Enniskillen; Tony Flood, Artane; Joanne Horan, Enfield; Robert Allen, Ballinderry; Martin McCullough, Newtownabbey; Meadh Murphy, Portmarnock; Bernadette Sonté, Carrigaline; Paul Caffrey, Dublin; Michael McCormack, Mullingar; Brendan Lawless, Dublin; PJ Downey, Galway; Rita Moran, Kiltimagh; Brian Fennell, Limerick; Pat Fogarty, Dublin; John Dunne, Galway; Kay Scarry, Galway; Daragh Holmes, Dublin; Michael Killeavy, Tullamore; Kity O'Kane, Derry; Garry Gilliland, Belfast; Anton McCabe, Omagh; Paula Geraghty, Dublin; Roisin Ryder, Dublin; Mike Devoy, Dublin; R McLaughlin, Ballymena; Liam Ó Cuinneáin, Co Dhúin na nGall; Patrick Corrigan, Belfast; P Erwin, Belfast; Joe Arkins, Ennis, Co Clare;

**WEBLINK** Download the report at [www.barnardos.ie/policies\\_and\\_campaigns/written-off.html](http://www.barnardos.ie/policies_and_campaigns/written-off.html) Or take part in Barnardos' survey into educational disadvantage at [www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=vjLc9cw5S38DS41mStxmGQ\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=vjLc9cw5S38DS41mStxmGQ_3d_3d)



### Reality cheques for island contestants

REALITY TV contestants in France have won the rights to overtime payments and other benefits enjoyed by ordinary workers. It follows a court case brought by three people who appeared on L'Île de la Tentation – or Temptation Island – and should now limit future participants in this and similar shows to a 35-hour working week. The contestants were each awarded €11,000 in compensation, including €8,176 euros in overtime, €817 for being denied a holiday, €500 for unfair dismissal, and €1,500 for the wrongful termination of their contracts.

### Aussie low wage mums 'taxed most'

HIGHER tax rates are being forced on working mums in Australia to bankroll tax breaks for top earners, it has been claimed. Research carried out by economist Patricia Apps found that low and middle income wage earners pay the most tax per Australian dollar because of a complicated trade off between income tax and family payments. The University of Sydney professor said: "If a father of a family with two young children is on \$40,000 and the mother goes out to work and earns around \$20,000, she can lose over 40 per cent of her income in taxes and lost benefits." She added: "The puzzle is why so many women work [under these circumstances]."

### Chinese cops free disabled kiln slaves

CHINESE police have freed 32 mentally disabled people forced to work in slave-like conditions in brick kilns and made 10 arrests in a raid in the east of the country. Among those arrested in the April 28 swoop was a man named as Zhang who was the kiln boss who is alleged to have "bought" the workers for up to 300 yuan (€31/£27) each. The Xinhua news agency said: "All of them are mentally handicapped people aged between 25 and 45. Few of them can tell where they were from." So far police have located the families of 12 of the workers and returned them, while the others are living in a welfare shelter.

### UAW workers vote for US Treasury deal

US car workers have ratified a deal brokered between General Motors and the US Treasury. Some 74 per cent of UAW workers voted in favour of the move which meets Treasury demands for changes to a 2007 collective bargaining agreement as well as modifications to the Voluntary Employee Beneficiary Association trust. UAW chief Ron Gettelfinger said: "Members have once again stepped up to make necessary and painful sacrifices to preserve US manufacturing jobs."

# 350,000 MARCH FOR A NEW EUROPE



ALMOST 350,000 workers and their families took to the streets last month in a series of massive demonstrations across Europe. The 'action days', organised by the European Trade Union Confederation in Madrid, Brussels, Prague and Berlin in May 14 to May 16, highlighted concerns about the deteriorating employment situation. ETUC chief John Monks, who spoke at the rally in Brussels, said: "The size of these Euro-demonstrations reveals the widespread concerns for the future. The world of financial capitalism seems to assume that after a few green

shoots of recovery, it will be soon business as usual for them despite their recent heart attack. "But they are still on life support provided by Europe's tax payers, and never again can greed and selfishness be allowed to cause damage of amounts of trillions of euros. "Tighter regulation of financial markets is needed now and more workers influence on boardrooms. Workers want life support systems for industry and jobs too, and ambitious action to help the fight against growing unemployment. That's the message from the streets across Europe this week."



PICTURES: ETUC



Action: John Monks at Brussels demo

# SIPTU attacks bosses group on ERO

SIPTU general president Jack O'Connor has strongly criticised IBEC's attack on the Employment Rights Order, and dubbed it "populist pandering to selfish interests".

IBEC had called for an overhaul of the committee system through which pay and conditions for employees across a number of sectors are determined.

Industrial relations director Brendan McGinty claimed some of these systems were no longer appropriate.

He added: "Unsustainable wage levels and unduly restrictive practices make it too difficult for us to compete with other countries."

But Mr O'Connor hit back and said IBEC should have been able to offer a better response to the current jobs crisis than attacking low paid workers and described the current mechanism for determining levels of pay "unquestionably fair".

He said: "A joint Labour Committee of representatives of employers and trade unions acting under the auspices of an independent chairman agree minimum levels of pay and other conditions of employment for an industry."

"When a proposal emerges it is publicised over a 21-day period to facilitate representation. All submissions received are considered. Then a proposal is formulated and it is submitted to the Labour Court for its consideration. The Labour Court having inspected and considered it can ratify it or otherwise."

Mr O'Connor rejected any suggestion of limiting payment of retrospection on entitlements to a maximum of one year, and posed the question, "Why should law breakers be exonerated from their responsibility and why should vulnerable workers bear the burden of it?"

He also appealed to IBEC to "abandon this populist pandering to selfish interests and to bring forward serious well thought out proposals to tackle the economic social crisis confronting our entire society".

**THE European Federation of Journalists has warned the growing economic and professional crisis in the media was weakening democracy across the region. It claimed the private sector was no longer "able to guarantee the provision of information services that are essential to preserve and enhance standards of democracy in Europe."**

# SECTARIANISM... Trademark's DR STEVIE NOLAN argues sectarian attitudes must be rooted out before we can move ahead CHALLENGING 'US AND THEM'

STATING incessantly that sectarianism has no place in our society and that it must be challenged and faced down whilst doing nothing about it looks at best symbolic and at worst cynical.

The murder of Kevin McDaid is no isolated incident and a reminder of 'darker days', it is a result of the very nature of this society, it is the inevitable consequence of the deeply held sectarian prejudices that run like a sewer through the attitudes and perceptions of us all.

Whilst the trade union movement has tried, despite the risk of alienating many members, to hold a strongly anti-sectarian line alongside a robust and eventually successful campaigning position on discrimination in the workplace, we need to get serious about this issue.

We know that we, the trade union movement, have taken significant political risks, and shop stewards have taken genuine individual risks, in campaigning for, and insisting on, the removal of sectarian 'flags and emblems' from the workplace. We must now take a similar stance on challenging sectarianism in our communities and institutions.

There is no agreed narrative of the conflict in Ireland and looking into the past to strengthen the present is a favourite pastime here. We like

to discover our heroic ancestors; the myths, old literatures and folk customs provide the authenticity that we need to justify ourselves; it is what makes 'us' right and 'them' wrong. So we point fingers and shout dates at each other, we claim the past as our own, and disagree on the present.

This unagreed narrative of the past finds its roots in the illegitimacy or otherwise of partition, of stories of injustice and dispossession of loyalty and rebellion and of colonizer and colonised. To address the dynamics and manifestations of sectarianism we must recognise that sectarianism arises out of a particular historical context - not to do so is to misunderstand sectarianism and weaken our ability to challenge its most pernicious influences.

It is not enough to condemn sectarianism and throw around accusations of fascism; the point is to change things, to tackle the false consciousness that gives rise to exclusive and narrow ethnic and national rivalries and the violence with which it so often manifests itself.

The work of Trademark encourages and facilitates contact and dialogue that has as its base an analysis of the historical and political realities that led to the current conflict. We seek to ensure that the roots of sectarianism are ac-

knowledged by looking at the complex historical backdrop to the conflict and the fractious relationship between established history and the power of ethnic and national memory. We offer opportunities for groups - particularly in areas of high community tension and across interfaces - the opportunity to listen to realities different from their own and through that process encourage them to move beyond what we believe are narrow identity politics to a politics based on community needs, equality and social justice.

Sectarianism weakens our resistance to the continued march of the free market into every area of our lives and the acceptance of its inevitability. The re-organisation of the world economy over the last 30 years and the emergence of a particularly savage form of capitalism poses many challenges to all those actors involved in the pursuit of democratisation and social justice.

The emergence of atypical forms of employment, low pay, anti-union policies and 'market flexibility' has offered little protection for workers and communities and has ensured that labour rights and related social and economic benefits remain beyond the majority of people in societies in transition.

Whether it is the eventual privatisation of water, the continuation of the failed PFI programmes or attacks on some of the lowest paid workers these free market policies are considered inseparable from the transition to 'democracy' and simply 'make sense', opposition to this particular economic model is therefore assumed to be 'nonsense'.

However, with the predicted implosion of this deeply flawed economic system, our politicians who invested all our futures on roulette wheel economics, now scramble around looking for answers that have been there all along.

It is therefore clear that those of us committed to social justice cannot do so in a social and political vacuum.

The defence of rights and the promotion of equality must recognise that sectarianism and narrow identity politics prevents the emergence of strong trade unions and broad left politics; we must not assume that this can be achieved without practical and concerted efforts to challenge sectarianism at all levels and

in all communities. The political process is not simply a transition from violence to peace or from a democratic deficit to greater participative democracy; the social and economic transition which ensures a just and sustainable resolution to this conflict must face up to the challenge of addressing sectarianism.

Trademark is a not for profit organisation and partner of ICTU which has an express responsibility in dealing with sectarianism and the challenges of racism and fascism; this unit whilst delivering political education and conducting research and policy development maintains its roots in intervention and political action. We continue to be involved in addressing sectarian disputes in the workplace and community.

**"Sectarianism & narrow identity politics prevents the emergence of strong trade unions and broad left politics"**

Trademark is a registered charity and conducts its work through an unstable cocktail of funding and donations; all donations to its work are therefore gratefully received. [www.trademarkbelfast.com](http://www.trademarkbelfast.com) for details

## Hustings, more talks and more job losses...

**May 1:** SIPTU chief Jack O'Connor claims "nothing short of a supreme national effort" is needed to deal with the economic crisis. He said unions had argued for a social dividend that would serve as a "catalyst" to mobilise the country - including a universal, mandatory pay-related pension scheme and measures to keep the maximum number of people in jobs.

May 1: Congress launches a May Day call for a €1 billion job creation and protection plan in a bid to tackle the unemployment crisis. ICTU assistant general secretary Sally Anne Kinahan claims inaction is no longer an option.

**May 2:** Employers group IBEC broadly support Congress investment call. Director general Turlough O'Sullivan claims employers and union were "singing from the same hymn sheet". He also called on the Irish government to introduce a PRSI holiday for employers and a trade credit insurance scheme.

May 2: Unite announces workers occupying the Visteon car components plant in West Belfast have received a much improved redundancy offer.

**May 2:** Irish government sources pour cold water on a traditional-style social partnership deal with unions.

May 3: IBEC's Brendan McGinty claims unions and employers were now "at a common purpose" to fund the fight to protect jobs "even if we have to borrow it".

**May 5:** Visteon workers vote to accept revised redundancy package. Unite regional secretary Jimmy Kelly hails the deal as "10 times what members were offered originally".

May 5: Jack O'Connor claims the current government policy of cuts and taxes would add to the Republic's economic woes. He tells RTE's This Week programme: "The country will not deflate itself out of this crisis."

**May 5:** Sounding a pessimistic note following a meeting of Congress's executive council, general secretary David Begg compares talks process to "playing handball against a haystack". He also claimed the Department of Fi-

nance had now the dominant role in government affairs, adding: "That does not lend itself to addressing these issues."

May 6: Following yet more talks, IMPACT general secretary Peter McLoone said unions had exhausted all arguments, and added: "It's up to the Taoiseach to come back and respond to the arguments."



**Another Red Tide:** Eamon Gilmore

May 7: Sainsbury's is to create 100 new jobs at a new store opening later this summer in west Belfast.

**May 7:** Courier firm DHL announces it is seeking 320 redundancies as it closes seven depots across the country. Option Wireless is to shed 55 jobs at its Cork base.

May 9: Addressing delegates at an IMPACT conference in Castlebar, Mr McLoone warned the government and social partners were "staring failure in the face" and insisted top priority must be protecting jobs and creating new work opportunities.

**May 12:** Eircom agrees restructuring deal with unions which will see 1,200 jobs shed over the next two years. CWU general secretary Steve Fitzpatrick said the union and staff were "not at all happy" with the deal. He added: "We've been forced into agreeing to cost savings to protect as many jobs as possible because of the financial situation the company finds itself in."

May 12: Dublin Airport Authority seeks 400 redundancies from its workforce of 3,600. Labour transport spokesperson Tommy Broughan described the news as "a major shock".

**May 14:** SIPTU warns of a campaign of industrial action if government fails to offer a national rescue deal.

May 14: Taoiseach Brian Cowen meets with union leaders. In a position paper issued after, the government said the "insights and views" of social partners could be reflected in the implementation of "extremely difficult" cutbacks in years ahead.

**May 15:** Directory enquiries company 11850 is to shed 90 jobs in Dublin as it outsources work to Asia.

May 18: Union leaders meet with government officials on the issues of job protection and creation, pension reform and assistance for those people hit by mortgage arrears.

**May 18:** SIPTU urges voters to support Labour Party at the local and European elections. He said it was the only party opposed to the bank guarantee scheme which he described as a "blank cheque" for speculators and developers. Meanwhile, Brian Cowen claimed the government was working "very intensively" to try and reach a deal.

May 19: IBEC offers bi-lateral talks to unions on a new national pay agreement if the ongoing national recovery talks hit the buffers.

**May 19:** Congress general secretary David Begg describes talks with senior civil servants as the most complicated discussions conceivable. Government official had talked of "extraordinary difficulties" in supporting workers who face involuntary redundancy, such as those at SR Technics. Following a two-

hour meeting Mr Begg said the ideal solution for ICTU would be a pension protection fund and claimed that had been ruled out by government on cost grounds.

May 20: IBEC upbeat on chances of a partnership deal on national recovery being brokered.

**May 20:** ICTU executive council meets to discuss the ongoing talks.

the financial crisis and boardroom decisions taken as a result of it can have a devastating impact on the lives of those who helped to create that company in the first place."

May 22: 15 jobs to go at Scientific Games Corporation in Ballymahon, Co Longford. Meanwhile, 18 solicitors, on fixed term civil service contracts, are to lose their positions at the Chief



**Solidarity:** Visteon workers and their families at May Day rally in Belfast

May 20: In what unions described as a positive development, Brian Cowen pledged to pump social welfare funds into measures to support jobs. In a letter to unions, he said: "I share the view that support for jobs and for those who are unfortunate to lose their jobs should be at the centre of our collective efforts."

**May 20:** ACCBank announces it is cutting a third of its workforce with a loss of 200 jobs and the closure of 16 of its 25 branches. The branches will close from October this year to April 2010. Unite regional officer Frank Maunsell said it was "a sad reflection on how

State Solicitor's Office.

**May 29:** Labour Party leader Eamon Gilmore claims working class Fianna Fail voters were deserting the party in droves and predicted Ireland would see "a seismic shift" in the forthcoming elections.

June 5: The local elections delivered a hammer blow to Fianna Fail - and was the worst result in their history. Voters also turned against coalition partners the Green Party, decimating their local base.

## Gilmore in juggernaut warning at conference

LABOUR PARTY leader Eamon Gilmore has claimed public sector unions must aim to maximise public support in trying to protect the interests of their members.

Speaking at the IMPACT conference in Portlaoise on May 23, he pointed to recent examples where industrial action had alienated the general public and warned delegates major changes were going to impact on the sector.

Mr Gilmore said: "The juggernaut is coming down the track. And when the juggernaut is coming down the track sometimes the best way of defending the interest of the members is not by erecting a barrier that it would crash through anyway."

"Sometimes the best way of dealing with the juggernaut is get up and to get control of the steering wheel."

"That is why I say that at this point in time, that with the changes that are now taking place, some of which are inevitable, that there is a new role for public service trade unions."

"It is not a role that is reactive to change but it is a role that is leading the change."

## Trades Council in call to ban barbaric cage fights

OMAGH Trades Union Council has called for a ban on cage fighting.

Secretary Anton McCabe claimed the activity - sometimes dubbed mixed martial arts - "hardly constitutes a sport" and was opposed by medical experts.

He said: "The BMA has already called for this barbaric activity to be banned."

"Dr Vivienne Nathanson, its head of ethics and science, has been quoted describing the activity as 'human cockfighting'. She said, 'It can cause traumatic brain injury, joint injuries and fractures. This kind of competition hardly constitutes a sport - the days of gladiator fights are over and we should not be looking to resurrect them'."

Mr McCabe also raised concerns young people were being offered derisory sums of money to put themselves at risk of serious injury.

He added: "We are in the middle of a serious recession."

"In such times, it is understandable some people are tempted by the offer of money to do something which can put their health at risk."

"No amount of money can compensate for permanent brain damage and premature death. And that is what we are looking at here."

## Quarter NI kids in poverty

ALMOST a quarter of children in Northern Ireland are living in poverty, new figures have revealed.

At total of 24 per cent of youngsters are in households where incomes are less than 60 per cent of the average wage.

The figures, compiled by the Department for Work and Pensions, also show that 17 per cent of adults and 20 per cent of OAPs are on the breadline in the North.

The Child Poverty Action Group called the figures "deplorable" and insisted that

hard-pressed families needed help now. Across the UK, almost 2.9 million children and 5.6 million working-age adults are classed as poor and should be seen against the backdrop of a Labour pledge to halve child poverty by 2010.

The child poverty target was set by then PM Tony Blair in 1999 when 3.4 million children were defined as living in poverty.

Since then ministers say they have succeeded in lifting 600,000 children out of poverty.

**■ AN index measuring construction activity in Ireland has shown yet more shrinkage in the sector in April - though there are signs the decline in commercial activity has bottomed out.**

**The Ulster Bank Construction Purchasing Managers' Index rose to 32.9 in April, slightly up from a low of 28.1 in March, but well short of the magic 50.0 indicator that divides expansion from contraction. Ulster Bank economist Lynsey Clemenger said that while bottoming out was "a welcome positive... any marked improvement is unlikely soon."**

## UCATT concern over agency directive

UCATT has flagged up its concerns over the implementation of the Agency Workers Directive and called for tougher rules especially in the construction sector.

The union claims the insistence by government that agency workers must serve a 12-week qualifying period before they receive employment rights will be difficult to monitor in the building trade.

Often construction workers are shunted between sites and unregistered gangmasters

will simply ignore the rules. General secretary Alan Ritchie said: "If the government are serious about improving conditions for agency workers, then they must introduce tougher rules in construction."

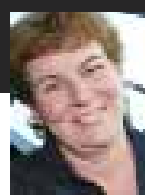
"A one-size-fits-all approach will fail."

"There is a vast difference between agency workers operating in static, regulated offices and the conditions in construction where workers operate in a highly casualised

environment and are frequently moved from site to site."

He added that the casualised nature of work in the industry did not just lead to exploitation but to increases in workplace injuries and deaths.

He added: "By reducing casualisation through regulating gangmasters and employment agencies, conditions on sites would improve dramatically almost overnight."



Northern Ireland vice-chair **UNA MURPHY** looks at ICTU's Women's Committee and its efforts to raise awareness of women's issues within unions

# Putting gender at top of the agenda

THE Women's Committee north and south of the border has been putting gender on the agenda since the 1960s and is one of the longest standing committees of Congress.

It's currently headed up by joint chairs Taryn Trainor of Unite and Clare Treacy from the Irish Nurses' Organisation.

In tandem with Congress staff, the Committee has organised a successful women's conference in Tralee, Co Kerry, and a women's seminar in Belfast over the past year and a half.

The seminar in March highlighted how the recession was impacting on women workers amid fears that they were bearing the brunt of job losses.

The TUC recently pointed to the increased percentage of women in the workforce meaning that more women than before will experience the effects of the recession. (see [www.tuc.org.uk/extras/womenandrecession.pdf](http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/womenandrecession.pdf))

Campaigners outlined problems women would encounter in the face of the worst economic downturn in many decades.

Fawcett Society director Katherine Rake said: "The impact of this recession on everyone is much bigger than simple employment figures but to capture its impact on women we need to look at broader social and economic issues."

"Women are more likely to be in part-time, lower-paid or temporary employment, filling the roles that are often the first to go when employers are forced to make cuts."

English MEP Jean Lambert added: "Those returning to work after maternity leave will find familiar difficulties compounded as they complete for the opportunities that do exist."

The ICTU Women's Committee meets regularly to ensure women's issues remain at the top of the trade union agenda.

Recently members of the Committee from across the north met in Derry to discuss domestic abuse



the years been organised in the US for women in trade unions and the Committee has set up similar leadership courses across Ireland to encourage more women to take up leadership roles. This is starting to pay dividends and more women are moving into jobs at the top table of the trade union movement.

The outgoing ICTU President Patricia McKeown, Northern Ireland Secretary of UNISON, has held the position since July 2007.

She is the second women's President of ICTU, and follows in the footsteps of UNISON colleague Inez McCormack.

There are now nine women on the Executive Council of Congress and three on the General Purposes Committee.

Teresa Moriarty, a labour historian, has researched the role of women in the trade union movement in Ireland.

Her studies led to the publication of a unique series of postcards honouring the contribution of women who held officerships in Congress and their own unions during the 20th century which has been published by SIPTU and the ICTU.

(Available from ICTU at [david.joyce@ictu.ie](mailto:david.joyce@ictu.ie) Tel: 003531 or 01 889777 or SIPTU at [equality.unit@siptu.ie](mailto:equality.unit@siptu.ie) Tel: 003531 or 01 8586455)

Over the years the Women's Committee has actively engaged in campaigns to encourage more women to become involved in political life as well as raising awareness of international issues such as Palestine and South Africa.

The Committee has also protested against the strip searching of women prisoners and campaigned against pornography.

But above all, it has brought gender issues into sharp focus at Congress ensuring they remain at the very top of the agenda within unions and well as enabling the forging of links with the wider women's movement.



**SIPTU's Anne Speed, Pamela Dooley from UNISON and MEP Marian Harkin were among the delegates to speak at the women's seminar in Belfast**



**Patricia McKeown**

# Survey shows over 50s fearful over jobs

EMPLOYEES aged 50 or over are facing a recession double whammy in the workplace, leading UK charities have warned.

More than one in four older workers are afraid they will be forced out of their jobs because of their age and fear their retirement incomes will be decimated by the slump, new research carried out by Help the Aged and Age Concern has revealed.

The charities argue that with the unemployment rate among the over-50s rising by nearly 50 per cent in the past year, these fears have become a reality for many.

Also, nearly half of respondents (47pc) said they are less confident than six months ago that their pension and savings will provide them with a comfortable standard of living in retirement.

This situation means for many, continuing working and retaining earning potential is more important than ever before.

A total of 60 per cent of those surveyed said the recession has meant they will have to or want to work longer than originally planned.

Yet, the economic situation and the lack of support available for over 50s

who do lose their job will leave many permanently out of work and facing a long and difficult retirement.

Michelle Mitchell, Charity Director for Age Concern and Help the Aged, claimed the figures painted an "extremely bleak picture" for millions of over-50s hit by the recession.

She said: "Those who do lose their jobs will face significant obstacles to getting back into work, leaving them financially vulnerable as they approach retirement."

"For many over 50s, one of the lasting legacies of this recession will be a retirement blighted by poverty."

"During this difficult time, we are urging employers to start seeing beyond job applicants' age and look at the skills, experience and commitment older workers have to offer."

"The government must also play their part by providing a tailored package of support for over 50s who do lose their jobs - this is currently almost non-existent."



**Stamp of approval: Keep the Post Public campaign outside Belfast City Hall**

CWU members have completed a tour of the North as part of drive to 'Keep the Post Public'.

They took to the road on May 11 to back a UK-wide campaign against government plans to part-sell-off the Royal Mail.

This was the Northern Ireland leg of a John O'Groats to Lands End promotional tour.

The posties' efforts have received support from every political party, every borough and every district council across the North but most especially there was a warm response from the general public.

CWU Northern Ireland regional secretary Lawrence Huston said: "Royal Mail is a vital public service for all people in Northern Ireland. We have some of the most remote locations in the UK and need a reliable, single-priced postal service."

"The government must re-think its position on privatising Royal Mail. It would be a political and financial disaster. We've got a first class postal service - privatising it would make it second class."

"Privatisation would inevitably lead to higher stamp prices, lower wages and the possibility of further post office closures, job losses and service reductions for unprofitable rural areas."

"Royal Mail makes nearly £1 million profit every day. It's a successful public company that should be modernised under full public ownership."



**The Carson trail: Road show reaches Stormont**



**Ours for keeps: Campaigners at Carrick Castle**

## Royal Mail profits welcomed

THE Communications Workers Union has welcomed news the Royal Mail has doubled its profits and claims it proves a wholly publicly-owned company can compete with the best the private sector can offer.

Deputy general secretary Dave Ward said the £255 million profit was a vindication of the union's stance in opposing plans for a part-sell-off of the postal service.

He added: "While private mail companies, including TNT, have seen huge profit reductions, Royal Mail's operating profit has doubled."

"We believe investment in and the pace of

modernisation needs to now be stepped up. "It's crucial that upgraded machinery for automated sorting is rolled out and further modernisation to products and services brought in."

Mr Ward also said the CWU expected the company to change its position on a staff pay freeze.

He added: "Royal Mail is making record profits so postal workers should be rewarded for their contribution to the success of the company."

"A pay freeze is not defensible in this situation."

**WEBLINK**

Sign the Keep the Post Public petition on <http://post.cwu.org/page/s/notforsale>



**Mitchell: Bleak picture**



TALLY OF DEATH	
Colombia	49
Guatemala	9
Philippines	4
Venezuela	4
Honduras	3
Nepal	2
Iraq	1
Panama	1
Nigeria	1
Tunisia	1
Zimbabwe	1

# 76 lives lost in 2008 over union activism

A TOTAL of 76 people were murdered across the world last year because of their trade union involvement.

The shock figure, revealed in the ITUC annual survey of trade union rights violations, also showed many thousands more were attacked physically or subjected to harassment, intimidation and arrest because of their activities.

While killings overall fell from 91 in 2007 the number of trade unionists murdered in Colombia climbed to 49 – 10 more than the previous year.

Nine activists were assassinated in Guatemala, four were killed in the Philippines as well as in Venezuela, three in Honduras, two in Nepal and one each in Iraq, Nigeria, Panama, Tunisia and Zimbabwe, where the Mugabe regime continued its reign of terror against the country's union movement.

In a number of instances, governments were either directly or indirectly involved in the killings.

A total of 50 serious death threats were recorded in seven countries as well, along with

some 100 cases of physical assaults in 25 countries.

According to the ITUC figures, governments in at least nine countries – Burma, Burundi, China, Cuba, Iran, South Korea, Tunisia, Turkey and Zimbabwe – were responsible for imprisoning trade unionists on account of their legitimate activities in support of working people.

ITUC general secretary Guy Ryder said: "Governments in every region are clearly failing to protect fundamental workers' rights, and in several cases were themselves responsible for heavy repression of these rights."

"The fact that certain countries, such as Colombia, Guatemala and the Philippines appear year after year on the death list shows that the authorities are, at best, incapable of ensuring protection and in some cases are complicit with unscrupulous employers in the murders."

The ITUC report highlighted the trend towards increasingly harsh exploitation and attacks on workers' rights in the world's Export Processing Zones, or EPZs.

Some 34 countries are cited in the survey for

inadequate or non-existent protection of EPZ workers, including Albania, the Bahamas, Belize, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Jordan, Mexico, Nicaragua, Poland and Oman.

A further 22 countries are singled out for the exploitation of migrant workers, who are often denied even the most basic of rights, and whose situation frequently means that they are the most vulnerable of all workers to exploitation and abuse.

Mr Ryder said: "Hundreds of millions of working people, in developing and in industrialised countries, are denied the fundamental rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining."

"For many, especially those in precarious employment, this denial wreaks havoc on their lives, as they work extremely long hours in hazardous or unhealthy situations with incomes so low that they are unable to support themselves and their households properly."

"Lack of respect for workers' rights has increased inequality around the world, and that inequality helped trigger the global recession."

## Govt scare tactics blasted

A LEADING union has accused the Irish government of using scare tactics to force public servants into "gambling" with their futures.

IMPACT chair Una Geaney claims workers thinking of taking up the new early retirement scheme were being sent mixed messages about whether retirement lump sums would be taxed in a future Budget.

Under the scheme, public servants can apply for their pension benefits early without any actuarial reduction in what they are entitled to.

Those over 50 who receive approval get the first 10 per cent of their pension lump sum up

front with the remainder tax free at the normal retirement age of 60 or 65.

Ms Geaney warned IMPACT would resist any "despicable" attempts to impose a new tax on retirement payouts.

She said: "Our members are being forced to gamble on their retirement income. They must either gamble that pension lump sums will be taxed in future, in which case they are effectively forced to take early retirement and forego up to 10 years' pay."

"Or they must gamble that their pension won't be taxed, and possibly end up with a much-reduced retirement income if it is taxed."

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## Dramatic step to counter racism...

A NEW group is hoping to make a dramatic impact on raising consciousness on a range of important issues – in particular the scourge of racism.

Belfast Voices, co-ordinated by theatre practitioner Doug Holden, has members drawn from Unite, NIPSA, ATL and UTU as well as various community groups.

A spokeswoman said: "Everyone is welcome and we hope to continue the work of getting the message of equality across using alternative formats."

The group performed two pieces of drama at the ICTU women's seminar in Belfast in

March, one focused on the experiences of migrant workers in the workplace and the other on ageism and racism.

Monika Paluch, who has taken part in the project, said: "I really enjoyed playing my part. I have never been involved in anything like this before, it is a great and memorable way to make a strong and important point."

ICTU's disability committee are also interested in creating a piece around awareness on disability.

Anyone who wants to take part should contact Pauline Buchanan at the Congress office in Belfast. Tel: 02890 247940.



## 7p boost for min wage

THE TUC has welcomed the 1.2 per cent increase in the adult minimum wage announced by the Low Pay Commission on May 12.

From October the hourly rate will rise by seven pence to £5.80 an hour.

Even though he described the increase as "very slender", TUC chief Brendan Barber said the LPC was right to resist pressure from business to freeze the rate.

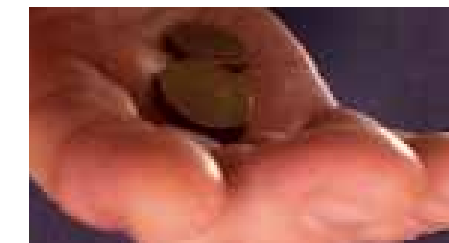
Business organisations had lobbied hard for a freeze, arguing that the cost of living is going down thanks to forecasts of negative inflation while pay freezes or even cuts to save jobs are spreading across the private sector.

Mr Barber said: "The recession was caused by very highly paid people damaging the nation's financial system. It would not have been fair to force the low paid to suffer a freeze in wages, while the city bankers still get their bonuses."

But GMB general secretary Paul Kenny said those at the bottom of the earnings league needed more help.

He added: "They are the ones who have the greatest difficulties meeting the higher outgoings for rents, food, energy and transport. They deserve more than this seven pence an hour increase. This is a missed opportunity by the Labour government."

## MINIMUM WAGE



# UNIONS IN BACKING FOR NEW TIPS LAW

UNIONS have welcomed new legislation that will outlaw the using of tips by employers to make up staff pay to national minimum wage levels.

The May 6 announcement follows a consultation on the issue which saw a majority of firms that responded back the changes set to take effect from October.

Under current rules, where tips and gratuities are given directly to workers by customers and retained by staff, they cannot count towards NMW payment.

However, where service charges, tips, gratuities and cover charges are paid by the employer to the worker via the payroll then the tip can count towards national minimum wage.

Maurice Cunningham, Unite's regional industrial officer in Northern Ireland, said: "The government is to be congratulated for doing the right thing by low-waged waiting staff and moving to close the loophole which has allowed greedy employers to use tips to pay staff the minimum wage."

"Hard-working waiting staff will be delighted to learn that bad employers can no longer line their pockets with the money that customers intended to go to workers."

"This is a triumph for the poorly paid in restaurants, bars and hotels across the country, and for Unite's campaign on behalf of all hospitality staff."

But he cautioned that there needed to be a transparent tipping system to ensure that 100 per cent of tips go to staff.

Mr Cunningham added: "Workers will be waiting for the hospitality industry to demonstrate they will now sign up to the fair tips system that their customers and staff have demanded. Our experience of the hospitality industry does not inspire confidence in their ability to self regulate on tips and services charges."

The GMB also welcomed the move – particularly the promise of a new industry code of best practice.

General secretary Paul Kenny said: "It was totally out of order that employers should have been able to use tips to make up staff pay to the National Minimum Wage levels. Thousands of workers will welcome the fact that from October this will be outlawed. GMB members will watch closely the Tory Party manifesto as to whether they will want to reverse this policy."

For the full consultation document go to [www.berr.gov.uk/files/file51166.pdf](http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file51166.pdf)



UNITE has staged a Dail protest over government inaction on jobs.

The May 12 demonstration highlighted the need to keep people in employment and to protect workers by putting in place a pension protection fund.

Slamming ministers, Irish regional secretary Jimmy Kelly, above, said: "They talked and listened but did absolutely nothing to save jobs and pensions at Waterford Crystal."

"They watched and waited but did absolutely nothing as SR Technics commenced shutting down 1,100 jobs at Dublin Airport."

"They need to wake up to the fact that borrowing to subsidise unemployment and bail out banks will not work. Working people are losing patience with their lack of action."

Labour Party MEP Pronias De Rossa and Sinn Fein TD Arthur Morgan also addressed the crowd.



# Close off loopholes that let bosses off the hook...

LOOPHOLES that give firms the opportunity to evade their responsibilities to their workforce must be closed off, a conference has been told.

Unites Irish regional secretary Jimmy Kelly speaking to delegates at an economic summit organised by the SDLP last month claimed workers' rights "had been constantly eroded" since the Thatcher era.

He said: "It's disgusting that workers are being forced out of work with no redundancy payments and the loss of their pensions."

"The loopholes that allow companies to escape their responsibilities should be closed."

Acknowledging the "magnificent fight" put up by Visteon workers in winning a much-improved package, he noted the continuing pensions campaign by Nortel and Waterford Crystal workers.

Mr Kelly noted that while there were differing contexts between the Republic and Northern Ireland, the "needed outcomes were the same".

Both governments had to redraw capital spending to ensure investment was prioritised on job-intensive activities. These included:

- Social housing construction as "building workers make up a sizeable element of the newly unemployed" and this should include all projects which had a high-labour content such as home insulation schemes,

- Investment in renewable energies. Mr Kelly called for a cross-border approach which he

claimed would pay "enormous dividends" down the line, and

- Boosting the tourism industry

Mr Kelly claimed each project should be weighed up on the merits of its earning capacity and whether it was job intensive.

He said: "This is not to suggest that necessary, but more capital intensive projects should be abandoned, but the priority for the next 18 months to two years is to maximise jobs and incomes. We should not have to accept the downward spiral of increasing unemployment which means a narrower base for increasing taxation and the higher cost of social welfare means decreased spending power."

The UNITE chief also called on the Northern Executive to put in place a job subsidy scheme based on German and Dutch models.

He said: "This would involve subsidising workers' wages in the event they are short-timed – as an alternative to redundancy."

Mr Kelly claimed this could be integrated in a training or re-skilling programme during those hours when employees would normally be working and added: "This would be cheaper and far more productive in terms of creating new skills

than just letting people fall into unemployment."

Pointing out that the Bush-Thatcher-Blair free market agenda had failed because of "greed", he called on Gordon Brown to "do something tangible".

He said: "We have a government wedded to letting market forces rule. That's why we are in the mess we're in."

Mr Kelly flagged up the fact the British government had failed to implement the EU temporary agency workers directive despite promises made to Unite over a year ago

He said the directive, which had already been implemented in most member-state countries, would give temporary workers the same rights of full-time staff, entitling them to redundancy pay.

Mr Kelly asked: "Why is it far that workers here are alone in Europe in being the quickest and easiest to sack? It's an absolute disgrace. Labour should hang their heads in shame."

He concluded: "Things have changed under the Labour administration, but not sufficiently to allow sensible working persons to know that they have the same protection as those in Europe. We don't."

“ We have a govt wedded to letting market forces rule.. that's why we're in this mess ”

## Make social work 'bearable'

UNISON has backed a UK government drive to get more people to take up social work as a career but warned against what it called the "revolving door effect".

The move was announced by children's secretary Ed Balls on May 6.

UNISON claimed more needs to be done to ensure the job is "made bearable", or risk having workers leave at the earliest opportunity.

National officer Helga Pile said: "Getting more people into the job is absolutely essential, but keeping them there is the real tough challenge."

"We must ensure that the workload is made bearable by cutting caseloads, culling paperwork and tackling the number of threats and assaults

on social workers." A recent survey, carried out on behalf of UNISON, revealed 70 per cent of social workers said that workload and pressure had increased over the past year, with 78 per cent reporting high levels of stress.

Ms Pile said: "When you add to this violence against social workers, with 65 per cent reporting verbal abuse, 26 per cent physical threats, and nine per cent actual violence, it makes the task of keeping people in the job even harder."

She added: "We are also very wary of the government's plans for a new set of performance targets – when targets turn into tick boxes, the real work of protecting children is made even harder."

UNITE has called on the UK government to help the haulage industry weather the recession through fuel rebates.

National officer Ron Web said: "There has been a dramatic fall in the volume of goods being transported in Britain, and Department of Transport figures today suggest that the number of lorry drivers seeking work has increased five-fold in the past year."

"This is a very serious situation which threatens the ability of our country to respond adequately when the economy begins to recover."

## Empower call at care home conference

UNISON's Pamela Dooley has called for greater emphasis to be placed on the individual rights of care home residents in Northern Ireland.

She was speaking at a conference the union organised with nursing and residential homes body the Independent Health & Care Providers last month in Belfast.

Ms Dooley, UNISON's head of organisation and development, told delegates: "We must move from a system where, all too often, residents of care homes are viewed as dependent and passive recipients of care to one where they are empowered, thrive and take an active role in the decisions which affect their care and quality of life."

"Individuals in care have rights that must be protected and promoted."

"The work of UNISON to date, particularly as a founder member of the NI Care Homes Partnership, shows real evidence of how employers, residents and staff can work together to provide person centred care which ultimately improves the quality of service and transforms a traditional nursing or residential care institution into a nurturing home."

## For a few coppers more...



Young UNISON members show what they think of the recent offer by local government employers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland of a 3p an hour increase. Lara Rowlands, an officer with UNISON, said: "An extra 3p an hour is nothing. Local government workers are already suffering job cuts, lack of resources, low morale and increased workloads. It's disgusting that we also have to suffer pitiful pay offers."

## UK BENEFITS USEFUL NUMBERS

Child Benefit Helpline:  
**0845 302 1444**

Tax Credits Helpline:  
**0845 300 3900**

Health in Pregnancy Grant Helpline:  
**0845 366 7885**

Sure Start Maternity Grant Helpline:  
**08000 55 66 88**

Child Trust Fund Helpline:  
**0845 366 7870**

## Help for first-time parents

NEARLY half of all first-time parents have money worries, yet most have not heard of Child Benefit, let alone the other benefits to which they are entitled, a new study has found.

The findings, revealed by Usdaw to coincide with their Supporting Parents and Carers Spotlight Day on June 3, showed that working parents are twice as likely to be worried about money as those without children or caring responsibilities.

Results also flag up that levels of awareness of entitlement to benefits among working parents tend to be low.

The highest level of awareness of government support for parents who already have children is for Tax Credits, with more than 90 per cent of survey respondents indicating that they are aware of these.

Less than a third of the working parents surveyed had heard of the Sure Start Maternity Grant, which is worth £500 to low income parents when a new baby is born.

Fewer than one in 10 new parents were aware of the

new Health in Pregnancy Grant, even though the £190 grant is not means tested and is available to almost all pregnant women.

Udaw general secretary John Hannett said: "About 75 per cent of our members who are parents and 60 per cent of members who are carers tell us that they aren't confident that they are claiming everything they're entitled to."

"And they're right – most are unaware of the benefits that are out there and that are meant to help parents with the additional costs that inevitably come with starting a family."

"Udaw is focusing attention on doing all we can to better support our members who are combining paid work with bringing up children."

"We have sent out thousands of leaflets, posters and cards to reps and members with information about what benefits are available and how to go about claiming them."

## HSE freeze on recruitment puts patients & staff at risk

GROUPS representing medical staff have warned of the risk to the health and safety of patients and staff as a result of the HSE's recruitment ban and other cuts.

In a joint press conference on May 5, members of the Irish Medical Organisation and the Irish Nurses' Organisation claimed services could only be maintained if frontline positions are filled.

Speakers claimed health care workers were responsible for the quality of care and overall safety of their patients. They pointed out that no doctor or nurse should be forced to work in a situation that was ethically wrong or which posed a risk to patient safety and welfare.

IMO vice president Prof Sean Tierney said: "We must ensure that health care delivery is efficient and safe. A full quota of frontline staff must be maintained to minimise the impact on patients."

"It is critical that the replacement of staff is prioritised and that locums and temporary staff are made available in critical areas."

INO general secretary Liam Doran added: "It is clearly understood that, regardless of the pressures the HSE is under, frontline staff will not countenance being put in a situation where they are asked to work in an environment which poses even greater risks than currently exist, for either patients or themselves."



Nancy, centre, receives her award at a ceremony in Hillsborough Castle

BELFAST Trust homemaker Nancy Smith has scooped the Department of Employment & Learning's essential skills award in the trade union category.

The mother of seven, who admitted hating school, started work with the Trust as a member of their twilight intensive homemaker team three years ago.

She was then offered the chance of doing a NVQ and despite initial nervousness about the course soon blossomed in the class.

Nancy claimed working through the literacy component to the course had helped her gain the skills and confidence she needed and is now keen to continue her studies.

UNISON's Fidelma Carolan said: "Nancy's award is a great testament to the many members who take that big step into learning and demonstrates it is never too late to start."

## NURSING



Time for action: flashback to INO protests over 35 hours working week in 2007

## Working hours report sent to Health Minister

FINDINGS from a commission into nurses' working hours have been sent to Irish Health Minister Mary Harney, it has been revealed.

The commission was set up after nurses took to the streets in 2007 demanding a cut in their 39-hour working week.

They returned to the wards only after a reduction to 37.5 hours was brokered along with a promise to look into how that could be cut further to 35 hours on a "cost neutral basis".

Last month's AGM of the Irish Nurses Organisation was told the 35-hour reduction was possible if all newly qualified nurses were guaranteed two years work in the public health system.

Director of professional development Annette Kennedy, who was a representative on the commission, told delegates nurses were more likely to stay in the profession if they had job prospects and a chance to practise their skills.

She said: "We need to hold on to nurses. In community



Doran: pragmatic

nursing alone half the nurses are over 50 and they'll be leaving in five, six or seven years. The vast majority in general service are over 44. If we can't bring in graduates, we'll be in serious trouble."

Ms Harney, who attended the INO conference said the findings had given her "food for thought".

INO general secretary Liam Doran said the formula would see 1,500 new nurses employed on a lower than standard salary carrying out duties normally done by full-time staff.

He added: "We have accepted that. We have tried to be pragmatic because the current system is not offering these new graduates a job."

Mr Doran estimated that under normal circumstances 2,000 nursing jobs would become available through retirement over the two years.

He suggested these positions could be filled by the newly qualified nurses on the programme instead. The report recommends the change could be planned over 18 months before being piloted in some areas prior to being rolled out nationwide.

## SAFETY AT WORK

# NUJ condemns mob attack on photographer

The NUJ has strongly condemned a gang attack on a press photographer covering the funeral of UVF multiple killer Billy Moore in Belfast.

The photo journalist, who is not being named by the union, was set upon by thugs and viciously beaten as he got out of his car in Rathcoole in the north of the city on May 21.

Moore, 60, was found dead at his home in the nearby Mount Vernon estate on May 17.

One of ringleaders of the notorious Shankill Butchers killer gang in the 70s, Moore had served 19 years in jail before his release under the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

The NUJ's Irish secretary Seamus Dooley, called on the UVF leadership to disassociate itself from the attack and to give an assurance there would be no further acts of this type.

He said: "This action is unacceptable in a democratic society. This working journalist was treated in a barbaric fashion."

"Fundamental questions are raised by the actions of the UVF. This group does not have carte blanche to behave in such a manner and the PSNI has questions to answer about how such an attack could have been allowed to happen at a major public event, which had been widely publicised in advance."

He said an advisory notice had been sent to



Seamus Dooley: Fundamental questions

media organisation suggesting they stay away.

Mr Dooley added: "There is an obligation on the PSNI to protect working journalists when they attend public events and the issuing of advance notice of potential trouble does not negate that responsibility."

"In Northern Ireland responsibility for the policing of public events rests with the PSNI and no group should assume the right to administer 'justice' or undertake their own policing operations."

## TUC turn up heat on hothouse workplaces

THE TUC want an end to hothouse conditions in the workplace and called for an upper limit to be slapped on ambient temperatures at work.

With forecasters predicting a long, hot summer this year, the report's authors argue for an "action level" of 24°C after which employers are obliged to act.

They added: "In addition there should be an absolute maximum temperature of 30°C (27°C for those doing strenuous work), at which point workers should not have to work and an employer should be liable for prosecution."

The TUC claims high temperatures at work can cause rashes, headaches, dizzy spells, fainting and heat cramps.

Stifling conditions also affect concentration, they also claim, making workers feel more tired and making them more likely to endanger their own or their colleagues' safety."

Under current rules, the upper temperature limit is not set out.

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations do not stipulate a legal maximum or a legal minimum working temperature; but state that "during working hours, the temperature in all workplaces inside buildings shall be reasonable".

The Case for a Legally Enforceable Maximum Temperature, can be downloaded at [www.tuc.org.uk/extras/maxtemp2009.pdf](http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/maxtemp2009.pdf).

## Safety at work hit by slump fears

A UK-wide survey has found one in 10 employees is fearful the recession will impact on health and safety standards at the workplace.

But the British Safety Council study of attitudes in both boardroom and shop floor to the issue found a general air of confidence among bosses – 95 per cent of those interviewed – that they were doing all that was required under legislation to safeguard their workforce.

Firms also claimed bosses' bonuses would be cut before there was a scaling back on work safe practices.

But the survey also flagged up that

about one in 12 workers claimed they felt under pressure to take risks with safety to cut costs.

Launching the findings on May 11, BSC chief Brian Nimick said: "No one should have to work in a situation where they fear for their safety because of unsafe practices."

"There needs to be a clearly defined 'safe to work' covenant between workers and bosses if we are to make the workplace in the UK and elsewhere as safe as possible."

"Even in the current challenging financial climate facing industry, now is not the time to make health and

safety costs a casualty of cut backs."

While the majority of workers (70pc) feel more inclined to be productive in an environment where their employer is attentive to their health, safety and wellbeing, only just over half of bosses (59pc) now think that a proactive approach to health and safety enhances the bottom line compared to 72pc in 2007.

In 2007/08 non-existent or inferior health and safety measures in the workplace killed 229 men and women and injured 136,000 employees – costing industry £7.8bn.

**A NEW UK study has predicted further business decline over the rest of the year. Research carried out by recruitment site TheLadders.co.uk found 37 per cent of the managers questioned believe Britain will not emerge from the recession until 2011, with four-fifths predicting further job losses will be inevitable.**

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## 50 YEARS ON AND

Delegate **BRENDA CALLAGHAN** looks back on last month's Belfast Trades Council

A BELFAST Trades Council delegation joined the celebrations in Havana last month to mark the 50th May Day since the Cuban revolution swept the hated Batista regime from power.

Some 34 delegates and friends of Belfast Trades Council had travelled to the Cuban capital to take part in the festivities – and they ranged in age from 95-year-old Spanish Civil War veteran Jack Edwards to Polish-Irish two-year-old Orla Rozanska.

All marched proudly behind a specially-commissioned banner with other delegations from around the world joining an estimated 750,000 people who thronged Revolutionary Square in central Havana.

NIPSA official Tony McMullan described his attendance at the event as a "privilege" and dubbed it "one of the best days of my life".

Cuban workers sang and danced as they marched along waving their national flags, and holding aloft pictures of the Castro brothers and Che Guevara amid a sea of political slogans.

The Belfast delegates clasped hands and hugged their Cuban counterparts in displays of affection that left many of the visitors speechless.

One woman came out of the crowd to give Unite member Joe Law her Che Guevara bracelet in thanks for the solidarity shown to the Cuban people.

President Raul Castro, dressed in a straw hat and traditional long-sleeved guayabera, was on the platform but did not address the crowd, leaving it instead to Cuban Workers Confederation chief Salvador Valdes Mesa to call for a renewed effort to help rebuild half a million homes devastated by last year's wave of hurricanes.

The festivities ended just after 10.30am leaving the delegation with an appetite for breakfast where they were joined by brothers and sisters from Brazil, South Africa, Canada and Australia.

Trades Council secretary Kevin Doherty commented: "This certainly puts St George's [in Belfast]

in the shade. This May Day was just magnificent."

A wide range of trade unions were represented in the delegation, including members of NIPSA, Unite, UCU, SIPTU, GMB, Trademark and the Belfast Unemployed Centre.

Before the May Day celebrations, delegates had taken part in a hectic round of meetings and visits to gain some understanding of issues within Cuba. All were struck by the candour and forthrightness of ordinary Cubans – not only those they met in formal settings, but also in conversations with locals in bars and on the street.

They talked of the challenges still to be faced, not least the problems with the dual currencies, the benefits and drawbacks of the tourist industry as well as the threat from consumerism.

Before travelling out, Belfast Trades Council had organised a series of Cuban hurricane fund-raising events.

And in a meeting with trade union representatives from the education sector at CTC Headquarters, they presented official Manuel Montero with a cheque for £10,000.

Thanking the delegation, Mr Montero promised it would go towards restoring much needed infrastructure in areas devastated by the hurricane.

Cuban trade unionists in the teaching sector emphasised the great advances that had been made in a country which has now the highest literacy rate in the world and where further education is free.

UCU executive member Pauline Collins said: "I found it interesting that even though most school principals and university lecturers are now female, Cuban males have no problems achieving the same levels of education as females. Maybe this is because the system is geared to learning, something we could we learn a lot from."

A meeting with the Federation of Cuban Women generated a lively debate that ran way over time as delegates explored the role of women in Cuban so-

ciety. The Federation has four million members and as with all Cuban national organisations it operates from local neighbourhoods who dictate their own priorities and needs.

With women holding more than 60 per cent of senior positions in Cuba, low levels of domestic violence, one year's paid maternity which can be accessed by either sex or shared between partners and state-provided childcare for all children over one year old, many problems faced daily by the female Trades Council delegates were just relics of the past for the modern Cuban woman.

At present the Council of State remains male-dominated although the number of women participating in the National Assembly has increased substantially in the last 10 years and the Women's Federation remains confident this will be soon be reflected at the very top.

Mel Corry of Unite and Trademark said: "The Cuban experience demonstrates that equality is achievable, we just have to decide if we want it, and whether it can be achieved without a revolution."

The delegation also travelled to Santa Clara to visit the monument and mausoleum of Ernesto "Che" Guevara and 16 of his comrades who died with him in Bolivia in 1968.

Che's memorial stands in the vast Plaza de la Revolution, encircled by billboards festooned with revolutionary slogans.

Its centrepiece is a marble pedestal atop which is a seven-metre-high bronze statue of Che,

Carvings on the long marble walls on either side of it show events from his life and the text of a letter he sent to Fidel Castro, shortly before he left Cuba in 1965.

Dr Margaret Simpson, who accompanied her father Jack Edwards on the trip, translated the text of the letter for other delegates.

She said: "It explains why he resigned his position [in the Cuban government] and his ideas about the

## STILL ON MARCH!

visit to Cuba culminating in a 750,000 strong May Day parade through central Havana...

people's struggle for freedom around the world." Che rests in a reconstruction of the Bolivian jungle camp where he was captured and executed. Its dark, bunker-like atmosphere is lit only by a small "eternal" flame.

Beyond the shrine, there's a small museum which contains artefacts relating to Che as well as a superb collection of photographs.

NIPSA delegate Helen McGowan said: "This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get a rare glimpse into the life of a true revolutionary hero." The visitors from Belfast also met with Che's comrades in the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution.

Again these veterans who had fought alongside the great man were very sincere in their analysis. They explained the CDR operates within neighbourhoods so that problems, ideas and solutions come from the bottom up and are not handed down by decree.

The visit finale came at the Trade Union Solidarity Conference on May 2 attended by 500 delegates.

Many speakers made reference to the changing political environment in South America and the importance of Cuba's role in this change.

The meeting ended with a standing ovation for Jack Edwards and his heroic struggle against fascism. The conference chairperson told delegates: "When it comes to solidarity, age is no object as Jack has demonstrated."

Delegates agreed the trip was a magic blend of politics, craic, social interaction and education giving a stunning insight into how much better society could be if it was organised for and by the people.

Kellie O'Dowd of Trademark summed up the experience. She said: "Cuban society has a lot to teach us, with regards to healthcare, education, literacy and the position of women within society. It is clear the answers are available if we have the courage to ask the proper questions."



**Brigadista: Spanish Civil War veteran Jack Edwards, above, gives a clenched fist salute before a specially-commissioned banner. Brendan Mackin, below, relaxes in the sun with Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre colleagues**





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