

THE **UNION POST**

PUBLISHED IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS

NEWS YOU CAN USE

MARCH 2011

Belfast
26 March 2011
Depart 12.30 UU Art College, Donegall St.
Rally 1pm Belfast City Hall
people's jobs
services
STOP THE CUTS
IRISH CONGRESS
Northern Ireland Committee

WISCONSIN
MICHAEL MOORE'S
ROLLOCKING
GREAT SPEECH

PAGE 10

AUSTERITY KILLS JOBS

**CONGRESS: PROOF IS THERE AS
UNEMPLOYMENT NEARS 15%**

Picture: Tom Clancy/Congress



**If people
aren't
working
IT'S
HURTING**

CONGRESS has claimed the shock rise in unemployment in the Republic to almost 15% is concrete proof austerity measures are not working and must be abandoned by the new government.

ICTU economic advisor Paul Sweeney warned continuing the discredited policies of the Fianna Fail/Green coalition would "likely plunge Ireland into another year of a downward deflationary spiral and throw yet more people out of work".

He claimed the last government had taken too

much demand out of the economy by "cutting too deeply and taxing low and middle incomes".

"Together with wage and welfare cuts, this has crushed domestic demand and led directly to thousands of job losses.

"It makes no sense for the new government to continue with policies that are guaranteed to cost more jobs."

Mr Sweeney also described the rise in the numbers of long-term unemployed as "extremely worrying".

Figures released on

March 15 show the numbers out of work for more than a year almost doubled – increasing from 4.1% of the workforce to 7.3%.

He added: "People out of work for more than a year now make up more than half of the total number unemployed."

"This has not happened since the late 1990s. It's time to review the extent of the cuts in public spending and in public investment, otherwise we face another year of falling national income, falling confidence, rising unemployment and emigration."

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UNION POST



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People services jobs

STOP THE CUTS

STRONGER TOGETHER
CONGRESS
Northern Ireland Committee

Solidarity message for Japan

UNITE general secretary Len McCluskey has expressed "shock and sadness" on behalf of his union's members at the devastation and loss of life caused by the Japanese earthquake and tsunami.

Directing his message in particular to Japanese workers and their families "at this difficult hour", he said: "We want you to know our solidarity is strongly with you."

"We know that with the support of people around the world, you will emerge stronger after this terrible event."

Messages of support came from Unite members working at Honda, Nissan and Toyota factories in the UK.

Members of the union's Civil Nuclear section also sent their "support and solidarity" to Japanese counterparts battling a potential meltdown at the Fukushima nuclear power plant.

"We understand and applaud your commitment to render the reactors safe and to ensure the safety of the wider community."

"We realise that this is a worrying time for your families who are already devastated by the earthquake and tsunami."

"Unite wishes to express its gratitude to the workers in their efforts at the plant and to send a message of support and solidarity to the workers and their families for the very important and crucial work they are undertaking."



McCluskey: Message

Video grab: Unite

http://www.unitetheunion.org/news_events/latest_news/general_secretary_len_mccluskey.aspx?lang=en-gb

BELFAST AND LONDON TO PROTEST ON CUTS

Rethink call as US laws target unions

AMNESTY International has urged several US states to abandon planned legislation that would drastically restrict workers' rights.

States including Colorado, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma and Tennessee have proposed bills severely limiting the collective bargaining rights of trade union members.

A similar bill was passed in Wisconsin on March 11.

Amnesty's trade union adviser Shane Enright said: "State governors must withdraw support for these measures which, if adopted, would violate international law."

"The US has an obligation to uphold the rights of American workers – including the specific right to organise and bargain collectively."

The Wisconsin bill strips away nearly all collective bargaining rights for most public employees, limiting their negotiation rights only to wages.

MORE ON WISCONSIN p11

CONGRESS in Northern Ireland is to stage a rally in Belfast on March 26 against the cuts and Tory-led coalition government's austerity policies at the same time as up to a million protesters take part in a massive TUC march and rally through London.

The Belfast march will depart from UU Art College, York Street, at 12.30pm followed by a short rally at Belfast City Hall at 1pm.

After the event, participants will be encouraged to go on a mass leafleting of the city, raising the public's awareness of the scale of the cuts and the alternatives promoted by the trade union movement, such as tax fairness and investment in growth.

Congress assistant general secretary Peter Bunting told *The Union Post*: "The rally in Belfast will coincide with the *March For The Alternative* the TUC is organising in London but we here in Northern Ireland will have an additional focus."

"We will be marching in spirit if not in step with our sisters and brothers in London in clear opposition to the

austerity policies of the Con-Dem coalition government.

"We fully agree with the voices from all parts of the UK who view these cuts as unnecessary and who are promoting realistic and humane alternatives based on jobs, growth and justice."

"We are part of that common strategy of opposition along with the Wales TUC and the Scottish TUC."

"This is a UK-wide issue and we are playing our part in that bigger picture."

"However, in Northern Ireland, we have just seen an unworkable and unfair budget rammed through the Northern Ireland Assembly with minimal consultation and without a shred of evidence that the objections raised by health and education professionals, the community sector or the trade unions have been considered."

"Democracy works both ways, and the rally also coincides with the start of the Northern Ireland Assembly election campaign."

"This rally will mark the start of our engagement with our members and the general public on the issues which ought to concern them most and which should determine their voting preferences."

"These are: jobs in the private and public sectors; fair pensions for all; a just welfare system; reversing the cuts; tax justice as the basis for a society in which we really are all in it together, for each other and not for a lucky few."

"We will be urging trade unionists to attend the rally and to then engage with their communities to ensure that the next Northern Ireland Executive cannot ignore working people."

COME ALONG AND DO YOUR BIT...

Join with your communities and the trade union movement in ICTU's protest against the Westminster and Stormont austerity policies in Belfast on March 26. For more information go to www.iduni.org

CONGRESS: SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP **NOT** TO BLAME FOR RECESSION



'Policy **hell bent** on cutting taxes for the wealthy at root of crisis'

CONGRESS has described attempts to blame social partnership for the economic crisis in the Republic as a "facile exercise in scapegoating" that was "designed to obscure the true cause of the collapse – banks, builders and toxic government policy".

Congress general secretary David Begg made his comments following the publication last month of a new report on the Department of Finance.

He claimed the key issue was not the record of individual departments, but of overall government policy from 1997 onwards.

"This is about the policy of the

government that came to power in 1997. They were hell bent on cutting taxes for the wealthy and deregulating whole swathes of the economy."

Mr Begg pointed out that one of the first acts of that government was to cut the 48% top rate of tax and that Congress had opposed the move.

He said: "Their philosophy was laid out clearly by then Tanaiste, Mary Harney, in her 'Boston versus Berlin' speech in 2000."

"She spoke of a country, that believes in the incentive power of low taxation... that believes in economic liberalisation... that believes in es-

sential regulation, but not over-regulation'. Anyone wanting to trace the roots of this crisis only has to read Minister Harney's speech."

Mr Begg claimed the cumulative effect of these policies was to "entirely erode the country's tax base and inflate the boom".

He continued: "Within the social partnership process – which also included employers, farmers and the community sector – Congress was a lone voice in opposing this economic philosophy, whether that was in the form of tax cuts for high earners, tax breaks for business or privatisation."

"Again, that is a matter of record."

And we cannot recall ever receiving support from the Department of Finance on any of those issues – quite the contrary.

"Where increased social spending arose, it was almost entirely due to substantial inward migration, mainly from Eastern Europe."

"That meant more public transport, more demands on health, bigger schools and language support teachers."

Mr Begg added that a major examination of social partnership carried out by the ESRI had found its impact had been positive, both in job creation and in encouraging Foreign Direct Investment.

For a fuller examination of ICTU policy over the years go to <http://www.ictu.ie/publications/fulllist/submission-to-the-investigation-into-the-banking-system/>

DISPUTE

Davenport Five showed 'real courage' in minimum wage fight

WORKERS REINSTATED AFTER COURT RULING

CONGRESS has welcomed the Labour Court ruling recommending the reinstatement of SIPTU members involved in the Davenport Hotel dispute as well as a return to their previous rates of pay.

The dispute was sparked after hotel chiefs removed the five employees from the work roster in early February after they refused to accept a cut in their minimum wage.

The Court recommended the workers, who are all from eastern Europe, be paid all the monies they would have earned had they not been removed from the roster.

It also said it could not support the claim by hotel operator, Persian Properties, that the hourly pay cut from €8.65 to €7.79 was needed to sustain jobs.

Congress assistant general secretary Sally Anne Kinahan claimed the March 7 ruling was particu-

larly welcome as it came on the eve of International Women's Day.

She said: "The five Davenport staff are to be warmly and heartily congratulated for their brave stand. It sends a clear message to workers all across the economy, especially those in lower paid employment – your best protection lies in joining a union.

"This dispute and ruling also sends a clear signal to the incoming government – move quickly on your pledge to reverse the cut in the minimum wage and stop other employers acting in this manner."

Also welcoming the decision, SIPTU organiser Pat Ward claimed it was a vindication of the courageous stand taken by the hotel's employees.

He said: "This is a great outcome for the workers concerned and for SIPTU.

"The five women displayed real courage in re-

sisting severe pressure from their employer to take a cut in their minimum wage level.

"Hopefully, their success will serve to demonstrate to other employers of similar disposition the resolve of our members and of this union to protect and defend the interests of low paid workers."

Over the last few months, Congress has been running a national Fair Wage campaign informing workers whose rate of pay is under threat of their options.

A special telephone helpline at **0818 300 900** has also been set up.



Sally Ann Kinahan:
Tribute to workers

Picture: Congress

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LEADING trade unionist John Freeman died on March 15. He was a former regional secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union in Ireland and also a past president of Congress. An appreciation of John's contribution to the trade union movement will feature in the next issue of *The Union Post*.

Picture: Unite

UNEMPLOYMENT

WOMEN FACE SECOND WAVE OF JOB LOSSES

WOMEN are facing higher levels of unemployment, underemployment and cuts to working hours as a "second wave" of the global economic crisis strikes at female employment across the world.

The claim is made in a new ITUC report published on March 8, International Women's Day.

The report, *Living With Economic Insecurity: Women in Precarious Work*, shows that while the initial crisis impacted equally on both men and women, increasing numbers of women are now either losing their jobs or being forced into more precarious, temporary, and informal forms of work.

The authors claim the official un-



Picture: ITUC

Warning: ITUC's Sharan Burrow

employment rate of 7% for women masks a harsher reality, with a massive increase in the numbers of "working

poor", defined as those employees – mainly women – whose jobs do not provide enough to meet basic needs.

Overall, the ranks of working poor have swelled by more than 100 million people due to the crisis, with around 1.5bn people – half the world's workforce – now in vulnerable employment.

ITUC general secretary Sharan Burrow insisted the report showed how the crisis was "far from over – especially for women".

She said: "Much of this impact is hidden, due to deficiencies in employment statistics. Much of it is also a direct result of women still being treated as second-class citizens at work."

"Too many women are denied the right to join unions and bargain collectively for better job security, wages and conditions, such as domestic workers or those working in export processing zones."

Ms Burrow added: "Cuts in public expenditure made with no consideration of their gender impact are having the biggest impact on women, both through higher unemployment and reduction in crucial services such as child care."

<http://www.ituc-csi.org/living-with-economic-insecurity.html>

Jobless crisis hits UK women

THE TUC has warned the Tory-led coalition government that it faces a potential crisis in female unemployment.

New figures show that while male unemployment in the UK has fallen by 31,000 over the past year, female unemployment has risen by 71,000 over the same period.

This rise comes at a time when the number of jobs in sectors where many women work is still far lower than at the start of the recession.

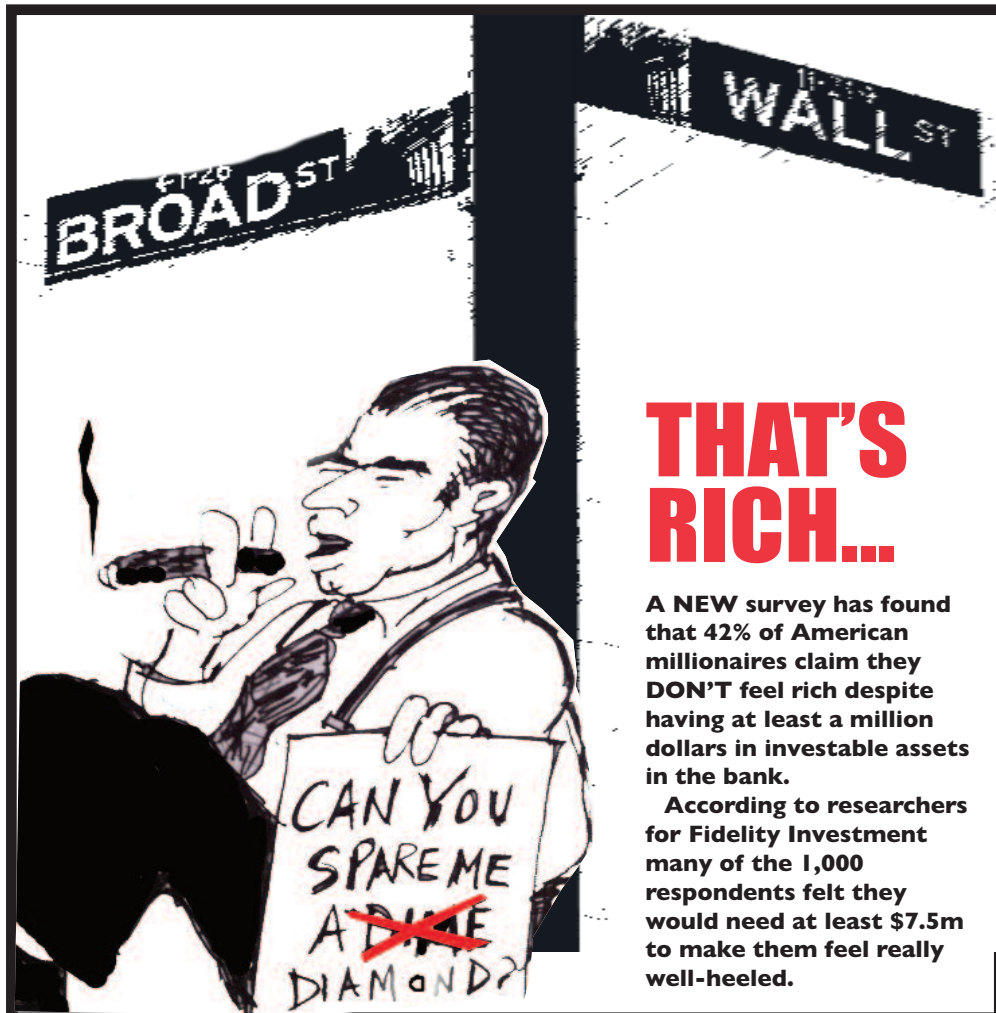
Since the downturn there has been a fall of 34,000 in retail vacancies, a 14,000 drop in administrative and secretarial jobs, the number of education vacancies has fallen by 20,000 and the number of jobs in health and social work has fallen by 18,000.

With redundancies in the public sector – where more than a third of women in work are employed – set to increase because of spending cuts, and slow economic growth likely to impact heavily on 'female' sectors such as retail and admin, the TUC warn women are in for a tough few years ahead.

General secretary Brendan Barber said: "While the government focuses all its energy on cuts, our unemployment crisis continues to grow."

"The UK desperately needs an economic strategy that prioritises growth and jobs to bring revenues in and the deficit down."

He added: "The current plan of deep, rapid cuts is causing job losses to mount and sending our economy in the wrong direction."



THAT'S RICH...

A NEW survey has found that 42% of American millionaires claim they **DON'T** feel rich despite having at least a million dollars in investable assets in the bank.

According to researchers for Fidelity Investment many of the 1,000 respondents felt they would need at least \$7.5m to make them feel really well-heeled.

5.2m 'work unpaid overtime'

A RECORD 5.26 million people worked unpaid overtime in the UK last year, a TUC analysis of official figures has found.

The research, published to coincide with Work Your Proper Hours Day on February 25, showed that more than one in five employees –

21% – regularly worked overtime over the last year.

Unpaid work totalled an average of seven hours 12 minutes a week for those employees who worked extra for nothing.

That extra labour was worth £5,485 per person and added a record £28.9bn to

the UK economy. The analysis also showed that public sector workers were the most likely to do unpaid overtime, with over one in four – 26.3% – regularly putting in more than seven hours of unpaid overtime a week, compared to one in six private sector workers.

School secretaries in vote for industrial action over 5% cut

IMPACT's school secretaries branch has voted overwhelmingly – by a margin of 72% – in favour of industrial action to oppose the 5% pay cut imposed on them since January 1.

The move follows a Department of Education and Skills instruction to all schools and VECs to cut the wages of 17,000 low paid staff, including school secretaries.

IMPACT assistant general secretary Brendan McKay claimed the union goal's was to have these "unjust and unfair" pay cuts reversed.

Those workers affected – school secretaries, caretakers, cleaners, administrative staff, and school completion programme staff – are employed by individual schools and

VECs. They are not on the department's payroll but are indirectly funded through grants from the department.

The department instructed employers to impose a pay cut on the same scales applied to public servants in last year's budget – a cut of 5% of gross salary on those earning under €30,000.

Mr McKay explained that a two-tier system currently exists where some school secretaries, employed before the implementation of the Programme for Economic and Social Progress in 1990, are paid directly by the Department of Education and Science.

Those employed after the PESF are paid out of a grant given to the

school boards, out of which other school expenses are paid. Therefore, those school secretaries employed after 1990 do not enjoy a standardised rate of pay, with some earning barely above the minimum wage.

He said: "The employers had consistently blocked any attempts to link these workers' rates of pay to the public service, but saw fit to establish a link in order to make a savage cut to their pay."

"Under the last social partnership agreement, we established a forum which sought to address the outstanding pay anomaly for these workers."

"The goal of the forum was to achieve an appropriately funded and common minimum rate of pay per

hour, but the imposition of this most recent pay cut undermines the objective which the forum had set itself, while the collapse of social partnership meant the forum has not been able to complete its task.

"Meanwhile, these workers remain vulnerable. They are not employed under any other public service conditions, have no access to pension, and do not enjoy the protections negotiated for public sector workers in the Croke Park Agreement."



McKay: 'Unfair'



Children collect water from a standpipe outside Alem Kitamama, Ethiopia. This year's World Water Day on March 22 focused on the impact rapid population growth and industrialisation has on urban water systems. According to World Health Organisation, roughly one in eight people in the world do not have access to safe water. A total of 1.4 million children die every year as a result of diseases caused by unclean water and poor sanitation.



Pictures: WHO/PIVrot

<http://www.worldwaterday2011.org/>

CWU's NEC backs Eircom package

THE CWU's National Executive Committee has unanimously backed a package of measures that will save Eircom a total of €92m over the next three years.

Members are currently being balanced on the deal which has been described by officials as the "toughest agreement" they ever brokered.

A series of meetings to discuss the details of the agreement have also been held across the country.

Dubbed the Eircom Rescue Plan, it comes after the company warned it was in danger of breaching its debt covenants.

The union fears that if the firm's financial difficulties are not dealt with, there is the danger of a takeover by banks and bondholders.

The ERP proposals come in two

stages. Initially, staff face a 10% cut in basic pay in return for a reduction in time worked.

This will involve the introduction of a nine-day fortnight over a period of 18 months.

Stage two involves negotiations over a series of issues tabled by both sides. It has been agreed that when agreement cannot be reached on any single issue, a referral can be made to an agreed third party.

The CWU has claimed the stage two talks are designed to "transform" Eircom into a "modern telecommunications company".

In a circular issued to members, general secretary Steve Fitzpatrick said: "Hopefully in the future Eircom will sustain the highest possible number of jobs, while creating a

longer term future for our members and for those members who come after us."

Describing the proposed deal as "no doubt the toughest agreement the union has ever had to deal with in its long history", he added that that it was "well named" a rescue plan.

He told members: "Your Executive is now satisfied that if the present financial position of the company is not addressed as soon as humanly possible then ultimately the company is likely to be taken over by the banks and the bondholders."

"Therefore, there is an urgent need to address the situation. It has been made quite clear to us by both shareholders that any investment either in the debt area or in infra-

structure can only happen in circumstances where there is a real prospect of making a return on that investment.

"So in a nutshell, the choice for our members is to let the situation continue to deteriorate and take our chances with the bankers and the bondholders or accept a difficult agreement that gives us hope for the future."

"The real difficulties outside the immediate impact on members' pay will be the transformation of the company through Stage 2 measures."

"However, in transforming the company and hopefully creating a better future, it will also create the conditions for the return of the time and therefore the associated pay."



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Pictures: NHSBT

PRIVATISATION IDEA IS BLEEDING 'RIDICULOUS'

TENS of thousands of people have already signed an online petition opposing any moves to sell off the UK's NHS Blood and Transplant Service.

The petition is part of a Unite campaign launched on March 4 in response to fears the government is proposing a "reckless" plan to privatise parts of the service.

In one day alone – March 9 – 10,000 people signed on at Twitter page #bloodmoney.

On taking office last year, Health Secretary Andrew Lansley sought to "commission an in-depth review of opportunities to make [it] more commercially effective".

It has been reported that since then his department has held talks with big name private providers about running

parts of the service. A Unite spokesperson said: "At the moment this is an idea being considered by the Department of Health – but unless people show they don't want this, the government will press ahead with their reckless plans.

"For generations, people have willingly given their blood to help save the lives of others.

"People give freely because they believe in helping their other people. It is service for the common good and that proud ethos has never been diluted – until now..."

The blood donation service is actually older than the NHS and started out as a way of helping injured troops in World War Two.

The service is a success story. Ac-

cording to its last annual report the NHSBT "met more than 99.9% of all product requests".

On top of that it has also "implemented efficiencies which helped to reduce the cost of a unit of red cells from £140 to £130".

One donor, who attends sessions every month, told *The Union Post* he would be reluctantly forced to rethink donating platelets if private companies became involved.

He said: "It's a ridiculous move if any part of the service is privatised. This is a public service and it should remain so.

"I give platelets because I believe in the NHS as an institution. Yes, it's an act of giving but it's not done to line the pockets of shareholders."

<http://action.unitetheunion.com/page/s/BloodMoney>

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NIPSA hits out at UFU over call to privatise

NIPSA has challenged the Ulster Farmers Union over its call for hundreds of civil service jobs within the North's Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to be privatised.

In its statement, the UFU claimed millions of pounds could be saved by the measure.

Hitting back, NIPSA official Noel Griffin said: "Our members are extremely angry that any organisation would publicly call for their jobs to be culled!"

"It is, in fact, also doing a dis-service to UFU members who would face price increases if the service was provided by the private sector."

Mr Griffin described the claim that millions could be saved as "pure speculation" and "a good soundbite".

He added: "The department has made numerous efficiencies over the past five years which reduced the overall staff numbers by 400."

"Our members certainly don't need a lecture from the UFU regarding efficiencies."

Mr Griffin also expressed disappointment that the UFU would attack NIPSA members who were "at the fore" in "protecting and defending services provided to their members – the farmers".

FEEDBACK
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ICTU warning on price rises

CONGRESS has warned rising prices are putting "impossible pressure" on working people and claimed the upward trend is likely to continue as interest rates and commodity prices increase.

Economic advisor Paul Sweeney pointed out the latest inflation figures confirmed the upward trend, with prices rising for the seventh straight month in a row.

He said: "This is putting impossible pressure on working people in the Republic where overall price levels are already some 26% above average price levels in the EU, according to Eurostat data."

"And we can now expect further increases in interest rates and in commodity prices along with the proposed rise in VAT."

Mr Sweeney added: "The incoming government needs to bear this increased cost of living in mind when framing policy."

MEDIA

INM: No payouts for Tribune staff

THE National Union of Journalists has slammed the refusal of Independent News and Media to make payments to Sunday Tribune workers following the closure of the title.

It follows a recent meeting between Tribune chapel reps accompanied by NUJ Irish Secretary Séamus Dooley and INM's Group Chief Operating Officer Vincent Crowley.

Mr Dooley said Crowley was "sympathetic and courteous but resolute in his refusal to make ex gratia payments".

He added: "The Sunday Tribune was effectively controlled and run by INM, despite the existence of a separate board."

"INM called the tune but is now refusing to accept responsibility for paying the fiddler."

"This is simply unacceptable and the NUJ chapel believes that INM has a moral responsibility towards them."

Meanwhile, Mr Dooley has called on Congress to campaign for additional resources so that the massive backlog in payments under the state's Insolvency Fund can be cleared.

Workers can wait up to six to eight months for payments. On February 24, more than 100 people staged a show of solidarity outside the Tri-

bune's Dublin offices as staff gathered to collect their final pay cheques.

Many former employees – including ex-editor Vincent Browne – and representatives from print and media organisations across the city joined other trade unionists at the event. Mr Dooley told the gathering that the closure of the title meant "a light had been extinguished" and that Irish journalism was now "significantly diminished".

Speaking outside to Trade Union TV, Sunday Tribune deputy editor Diarmuid Doyle said it was a "very sad day" for him personally.

"I've enjoyed every minute and worked for five editors and countless managing directors."

"It was always a struggle of some sort because of financial difficulty but journalistically we had a great innings."

Mr Doyle, who worked at the title for 20 years, added: "It was a sad day in the office this morning."

"We picked up our final pay cheque but to come down here in the open air and see so many people from other papers and other unions."

"It's fantastic, it's a bit of an uplift actually. I feel a lot better than I did an hour ago."



Video grab: Trade Union TV

Tribune Deputy Editor Diarmuid Doyle outside Independent House

PROTEST COVERAGE <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZDGx4H7k-A>

BSkyB bid green light is slammed by unions

MEDIA unions have slammed the decision by UK Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt to accept a proposal by Rupert Murdoch's News Corp to move Sky News into a separate company to clear the way for a full-scale takeover of BSkyB.

BECTU general secretary Gerry Morrissey claimed his union had "no confidence" the proposal would provide the safeguards needed to preserve a diversity of media in the UK.

Describing it as "a political decision", he added: "This paves the



Dear: 'Bad news'

Murdoch: BSkyB bid

way for Rupert Murdoch to extend his already considerable media interests in the UK. What do we see ahead? Less choice, fewer voices and more undue influence for the Murdoch empire."

NUJ general secretary Jeremy Dear also

slammed Mr Hunt's decision not to refer the bid to the Competition Commission.

He added: "This decision is bad news for democracy and media plurality. The reverberations will be felt across the entire media and political landscape."

Nautilus in broadside at menace of piracy

SEAFARERS' union Nautilus has backed an international shipping industry campaign to harness "people power" in the fight against piracy.

The campaign wants governments to take effective action to tackle the growing menace from Somali pirates "before it strangles world trade and before more innocent seafarers are tortured and murdered".

The SOS Save Our Seafarers campaign is a joint initiative of shipping industry organisations and the International Transport Workers' Federation.

Worryingly, the pirates' area of operations now stretches right across the Indian Ocean, meaning there are no alternative routes to avoid the danger, especially for tankers coming out of the Gulf.

In a statement, Nautilus warned: "More than 800 seafarers are currently held hostage on hijacked ships. Subjected to physical and psychological abuse for months at a time, they are held ransom for millions of dollars."

However, a global boycott of piracy areas "is now possible", according to the ITF. Seafarers' section chair Dave Heindel said: "The world has lost control of piracy. All the Arabian Gulf and most of the Indian Ocean are now effectively lawless. Yet there is a way that control can be regained – by actively going after pirates, stopping them and prosecuting them."

"Not this ludicrous situation of taking away their guns and setting them free to strike again."

<http://www.saveourseafarers.com/>

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Egypt govt opens door to union law reform

THE ITUC has welcomed indications the new Egyptian government is thinking of amending existing labour laws.

General secretary Sharan Burrow said a recent statement by the country's Labour Minister "finally opens the door to the demand of the international trade union movement for the full respect of freedom of association in Egypt, in law and in practice".

Earlier this month, Ms Burrow took part in a two-day seminar in Cairo organised with the newly-created independent Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions.

Under the Mubarak regime, the official Egyptian Trade Union Federation, founded in 1957, had a virtual monopoly, which Ms Burrow pointed out contradicted international law "as set out in ILO conventions on freedom of association".

At a March 14 press conference in Cairo, she said: "There is no real democracy without free, representative and independent trade unions."

"The Egyptian people, who have suffered for far too long the denial of their fundamental rights, poverty, injustice and corruption, have carried out a remarkable revolution, courageously mobilising – including through massive strikes – which brought the regime to its knees."

"Respect for the rights of Egypt's working men and women and responding to their fundamental needs is essential for the construction of a democracy which respects fundamental rights, development and social justice."

THE ITUC has condemned the brutal crackdown on protestors in the Bahraini capital of Manama. General Secretary Sharan Burrow dubbed the actions of the authorities "appalling" and called for international pressure to be brought to bear to stop what she called "the killing and maiming of innocent civilians".



Heads up on women's rights

BIG PICTURE
By Paula Geraghty

THE impact the recession has had on women's rights was the central theme of this year's ICTU Joint Women's Committee Seminar in Cork.

A total of 150 trade unionists, above, gathered at the Silver Springs Hotel on March 4 and 5 – just a few days before International Women's Day. Speaking at

the event, Congress president Jack O'Connor urged women workers to be inspired by the example of the Bryant & May match factory workers and their famous 1888 struggle for workplace rights.

He called for a "can do" attitude to challenge current stakeholder values and to forge a "shareholder/citizens' society".

<http://www.ictu.ie/equality/news/2011/03/03/congress-national-womens-seminar-cork-45th-march-2/>



Moore backs protests

TOP American film-maker Michael Moore has delivered a tub-thumping speech in support of Wisconsin's public service employees.

The Bowling For Columbine director told thousands of protestors gathered in the state capital Madison on March 5 he had sat down the night before in New York to write a blog on the issue – but had then decided to fly up and deliver its contents in person.

Pointing out that a small number of Americans had accumulated as much wealth as half of the US population combined, he said: “400 obscenely rich people now have as much loot, stock and property as the assets of 155 million Americans combined.

“If you can't bring yourself to call that a financial coup d'état, then you are simply not being honest about what you know in your heart to be true.”

He insisted that the US was not broke and called it “the big lie” peddled to serve the interests of the rich.

The wealthy elite had created “very smart things” to prevent people “demanding their country back”.

Firstly, they controlled the message – the media – and had “expertly convinced” Americans they faced “mass economic annihilation” in September 2008 when what he called the “worldwide Ponzi scheme” crashed.

He added: “Wall Street issued this threat: either hand over trillions of dollars from the US taxpayers or we will crash this economy straight into the ground.

“Fork it over or it's goodbye savings accounts. Goodbye pensions. Goodbye US Treasury. Goodbye jobs and homes and future.”

A REEL SHOW OF SOLIDARITY

Massachusetts' finest: Dropkick Murphys have sounded off against Wisconsin governor Scott Walker's attack on public service workers



Picture: Dropkick Murphys

MASSACHUSETTS celtic folk/punk band Dropkick Murphys have given their full – and very loud – backing to Wisconsin's public sector unions fighting state governor Scott Walker's legislative attack on collective bargaining.

The band has pledged its “support and solidarity” with “the working people of Wisconsin” by releasing an advance stream of the song *Take 'Em Down* off their new album *Going Out In Style*.

The song – at <http://www.dropkickmurphys.com/news/> – has the refrain:

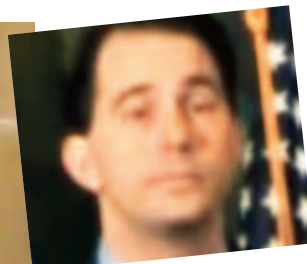
*When the boss comes callin' will you stand and fight?
When the boss comes callin' we must unite
When the boss comes callin' we can't let them win...*

Lead singer Ken Casey told US monthly *Labor Notes*: “Hopefully we can do our small part to help things go the right way up there [in Wisconsin].”

He added that because the Dropkick Murphys had a “uniquely young fan base”, the band was able to “spread the word” about “good working conditions, strength in numbers and having good representation”.

They band have also created a limited edition *Take 'Em Down* t-shirt available at www.dropkickmurphys.com/merch.

Proceeds from sales of the t-shirt will benefit Workers' Rights Emergency Response Fund in Wisconsin (<https://afl.salsalabs.com/o/4002/wi-response>).



Left: Public sector workers take over the Capitol building in Madison, Wisconsin, last month. Above: Gov Walker, the target of their fury

VIEW THE FULL SPEECH AT <http://www.michaelmoore.com/words/mike-friends-blog/america-is-not-broke>

WANT TO FIND OUT THE LATEST LABOUR NEWS STATESIDE? CHECK OUT <http://www.labornotes.org/>



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BACK ISSUES**



Pictures: MRCI

Don't Enda EROs

A WORKER from the Restaurant and Catering Workers Forum of Fine Gael leader Enda Kelly a bite to eat early on March 8 as he arrives at Leinster House for his first day as Taoiseach.

The Forum – combining MRCI's Restaurant Workers Action Group and SIPTU's Hotel Catering Arts Leisure

and Entertainment Branch – also gave early-bird TDs some food for thought as they enjoyed the offer of an al-fresco “power breakfast”.

They wanted to highlight to legislators the importance of protecting the minimum wages and conditions of restaurant and catering workers as set out in

Employment Regulation Orders.

Earlier this year, the former government commissioned an independent review into ERO and REA wage setting mechanisms.

The Forum has called for the Joint Labour Committee Mechanism for determining wages and conditions of EROs to be maintained.

A spokesperson said: “Workers are deeply concerned about this review as the outcome of it will have a direct impact on them and their families.

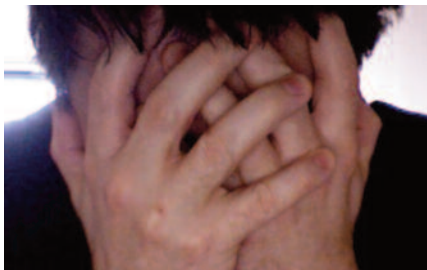
“Many are concerned about their wages being reduced if the EROs are abolished.

“Presently workers are struggling to make ends meet and have already experienced cuts in the form of the universal social charge, increased taxes, pay reductions and reduced hours.”



<http://www.mrci.ie/Restaurant-Workers>

<http://www.ictu.ie/publications/fulllist/category/unionpost/>



Stress warning: 'Culture of fear sweeping UK'

UK stress levels soar as jobs lost

A NEW survey has revealed that workplace stress levels have soared in the UK over the past year.

The research carried out by the Trade Union Co-ordinating Group found that one in four workers – 26% of those questioned – were more stressed than a year ago because of worsening conditions at work.

PCS chief Mark Serwotka said: "This survey reveals the rising levels of stress and insecurity in the workplace.

"With government plans for further cuts to jobs, pensions and pay on the horizon, this situation is only going to deteriorate in the next 12 months."

RMT general secretary Bob Crow added: "This important research shows that a culture of fear is sweeping through Britain's workplaces as employers use the threat of the sack to demand longer hours for less money as the spectre of two and half million on the dole hangs over workers' heads."

The poll of 754 full and part-time workers was carried out by Electoral Reform Research at the end of last month.

Congress backs Barry for Seanad

CONGRESS has nominated Wicklow county councillor Barry Nevin to contest the Seanad Éireann elections for 2011.

Cllr Nevin, who is hoping to win a seat on the Seanad's Labour panel, has been a member of Wicklow County Council since June 2009 and is a member of its Strategic Committee on Planning.

He said: "It is a great honour to receive this nomination from Congress. The general election has shown there is a very definite mood for change and I believe I can reflect this in the new Seanad."

Cllr Nevin works for the airport police/fire service in the Dublin Airport Authority, where he is also a worker director on the board.

A vice-president of Bray Credit Union and a member of Bray and District Trades Councils, Wicklow Tourism and Bray Partnership, he has been a member of SIPTU for 22 years and served for six years on union's National Executive Council until 2010.

Equality attitudes

NEW research has revealed significant levels of inequality still exist between men and women.

Among the findings were that 60% of young women in the UK had experienced sexist behaviour – being subjected to sexist comments, being touched inappropriately or through gender discrimination – in their daily lives.

On a more positive note, much of the research, commissioned by the EQUALS coalition for the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, revealed most UK adults of both sexes aspire to greater equality.

Govt will use report as pensions 'Trojan horse'

UNISON chief Dave Prentis has warned the Tory-led coalition government will use the Hutton Report as a "Trojan horse" to raid the pensions of millions of public sector workers across the UK.

He added that he was sending out a "clear message" that industrial action was now "one big step forward".

Mr Prentis said: "There is a lot of nonsense talked about public sector pensions – they are not gold-plated. The average is very low – in local government, the average is just over £4,000, falling to £2,800 for women.

"Whatever the Hutton Report may say about fairness, the government will use it as a Trojan horse to raid the pensions of hard working public sector workers.

"Asking workers to work longer for less is simply not



Picture: UNISON

Prentis: Clear message

an option. We want to talk to the government as a matter of urgency. But I am sending out a clear message to our 1.4 million members warning them that industrial action is now one big step closer."

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber warned imposing the harsh changes could lead to lives of poverty for many pensioners in the future.

He said: "Public sector workers are already suffering

a wage freeze, job losses and high inflation. They are now desperately worried that they will no longer be able to afford their pension contributions, and will have to opt-out."

Mr Barber pointed out even before Lord Hutton's recommendations are made, changes to public sector pensions – including the government's arbitrary switch to the CPI measure of inflation – have already reduced values by 25%.

"And if changes force members to leave schemes, this could make the short term cost of pensions for the government greater and store up real problems for the future.

"Imposing changes without agreement could lead to real industrial tensions and getting the decisions wrong could leave future pensioners in poverty."

SOME FACTS ON PUBLIC SERVICE PENSIONS

▶ **Local government and NHS pension schemes were renegotiated in 2006 to make them sustainable and affordable.**

▶ **Both schemes are cash rich – more is going in than coming out. Last year, the NHS scheme received £2bn**

more in contributions than it paid out and this money went straight to the UK Treasury.

▶ **The average pension in public sector schemes is very low. In local government, the average is just over £4,000, falling to £2,800 for women.**

▶ **If these people didn't save for their retirement, they would have to rely on means-tested benefits paid for by the taxpayer.**

▶ **OAPs are already being hit with the move from RPI to CPI – cutting their value by 15%.**

▶ **Cuts to local government employers grants mean the shortfall in pension contributions has to be made up by employees, meaning they may have to pay between 50% and 100% more for a reduced pension. This is effectively a tax on low paid workers.**

Lord Hutton plans will 'seriously devalue' public sector pensions

NIPSA General Secretary Brian Campfield has warned public service pensions will be "seriously devalued" if recommendations contained in the Hutton Report are implemented.

Among the key recommendations revealed by Lord Hutton in his 215-page report on March 9 were:

- Shifting from final salary to career average-based schemes and moving the normal pension age (NPA) in most public service schemes to the state pension ages, and

- Introducing a normal pension age of 60 for those members of the uniformed services – armed forces, police and firefighters – who currently have a NPA of less than that.

Lord Hutton also called for a clear "cost ceiling" for public service pension – worked out as the proportion of pensionable pay taxpayers will contribute to employees' pensions – and the introducing of more independent oversight and stronger governance of schemes.

Mr Campfield said: "These recommendations along with what Hutton proposed in his first report, including significant increases in employee contributions, seriously devalue the pension rights of public servants.

"The recommendations in this report together with what the government did in changing indexation from RPI to CPI could cost as much as 25% in pension values."

NIPSA assistant general secretary Bumper Graham

pointed out that public service pensions had already been updated and changed following talks in 2007.

He said: "As a result, the total value of public servants' contributions went up by as much as 17.5% and the cost to the taxpayer reduced by 15%.

"Those changes provided for stability – what we now face is that agreement being shredded.

"At a time of pay cuts, increased taxation and rampant inflation, public servants cannot afford to be paying more for less in their pensions." Mr Graham said it was clear that the "scapegoating" of public servants was continuing and that their pensions were "now the next target".



Graham: Next target is pensions

IMPACT's Niall Shanahan looks at the Aer Lingus settlement

HOW WE LANDED A

AT the height of last year's summer travelling season, a dispute between cabin crew and Aer Lingus arose when management unilaterally imposed substantial changes to rosters, supposedly to achieve the objective of increasing annual flying (or 'block') hours.

The ballot to accept the 'Greenfield' cost saving plan in March 2010 saw cabin crew agree to increase flying hours to from 700 to 850 per year, as part of overall working time.

However, the roster changes were not part of the 'Greenfield' plan, and the imposition of the new rosters meant that most cabin crew were working long and exhausting hours, with very short rest periods between their duties.

IMPACT had spent the last several years getting through a very difficult series of cost saving programmes at the airline, each more demanding than the last.

Two successive programmes saw cabin crew contribute savings of around €30m, demonstrating a huge commitment and loyalty to the airline.

Ironically, June 2010 was the airline's most successful month ever in terms of passenger loads and yields, and that was achieved on the basis of the existing contracts and rules.

So it was clearly unnecessary to abolish all existing agreements on flying time for the company to be a success.

The new rosters allowed cabin crew to work 60 hours over a seven-day period. Crews on European routes ended up working very long shifts without breaks. Cabin crew balloted to take action.

Industrial action commenced in the form of a work to rule in October 2010. Cabin crew were determined that any industrial action we took would not cause any disruption or delay to flight services.

The very point these IMPACT members were trying to make was that the 850 flying hours could be delivered under the existing flight rules, so it made sense to pursue a work to rule.

At the same time, cabin crew members were steadily increasing the number of flight hours, and by the end of the year these had already hit an average of 830 flight hours each.

Crucially, even during the appalling weather conditions in November and December, the work to rule did not cause any disruptions.

As the post-Christmas period arrived, and with passenger volumes at their lowest point in the year, the company's heavy-handed response was anticipated.

A new set of rostering arrangements commenced on Monday, January 17.

In a letter to each member of cabin crew, Aer Lingus informed them about the new roster, which it said "includes all of the necessary changes to deliver the productivity commitment of 850 hours", and warned staff that failure to comply fully with the new rosters would put staff in breach of their contracts of employment.

The letter also contained the threat that a continued refusal to work the new rosters would result in individual staff members "being put off duty and removed from the payroll".

In the course of the dispute, 300 workers were removed from payroll, flights were cancelled and the company spent significant sums of cash leasing aircraft and crews from other airlines.

The company ruled out any possibility of negotiation, arbitration or engagement with a third party. However, all parties were convened at the LRC following interventions from Congress and Ibec, and an intensive period of negotiations got underway.

As a result, most of cabin crew's problems with the new rosters were completely resolved, while satisfactory compromises had been reached on the rest.

Management would not be able to impose unacceptable changes in future because an "industrial peace" commitment obliges both sides to agree future changes or resolve them through arbitration.

The overall outcome means that:

- Duties cannot now be changed by more than two hours on the day of duty, which was the situation before imposition of the new rosters.

- Duties cannot now be changed by more than three hours on the day before the rostered shift.

- Duties cannot be changed from short-haul to long-haul on the day of duty

- Controversial "double" shifts will not be imposed. Instead they will be rostered mainly on a voluntary basis, with guarantees that no individual staff member will work a disproportionate number of "doubles" if there are insufficient volunteers.

- Cabin crew can once again request one weekend off every two months. They will also be prioritised for weekends off at the start of their annual leave, which is a new benefit.

- The arbitrator has required the company to plan rosters with the objective of ensuring eight days off per month.

- Cabin crew will not be forced to work 26 days away from base. If this duty is introduced it will be on a strictly voluntary basis.

- Management will work to ensure that meal breaks are facilitated on short-haul flights and will give a monetary compensation in cases where this is not possible.

- An agreed system to allow crew to "bid" for their preferred shifts will be introduced.

In IMPACT's view, the company underestimated the unity and strength of cabin crew and, indeed, the public support for cabin crew's case.

We are satisfied that this outcome rids the rosters of the unacceptable aspects that would have made impossible a reasonable balance of career and family commitments, while also meeting the agreed objective of increasing flying hours.

While it was an extremely difficult time for cabin crew, they showed great determination as a group. There was universal acknowledgement that this determination, along with the support of their union, families, colleagues and others helped to achieve a satisfactory outcome.

The value of union membership has rarely been better expressed.

'The value of union membership has rarely been better expressed'



Keeping step with mum: Three-year-old Leah Hearney marched with her mum to the Aer Lingus HQ to protest against the removal of cabin crew from the payroll during the dispute

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and outlines what lessons can be drawn from the dispute

SUCCESSFUL DEAL

CREWS CONTROL

Aer Lingus cabin crew – including some who had been taken off duties and payroll – report for duty en masse during the dispute. Joined by members of pilots' branch IALPA, they later presented a letter outlining their concerns to airline boss Christoph Mueller

Pictures: Conor Healy



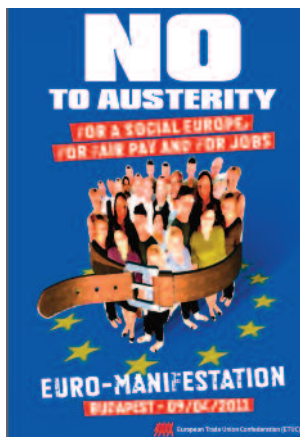
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ETUC plan big April 9 demo at meeting of EU ministers

THE EUROPEAN Trade Union Confederation is joining with its six Hungarian affiliates to stage a massive Euro-demo to coincide with the meeting of European finance ministers in Budapest on April 9.

The ETUC has slammed the wave of austerity policies and fiscal consolidation plans being pushed through by European institutions as well as by national governments.

A spokesperson said: "These plans focus only on cutting public spending, public services, and wages."

"There is also a very dangerous interference with collective bargaining processes and social dialogue at national level."

"This is happening while bankers and CEOs are continuing to receive huge and scandalous bonuses and pay."

"The European trade union movement stands clearly against these policies – this is not only unfair because the burden is carried only by those who are not responsible for the crisis, but also wrong from a economic and strategic point of view."

<http://www.etuc.org/a/8396>



REPORT Su Su Nway

Jailed Su Su needs your help

BURMESE labour activist Su Su Nway is serving an eight-and-a-half-year jail term in a remote prison far from her family.

A member of the opposition National League for Democracy, the 38-year-old was arrested in 2007 and convicted under legislation routinely used to punish peaceful political dissent.

She has a heart condition and high blood pressure made worse by conditions in the prison as well as lack of access to proper medical care.

Su Su, pictured above centre, also reportedly contracted malaria last year.

She has been punished with occasional spells in solitary confinement, as well as being denied family visits, sufficient food and clean clothes.

Su Su went into hiding for nearly three months in 2007 after taking part in a rally against sharp fuel price increases.

She was arrested in the aftermath of the uprising in mid-November of that year, for

putting up an anti-government banner near the hotel in Yangon where the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma was staying.

In August 2009, she was transferred to Hkamti prison, more than 1,600 km from her family home.

Prisoners in Burma rely on their families to bring them food and medicine, and the distance means that it is very difficult for Su Su to receive essential supplies from her relatives.

Amnesty is asking people to go to www.amnesty.org.uk/tradeunions and sign the petition to Burma's Minister of Foreign Affairs, asking him to release Su Su Nway immediately and unconditionally.

While she remains in custody, Amnesty has called on the authorities not to mistreat her, to provide her with prompt and adequate medical care, and ensure that she is moved closer to her family.

For more information visit www.amnesty.org.uk/tradeunions



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