

# LISTEN UP, ANGELA... AUSTERITY ISN'T WORKING

Picture: CC WEF



Picture: Paula Geoghegan

CONGRESS general secretary David Begg has told German Chancellor Angela Merkel Ireland needs measures to stimulate demand and ease the burden of bank debt – not more austerity.

Mr Begg met Dr Merkel on March 22 as part of delegation of EU trade unionists, organised by the German trade union confederation, DGB.

Speaking before the visit, Mr Begg said:

“Chancellor Merkel needs to hear directly that the imposition of ever tighter austerity in Ireland is not working and will not lead to recovery. Instead, it will lead to a lost decade.

“I will be saying that we need measures to stimulate domestic demand and create jobs immediately. The jobs crisis needs to be addressed urgently if we are to have any hope of recovery.

“Permanent austerity means that the debt we have will become even more unsustainable and unpayable. In addition, there needs to be some action at an EU level on the Irish bank debt.

“The citizens of Ireland cannot and should not be required to pay the debts of badly-run banks. That debt burden is hampering any prospect of recovery,” he added.

Mr Begg joined other trade union leaders from Belgium, France, Italy, Sweden, Greece, Spain and the Czech Republic for the visit. The delegation also met Frank-Walter Steinmeier, leader of the opposition Social Democrats.

# Unions attack Osborne's 'Budget for millionaires'

UNIONS were quick to lash UK chancellor George Osborne's "Budget for Millionaires".

Unite regional secretary Jimmy Kelly claimed it marked the return of "robber barons".

According to the union, the super-rich gained £6bn in tax cuts while the welfare bill was slashed by a further £10bn.

Mr Kelly said: "The Con-Dems have proved to be the allies of the robber barons who will pocket the money and place it in their tax havens."

Turning to the government's plan to reduce Corporation Tax to 20%, he added: "It will mean that a billion pound company will pay the same level of tax as someone on minimum wage."

"All Osborne has done is increase the wealth gap and the divide between the poorer northern regions and the affluent south-east of England. It is purely tribal politics that will have catastrophic consequences."

NIPSA also weighed into the chancellor's plan to introduce regional pay.

General secretary Brian Campfield said: "This is a continuation of the strategic attack by this current government on public servants and public services."

"There is no economic rationale for depressing the wages of public servants in areas like Northern Ireland."

"There is plenty of research, which has demonstrated that where public sector pay is higher than the regional private sector, that this is explained primarily by the educational and skills requirements of the different sectors."

"Neither is there a sustainable argument that levels of public sector pay have a detrimental impact on the private sector. The fact is that with the current levels of unemployment the private sector should have no difficulty whatsoever in recruiting employees."

"The rates of pay in the public

sector are just not relevant in these circumstances."

Meanwhile, NIPSA's sister union PCS claimed the Budget had widened the gap between rich and poor and warned it would do nothing to create jobs.

General secretary Mark Serwotka said: "This is a Budget for the rich, and is outrageous at a time when unemployment is rising, people's pay is being frozen, pensions are being attacked, and social security slashed."

"It is a very arrogant demonstration of the fact that we are not all in this together."

CWU insisted Osborne had offered little for ordinary people but had helped the wealthiest in society by cutting their tax.

General secretary Billy Hayes said: "What else do you expect from a Cabinet of millionaires?"

"Reducing the deficit by cutting welfare spending means the poor will pay for the mistakes of the rich."

Usdaw chief John Hannett claimed his union's members were facing the "biggest squeeze on their family incomes for a generation", but the Budget had done nothing to alleviate their money fears or give them "any hope of future respite".

He added: "Even with the welcome increase in the amount people can earn before paying tax, the poorest working families will not benefit from this and the vast majority of our members will remain worse off as the changes to tax credits and benefits already announced will hit our members even harder next month than they did in April 2011."



United in opposition: NIPSA general secretary Brian Campfield, Usdaw chief John Hannett and Mark Serwotka, who heads the PCS, spoke as one in attacking chancellor George Osborne's 'millionaires' Budget' Pictures: NIPSA, Usdaw, PCS

## ICTU welcomes bill to protect whistleblowers

CONGRESS has welcomed new Irish government proposals on whistleblowing but insisted they must be backed up by tough sanctions – not just in law but in practice – to stop employers attempting to "victimise or target people who blow the whistle on bad or illegal practices".

Legal affairs officer Esther Lynch was responding to the publication last month of the *Protected Disclosure*

*in the Public Interest Bill 2012*. The bill was described by Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Brendan Howlin as a "key part" of the government's reform agenda and a "huge advancement" on the "previous piecemeal approach" to the issue.

Ms Lynch said: "This represents a giant step in the right direction, but in order for the proposed measures to work, they must be backed by ef-

fective safeguards for whistleblowers and real sanctions for those who target them." She warned that while whistleblower protection would not of itself prevent wrongdoing, it was a "necessary component" and something unions had called for consistently.

"With effective whistleblower protection in place, wrongdoing can be quickly exposed."

Ms Lynch said Congress would be

pressing for other changes to the proposed legislation, including broadening the range of workers who are protected to include interns and apprentices and protection for employees who report on violations of labour standards to the National Employment Right Authority. She added that Congress will also propose that these protections would apply immediately, with no qualifying service period.





Picture: Paula Geraghty

Irish president Michael D Higgins addresses Women's Conference in Belfast on March 2

**LEGISLATION**

# Irish union rights to meet EU standards

CONGRESS has welcomed confirmation from the Irish government that it will legislate to ensure union rights in the Republic are brought into line with human rights standards across the European Union.

Gerard Corr, Ireland's ambassador to the United Nations, confirmed the Republic would honour its commitment on collective bargaining rights contained in the Programme for Government.

He told a special session of the UN's Human Rights Council in Geneva that Irish law would be made "consistent with recent judgments of the European Court of Human Rights".

Welcoming the move, Congress legal affairs officer Esther Lynch said: "Work should begin without delay to ensure that this commitment on basic union rights is fully and properly realised."

"Ireland is seriously out of line with most developed nations in our failure to fully uphold union rights and appreciate how central they are to human rights."

"We are happy to start discussions with the Government on this immediately and see no reason for further delay."

**ECONOMY**

# CSO data flags up need for jobs drive

CONGRESS has claimed new figures showing Ireland moved back into recession in late 2011 underlines the need for a major jobs and growth investment programme.

Speaking after data from the Central Statistics Office, released on March 22, showed falls in GDP, GNP and domestic demand, Congress chief economist Paul Sweeney said: "Once again we see clear proof of the self-defeating nature of the austerity regime. It is collapsing demand, costing jobs and strangling all prospects of recovery."

"Congress has made several proposals on how government could move quickly to set up a high impact jobs and growth investment programme."

"This can be funded by monies remaining in the National Pension Reserve Fund, through incentivising private Irish pension fund investment and leveraging resources from the European Investment Bank."

"We need to move on these as a matter of urgency."

He added: "The latest data clearly shows that prospects of a recovery are receding and will continue to do so while we fail to act on job creation and investment."

# 'False economy' eroded our sense of community

PRESIDENT Michael D Higgins has spoken of the "huge price" Ireland has paid for what he called the "speculative period of unsustainable growth" and "false property-led development" in the first decade of this century.

He made his comments to delegates at Congress' Women's Conference held in the Waterfront Hall, Belfast, earlier this month.

President Higgins said: "For those who promoted this bubble, personal wealth and material possessions became a dangerous obsession – at the level of society, ostentation replaced simplicity and selfishness replaced selflessness."

"The sense of community, for which our island was so richly famous, was eroded as those who pursued aggressively individualistic goals had little time for collective endeavour, little interest in social solidarity and little capacity for ethical reflection."

To build a new future, the "values" and "assumptions" that lay behind "this false economy" had to be exposed and rejected.

He said: "We are emerging from a dark period in our economic history – and we are certainly entitled to curse that darkness."

Any new economic approach had to make "sustainability and social cohesion" as much a priority as "efficiency and competitiveness".

President Higgins told delegates: "We must work together to reclaim a better version of Irishness



Picture: Kevin Cooper/PhotoLine

than the recent one which has thankfully expired – where we put community solidarity and social cohesion above the demands of acquisitive individualism.

"Only then can we fully rebuild our personal lives and our communities."

The president said the trade union movement had been central to the development of community in Ireland over the past century and predicted it would play a "pivotal role in rebuilding our damaged society".

On gender equality, while acknowledging the progress that had been made, he pointed out that many "barriers" still had to be "broken".

He noted that despite high

standards of education, women were still not afforded the opportunity to fill many "key decision-making roles".

This exclusion harmed not just women but society as a whole.

President Higgins added: "In many instances, women are not enabled and empowered to bring their expertise to the table to ensure that our decision-making is based on the balanced views and experiences of both genders."

"It is a matter of regret to me that patriarchy and its related authoritarianism still prevails in many fields and that it conspires to self-perpetuate, despite all the evidence in support of the value of diversified decision-making."

**MORE WOMEN'S CONFERENCE PICTURES GO TO PAGE 10,11 & 12**

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## HOUSEHOLD CHARGE UNION VIEWS...

### An attack on the lower paid

CPSU general secretary Eoin Ronayne has slammed the Household Charge as an indiscriminate attack on lower paid workers.

He said: "It is unacceptable for lower paid workers to be expected to carry the same burden as those who prospered during the Celtic Tiger amassing high value properties and earning high salaries."

Mr Ronayne called for the tax to be replaced with a comprehensive wealth/property tax which would widen the tax base ensuring those with the

most contributed more to ensure public services for those most in need in society. He also took the opportunity to clarify the union's position following recent comments in the media suggesting the CPSU was calling for non-payment by its members.

Mr Ronayne confirmed the union's Executive had not voted to support any umbrella campaign for non-payment of the charge but pointed out that the issue would be a key debate at the union's annual conference in Cork next month.

### It's 'unfair and regressive'

MANDATE has called on the Irish government to withdraw its "unfair and regressive" proposals for a €100 Household Charge.

However, the union's National Executive Committee has signalled support for bringing in a "fair and progressive" property tax instead.

General secretary John Douglas said: "One of the causes of the country's current economic difficulties was the frittering away of the tax base under successive governments and our over-reliance on transaction taxes such as Stamp Duty. In order to rectify this situation we need to put a proper tax system in place and a property tax needs to be part of that – however, one that is fair and progressive."

He added: "The Household Charge is unfair and regressive because it levies every household – whether they have an income of €10,000 or €1,000,000 – the same amount of money, €100. This is simply not right. People on low and middle incomes have been hit hard over recent times by a range of different charges and the Household Charge represents the last straw for many."

### Don't sign up for this tax

UNITE has called on its members to take a stand against the Household Charge.

Regional secretary Jimmy Kelly, speaking after a meeting of the union's Executive earlier this month, underlined that the union was not against a property-based tax in itself and was all for broadening the tax base "on those rich enough to pay".

He said: "We believe it is right there should be a tax based on property as exists widely and generally fairly

throughout Europe, but not on the family home of low to middle income earners and not at the scandalous flat rate we are being asked to pay in the short term."

Mr Kelly added: "We will urge our members throughout the country not to register. The government needs to think through a fairer way to impose tax on property.

"It needs to take account of people's inability to take one more punch below the waist.

"It needs to be fair."

### Charge 'subsidises' the rich

SIPTU's National Executive Council called on the Irish government to suspend the Household Charge because it "subsidised" wealthy people at the expense of middle and low-income families.

It came as the NEC gave unanimous backing to a motion on the issue at a meeting on February 17. The motion stated: "The Household Charge as currently proposed by the government is a flat tax which is unfair and regressive in that it subsidises wealthy people at the expense of middle and low income families.

"The NEC supports the principle of a fair and progressive property tax which is proportionate and which recognises that wealthy households can afford to pay more than those with modest earnings while those on lower incomes should be exempt. We call on the Government to suspend the introduction of the Household Charge until it is replaced by a fair and progressive property tax."



## DOCKS DISPUTE AUCKLAND



THOUSANDS of people took part in a March 10 rally in Auckland, New Zealand, to show their support for local dockers locked in a long-running dispute with port management. It came after 300 “wharfies” – members of the Maritime Union of New Zealand – were put under threat of dismissal on March 7. The International Transport Federation claims management is attempting to undermine hard-won workers’ terms and conditions at the port. MUNZ president Gerry Parsloe said: “What our members most want is to get back to work, and get this port running again. This can happen with a collective agreement that protects basic job security.”

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## JOBS INITIATIVE

# Howlin: Coalition to explore unions' pension funds plan

BRENDAN Howlin, minister for public expenditure and reform in the Republic, has said he is committed to exploring trade union proposals to use tens of billions of euro held by Irish pensions funds to help create jobs.

He told SIPTU's *Liberty* newspaper: "There is about €70 billion in pension funds here owned by workers. About 2% of that is invested in this economy. I think workers want money that they are putting into a pension fund to be active in sustaining jobs here."

"We are going to have to find a mechanism for that and this Government will engage with the unions and the pension funds in that endeavour."

The proposals envisage private pension funds increasing the proportion of their assets invested in the domes-

Picture: Labour Party



*'I think workers want money that they are putting into a pension fund to be active in sustaining jobs here'*

Brendan Howlin

tic economy by 5% for use in selected job generating economic activities in return for exemption from the controversial pension levy.

As well as providing venture capital for setting up new enterprises in the manufacturing and service industries,

the funds – raised through the combination of private pension funds, the National Pension Reserve Fund and European Investment Bank monies – could also create jobs in vital infrastructure projects, including in the energy, utilities and transport sectors.

## FISCAL COMPACT

# TUC: Three reasons why this treaty is bad for us all

THE TUC has described the Fiscal Compact as "profoundly unfair, undemocratic and misguided".

In a February 28 letter to Prime Minister David Cameron and deputy PM Nick Clegg, general secretary Brendan Barber claimed the treaty was unfair because austerity measures "fell hardest on the shoulders of the weakest" against the backdrop of a "thriving" financial sector.

He described the manner in which it had been negotiated as "undemocratic" because it tied the hands of elected governments, locking them into pursuing austerity policies. Finally, he claimed the treaty was "profoundly misguided".

Urging Cameron and Clegg to change their strategy, he added: "Governments are deluding themselves if they believe that this Fiscal Compact will bring back market confidence – it will be a straight-jacket killing growth."

"Already, austerity risks forcing countries back into recession. Where is the growth going to come from when governments cannot invest and when workers do not earn enough to spend in their local economies?"

Meanwhile former TUC and ETUC general secretary Lord John Monks has called the new treaty "massively counterproductive" – and warned that Europe was ignoring the lessons of its own history.

Writing for the TUC's *Touchstone* blog, he said: "Just when the EU needed to rise to the challenge of handling its worst economic crisis since 1945, it has adopted the approach of President Hoover in the 1930s and intensified austerity at a time of economic collapse."

"It is as though John Maynard Keynes, had never analysed what went wrong nor that President Roosevelt had not correctly tackled the 1930s crisis by the New Deal policies of growth and employment."

## Congress EC to discuss FC

CONGRESS' Executive Council met earlier this month to discuss the Fiscal Compact and proposals for a referendum on the new treaty.

ETUC general secretary Bernadette Ségol and economist Karl Whelan outlined their reading of its implications during presentations at the March 9 meeting.

It was agreed that a briefing paper would be drawn up to inform and shape debate across the trade union movement. The Executive Council also agreed to meet again to discuss on the issue.

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## EQUAL PAY

# Wage gap warning to Irish government

SIPTU has warned the Irish government the wage gap in the Republic will continue to widen unless workers in low pay sectors are given the protection they need in law.

Ethel Buckley, the union's national equality and campaigns organiser, made the comments as new research revealed that the gender pay

gap in the Republic stands at 17.1%.

She said: "Working women in Ireland are more likely to work in low paid and precarious work than men.

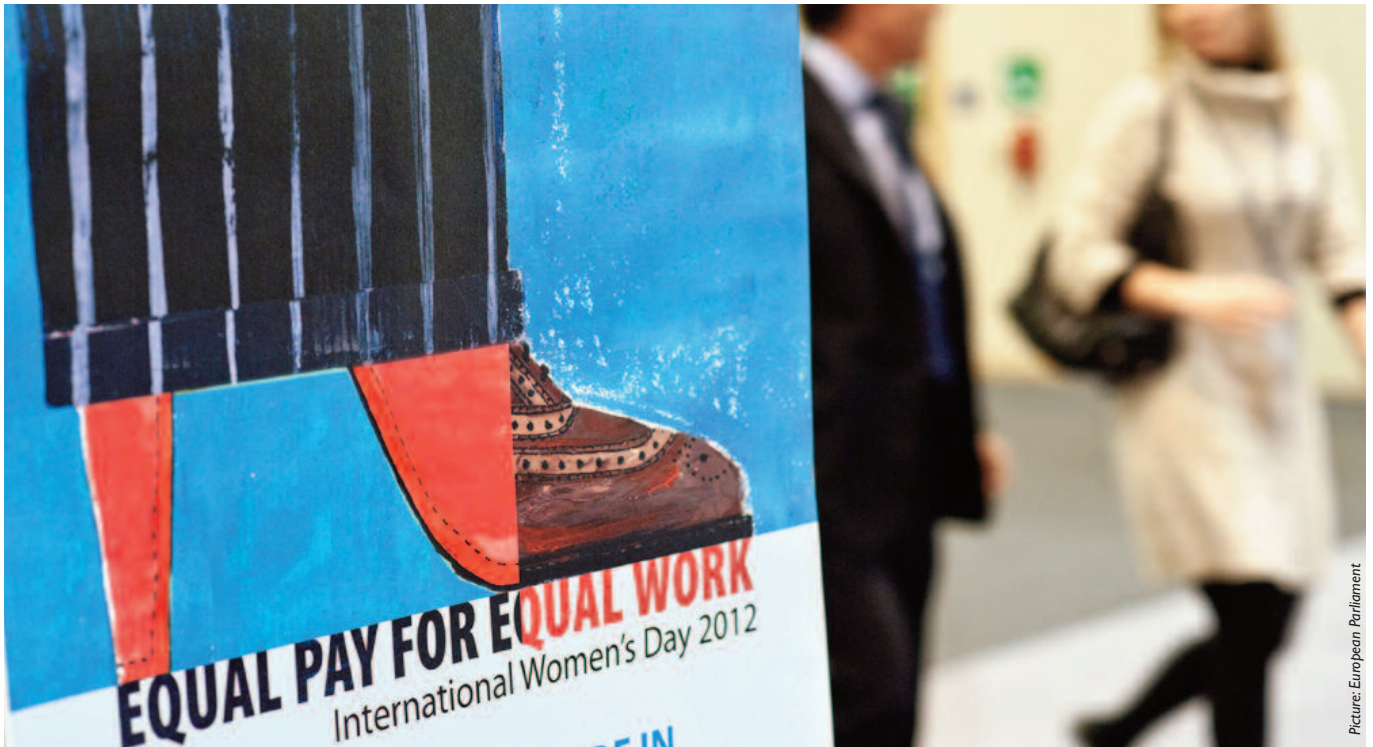
"Women comprise the overwhelming majority of workers in the low pay sectors covered by Employment Regulation Orders.

"We need to ensure that the new legislation governing these sectoral agreements is sufficiently robust to protect these vulnerable workers. Otherwise the wage gap between women and men will get even wider."

The EU Commission gender pay gap study found that

young women earn more than 90% of their male equivalents but this falls to 71.5% in the 35 to 44 age group and to only 61.4% group for women aged between 55 and 64.

In the Republic, only 123,000 women earn more than €50,000 a year compared with 254,000 men.



## No discernible progress in last 10yrs

CONGRESS has claimed the last decade has seen "no discernible progress" in addressing the gender pay gap and that inequality remains a "significant factor" in the working lives of women.

Assistant general secretary Sally Anne Kinahan, right, made the comments on March 8 – International Women's Day.

She flagged up recent reports by the ITUC and the European Commission confirming that genuine pay and workplace equality had still to be realised.

The ITUC report detailed how little progress had been made on pay over the last 10 years while the EC survey found that women in Ireland earned 17% less than men.

It also revealed that twice as many men than women earned more than €50,000 a year.

Ms Kinahan said: "It is important we recognise significant obstacles remain for women in the

workplace. We should also acknowledge that the evidence from the ITUC is that women in trade unions are better protected in this crisis and enjoy better conditions than women in non-union sectors."

Ms Kinahan pointed to research carried out by the University of Limerick and presented to the Congress Women's Conference earlier this month.

This showed that women in Ireland are more likely to work in low paid and precarious employment.

Researchers found that most workers covered by Joint Labour Committees were female.

The study also revealed that the payment of Sunday premiums, shift allowances and overtime to JLC workers did not place a major burden on employers. Ms Kinahan flagged up the recent deal

<http://www.ictu.ie/press/2012/03/08/inequality-still-a-significant-factor-in-working-lives-of-women/>

between employers and unions in the contract cleaning industry and claimed this represented a "big step forward" in ensuring basic minimum standards for workers in traditionally low paid sectors.

The national agreement was brokered between SIPTU, the Irish Contract Cleaning Association and employers' group IBEC.

The deal restores pay rates and other conditions of employment that existed under the previous Employment Regulation Order.



## UK government is 'female unfriendly'

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber has dubbed the UK coalition government the "most female-unfriendly in living memory".

He made the comments as he addressed the TUC Women's Conference in London on March 14.

Acknowledging that this was a time of "tremendous

difficulty" for "ordinary women and their families", Mr Barber pointed out that more than a million women were now without work in the UK.

But he told delegates that this did not just represent a "job crisis" – as women were twice as likely to be affected by cuts than men. Mr Barber

said: "Child benefit and tax credits are being sacrificed as ministers look for ways to cut the tax rate for people earning more than £150,000, even though they get more in tax breaks than most women earn in a year.

"Women are being disproportionately hit by the pay freezes, pension reforms and

massive jobs cull in the public sector.

"Basic employment rights are under threat and refuges for victims of domestic violence are being closed.

"The evidence is clear – this is the most female-unfriendly government in living memory."



# Scale of AIB job losses 'devastating'



Picture: IBOA

THE IBOA has warned plans to slash 2,500 jobs at AIB will have a devastating impact on the bank's staff and their families.

The union had been expecting an announcement on a restructuring plan but the number of proposed job losses has shocked many observers.

General secretary Larry Broderick said: "Although we have been expecting an announcement for some time, the scale of the proposed job losses means that ordinary bank staff are being asked to suffer the consequences of the mismanagement of the bank's affairs to a disproportionate extent."

The IBOA chief called for a

"balanced accommodation" in any talks on the restructuring proposals.

This had, he said, to take into account all of the bank's stakeholders, "including staff and customers as well as the government and shareholders".

Mr Broderick vowed the union would seek to protect as many jobs as possible during the discussions and that any job losses are implemented "on a voluntary basis".

He warned that the "continuing haemorrhage" of jobs in the financial sector showed "no signs of abating".

"We need a realistic strategy to strengthen existing employment and create alternative opportunities."

Meanwhile, SIPTU insurance and finance sector organiser Adrian Kane slammed the number of redundancies being sought as unacceptably high and vowed his union would seek to protect as many directly employed jobs as possible.

He said: "While accepting that our members expected to see a reduction in over-all employment levels due to the financial crisis they also know that labour costs were not the cause of the international banking collapse.

"We are concerned that the crisis is being used by some in the finance industry to drive down decent pay and conditions."

# Health bill 'takes N out of NHS'



Picture: Mark Thomas/UNISON

UNISON has vowed to redouble its efforts to save the NHS.

Members of the union held a minute's silence outside the Houses of Parliament on March 20, left, to mark the end of the NHS "as we know it".

It came as inside the Lords voted for the controversial Health and Social Care Bill - described by UNISON as "pernicious".

The legislation abolishes Strategic Health Authorities and Primary Care Trusts and gives greater control over care budgets and commissioning to GPs and other health professionals.

Professional bodies representing doctors, nurses and other NHS workers have come together to fight the changes.

General secretary Dave Prentis said: "This Bill takes the N out of NHS. It is a scandal that this government is ignoring the groundswell of opposition from medical experts, royal colleges, staff, unions and the public.

"Patients will have a two-tier health service and where they live will determine the healthcare they receive.

"Make no mistake, this is not the end of UNISON's opposition and we are not alone - huge question marks remain over this Bill. We will continue to campaign hard to try and mitigate the worst excesses of this bill."

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# Pay fair, minister!



MORE than 1,500 student teachers took to the streets of Dublin last month demanding equal work for equal pay.

A series of government measures effectively means that new entrants can expect to earn up to 30% less than teaching colleagues who entered the profession only 18 months ago.

INTO president Noreen Flynn warned of the dangers of continuing to load the burden of austerity on to the next generation.

Pointing out that the country's problems were not caused by the young, she told the crowd: "The older generation's foolishness cost this country its economic independence. So why then are younger people, from children to new home-owners, paying the greater price?"

"There is a fairer way than squeezing younger people who did not cause our crisis.

"We cannot risk creating an embittered, resentful new generation sending thousands off on the modern equivalent of the emigrant ship with little to show for Ireland's



**Mask protest: Dozens of 'Ruarí Quinns' showed up at the Dublin rally**

excesses and policy mistakes."

Meanwhile, ASTI president Brendan Broderick, speaking before the February 22 date, claimed the government was guilty of targeting new teachers for pay cuts.

He said: "The government is attempting to pick off a vulnerable group of young people who are already facing unemployment, emigration and years of precarious employment.

"Those students lucky enough to find teaching work will be treated differently than many of the colleagues they teach alongside.

"They will receive up to 30% less pay than they would have received if they entered teaching just 18 months ago."

William O'Brien, a second-level student teacher at UCD told *The Union Post*: "These cuts represent nothing less than the segregation of the profession. Today is about the unfairness of treating new teachers differently than their colleagues."

Yvonne Rossiter, a second-level student teacher at Trinity College Dublin, added: "It is unthinkable that in 2012 we are having to protest for equal pay for equal work."



**'Young are paying the price': INTO president Noreen Flynn, above centre, with some of the protestors**

Pictures: INTO/TUI

## CPSU Battle ahead in run up to Croke review

CPSU general secretary Eoin Ronayne has warned of the battles that lie ahead to protect lower paid public and private sector workers.

And he called on CPSU members to "brace themselves" and expect more attacks from "neo-liberal economists" and "the baying hounds of the right-wing media".

Mr Ronayne, who took over from Blair Horan earlier this month, predicted the Government would come under "relentless pressure" to cut the wages of lower paid workers in the run up to the Croke Park review.

He claimed there was now a battle on to "protect the lowest paid from further cuts in basic pay and increments".

Mr Ronayne also warned the patience of low paid public servants was not beyond breaking.

He said they were being caught between increasing stealth taxes and pay cuts and were finding it impossible to make ends meet.

He added: "There comes a point where the current attack on low paid workers makes no economic sense whatsoever."

## IMPACT Teagasc shows deal works well

IMPACT has claimed other organisations could learn from the approach adopted by Teagasc to public service reform.

Matt Staunton, the union's national secretary, flagged up the Republic's agriculture and food development authority as a "living example" of the effective working of the Croke Park agreement.

Speaking at the annual New Frontiers in Industrial Relations conference in Dublin earlier this month, he said this had been achieved by early planning, good leadership and staff involvement. Mr Staunton told delegates Teagasc unions and management had not "hidden" behind Croke Park.

He said: "Instead we have actively used the agreement as a tool to solve problems and deliver savings and reform on a scale, at a speed, and with a level of cooperation that would have been unthinkable without the agreement.

"Croke Park is often criticised for being too slow in the delivery of change. But this case demonstrates that time invested in getting service configuration right, clearly communicating what you're doing and why to staff and service users, and bringing staff and their representatives along in the change process, is time invested well."



# CONGRESS WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

*I'm every woman!*



SIPTU vice president Patricia King with President Higgins and his wife Sabina



Speakers Dr Michelle O'Sullivan and, below, Sylvia Walby



UNISON's Pamela Dooley at conference



Theresa Moriarity gave a presentation on life in the slums of Belfast



Pictures: Paula Geraghty & Kevin Cooper/Photoline



President Higgins was given a standing ovation following his speech, introduced by David Begg



## Masterclass on organising women

ANDY Snoddy – of the United Federation of Danish Workers, or 3F for short – spoke to the conference about organising women in difficult times.

Claiming that organising was “nothing new”, he told delegates: “It’s what trade unions do, from organising the Belfast mill workers 100 years ago to organising cabin crew today, it is the same process.

“All organising is based on issues – the workers’ issues, not our issues. If we take the example of the mill girls, they had low wages and appalling working conditions but they were organised around the right to talk or sing in the workplace.

“Likewise, when Unite organised Flybe cabin crew, while there were a host of issues, one of the most pressing was crew

food as the airline provides food for the crew and that might be for all three meals in a day. Sandwiches can become the key issue.”

Insisting that the modern organising approach was “nothing new”, Mr Snoddy said it simply meant “making a system out of what was often a gut reaction”.

“We talk to the workers, find out their issues, find who are the natural leaders and involve them in an organising committee.

“We have some informal education and plan collective actions to win the issue.”

He insisted that unions can still win and told delegates: “Experience has shown that for the bigger issues we need to combine organising with leverage

strategies. A classic example was the Unite meat industry campaign.

“Around 14,000 workers – mostly migrant agency workers – were organised from the bottom up using organising, but to win equal pay with directly employed workers, to win a transfer from agency to permanent employment, required a complex leverage strategy to compel the supermarkets to impose new higher standards on their supply chain.”

Mr Snoddy said the the future of hundreds of thousands of Irish workers depended on the trade union movement.

“We have the knowledge, the tools to win – what we need is the commitment by unions to use the tools and techniques.”

## COLOMBIA

# NI unions back drive for peace

TRADE unions in the North have launched a ‘Justice for Colombia’ campaign and are seeking cross-party support from MLAs and MPs for the initiative.

It is hoped local political parties can join with trade unions in pooling their experience of the Peace Process in Northern Ireland and offer valuable advice about conflict resolution to the Colombians. The initiative was launched at the Unite HQ in Belfast earlier this month.

Mariela Kohon, of the pressure group Justice for Colombia, and Sarah Merrill, of Parliamentary Friends of Colombia, spoke at the event.

They outlined the historical background to the civil war in Colombia, which has seen thousands of trade unionists targeted and killed as the army and allied right-wing paramilitary groups battle FARC insurgents.

Colombians for Peace is made up of high-profile figures – including former presidents, journalists, politicians, and academics – and is backed by human rights organisations and the trade union movement.

It has already secured the successful release of several FARC hostages and played an important role in advancing prospects for peace as well as helping to raise the profile of the conflict internationally.

Most recently they have been working closely with ASFAMIPAZ – an organisation representing relatives of soldiers and police captured by FARC – in a bid to secure the safe release of 10 remaining hostages.

Welcoming the delegation to Belfast, Unite regional secretary Jimmy Kelly said: “We fully support the peace campaign and the right for social justice and equality for all in Colombia.

“It is vital that the international community sustain the pressure in order for the peace process to begin this brutal and savage conflict.”

In her talk, Mariela Kohon explained how more than 3,000 trade unionists have been killed so far in the conflict. She said: “It is the most dangerous place in the world to be an active trade unionist working for workers’ rights.

“We in the peace movement would like Northern Ireland politicians to engage in this process. We feel that using their experience of conflict resolution would really resonate with the Colombian administration.”

Adding her union’s backing for the initiative, UNISON regional secretary Patricia McKeown said: “It is time for Stormont to join the international debate on world affairs other than thinking solely about itself. We will be bringing a delegation from Colombia to Northern Ireland in May in order to meet our MLAs, trade unionists and peace activists.

“They will impress on us all the importance of supporting their cause for peace. It is crucial for the Stormont administration to play its role.”

## EDUCATION

# Numbers drop leads to ‘comps by stealth’

NORTHERN Ireland’s falling population will ultimately negate any use or need for academic selection, it has been claimed

Ulster Teachers’ Union general secretary Avril Hall Callaghan made the comments at her union’s annual conference in Newcastle, Co Down, on March 22.

She said: “Most grammar schools have already experienced great change as they are now accepting up to 50% of their local population as opposed to the 25% they used to take when the school population was larger.

“As a result many of them have adapted to cater for pupils with the full range of marks and are in all but name comprehensive schools.

“As the birth rate falls and the population of school-age children decreases, there is no longer a need for two schools in a town.

“Because grammar schools are filling their places it is the secondaries which are falling short of pupil numbers. What this is amounting to is the introduction of a comprehensive system of education by stealth – and it is the grammar schools which are creating that situation.”



**CONGRESS WOMEN'S CONFERENCE** *I'm every woman!*

Pictures: Paula Geraghty



**Clockwise from top:** Congress delegation with President Michael D Higgins and his wife Sabina; Unite delegation; NIPSA delegation; Congress general secretary David Begg greets the President who is flanked by Belfast Lord Mayor Niall Ó Donnghaile; CWU delegation; INTO delegation; NUJ delegation and ASTI delegation





## PCS vows to forge ahead with drive on pensions

THE Public and Commercial Services union has vowed to continue to pursue a joint union campaign against UK government cuts to pensions.

Following a meeting on March 19, the union's national executive agreed to build for a co-ordinated national strike in April.

It comes after a consultation ballot of members – 90.5% of whom voted to reject the government's offer and 72.1% voted to support a programme of further action with other unions – the highest vote for action the union has ever had.

The PCS will formally reject what the government has tabled to date and offer "solidarity and practical support" to teachers and lecturers in London who are staging a one-day strike on March 28.

General secretary Mark Serwotka said: "Our overwhelming ballot result came in the face of continuing attacks from the government, and during a time when many people are suffering personal financial hardship.

"While we remain committed to negotiating with ministers, they have so far refused to move from their plans to force civil and public servants to work longer and pay more for less in retirement.

"We will be working with other unions to build for co-ordinated national action to successfully fight these cuts to pensions, as well as those to pay and jobs that this brutal government is inflicting on the public sector:"

## PHOTOLINE

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## Congress in warning over Commission strike proposals

CONGRESS has warned new European Commission proposals on the right of unions to go on strike could lead to the right being undermined across Europe and could well be in contravention of ILO conventions.

Congress legal affairs officer Esther Lynch said the Commission proposals – known as the Monti II Regulation – were flawed and "will almost certainly have to be rewritten and revised".

She continued: "In our view they could well contravene key ILO conventions. The rationale behind these proposals was to repair the damage done by the Viking and Laval rulings from the European Court of Justice."

"The avowed aim was to provide for binding legislation to ensure 'economic freedoms' respected fundamental social rights, such as the right to strike.

"As drafted however the Commission's regulation would undermine the right to strike. It is our view – and the view of the ETUC – that neither economic freedoms nor competition rules should have priority over fundamental social rights.

"It needs to explicitly state that in case of conflict, human and social rights shall take precedence."

## Vita Cortex workers agree to LRC invite

SIPTU members involved in a sit-in at Vita Cortex have agreed to enter into a mediation process under the auspices of the Labour Relations Commission.

It is understood Kevin Foley, the LRC's director of conciliation services, wrote to SIPTU and IBEC on March 22, inviting both sides to begin a "process of mediation" to find "a basis for resolution of the dispute".

SIPTU organiser Anne Egar said: "If this proposal from the LRC is accepted by the owners of Vita Cortex it could be the first stage in a process that can lead to a resolution."

Vita Cortex workers marked the 100th day of their sit-in at the former foam manufacturing plant on the Kinsale Road in Cork on March 24.

Ms Egar added: "The workers are adamant that the dispute will continue until a just resolution has been secured."

## Running out of time

A SURVEY of NHS employees in England has found that almost half claim not to have enough time to complete their tasks at work.

UNISON insisted the official 2011 NHS Staff Survey – involving 135,000 health service workers – reflected the reality of increasing workloads and stress for hard-pressed frontline staff.

Christina McAnea, the union's head of health, said: "The increase in workload is not a coincidence, it is down to cuts in staffing and to a lack of cover for staff on sick or on leave."

She also warned that it not only staff that suffered as a result, adding: "The increase in workload and stress is felt by patients and workers' families too."

**EDUCATION**

# School cuts will cost us dear in the long term

PLAYING down impact of education cuts will have long-term costs, an ASTI schools seminar has been warned.

John O'Donovan, who chairs the union's Principals and Deputy Principals Committee, called on school heads not to be fooled by the phrase "greater freedom to allocate and manage staff" used by the Department of Education and Skills when describing the axing of ex-quota guidance counsellor provision.

He said: "This is a straightforward cut in teacher numbers and will result in the loss of almost 700 teaching posts in second-level schools."

"Rather than giving principals greater autonomy, it is forcing them to choose between reduced curriculum choice or reducing vital guidance provision for students."

Mr O'Donovan made his comments to 180 principals and deputy principals gathered at the Raddison Blu Hotel in Athone on February 29.

He claimed a "lowest-unit-cost mentality" should not be applied to educating young people.

"Schools are collaborative communities which seek to support all young people at a vital stage in their lives and regardless of their abilities, needs, and circumstances."

"All schools strive to be cost efficient, but stripping schools of key staff will fundamentally change the type of education service they can deliver."

Mr O'Donovan added: "It will cost us all in the long term."

**Got a union story?**  
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# Candy for Prez!



**WITH tongue stuck firmly in cheek, a new "Republican Party" hopeful has stepped into the US presidential race. GOP spoiler Candidate Walmart – who, according to lawyers here at the Post, is purely fictional and solely intended for purposes of satire, parody or lampoonery and is NOT affiliated with Walmart Stories, Inc – is campaigning**

**in favour of "standing up not just for the rights of the one per cent but the rights of the top one per cent of the one per cent".**

**Among his platform ideas is vowing to abolish the national minimum wage and mandatory overtime pay.**

**Anyway, you get the idea... Check out his campaign commercial at...**

<http://candidatewalmart.org/economy-jobs/>

**CONFERENCE**

# NIPSA: Cuts could fuel domestic abuse hike

NIPSA general secretary Brian Campfield has expressed deep concern that incidents of domestic violence will continue to increase in Northern Ireland as services and benefits are cut.

He made his comments at an event organised by the union's Equal Opportunities Committee in Belfast on March 7.

Mr Campfield said: "NIPSA will continue to call on the Assembly to ensure that all victims of domestic violence are protected from any negative impact of these cuts and changes to the welfare benefits system."

"We will also continue to work with employers to accept that this is a workplace issue and the importance of having supportive systems and procedures in place which will create a safe and supportive working environment which gives people suffering from domestic violence the confidence to come forward."



# Ronayne new CPSU gen sec

FORMER RTE journalist Eoin Ronayne has taken over as general secretary of the Civil Public and Services Union.

He replaces Blair Horan who retired earlier this month.

His appointment goes before the union's delegate conference next month in Cork for ratification.

Mr Ronayne – currently a member of Congress' Executive Committee – joined the CPSU as financial secretary in 2002 after an eight-year stint as NUJ Irish secretary.

A long-time activist at RTE, he led the four-week strike in 1992 which is credited with reversing an anti-union approach by the then management.

Since moving to the CPSU, he has played a pivotal role with outgoing general secretary Blair Horan in representing the union and its members in public and in media debates particularly during the disputes and protests over the unilateral cuts in pay and the imposition of the pension levy.

# US unions set to back Obama



**Trumka: Getting people out**

AMERICAN unions plan to mobilise hundreds of thousands of activists to campaign for the re-election of President Obama in November.

It follows recent successful grassroots initiatives in Ohio and Wisconsin – where unions used their organising network to wrong-foot Republican Party attempts to undermine unions.

Last November, the efforts of more than 17,000 union volunteers in Ohio were key in winning a vote to repeal a law curbing bargaining rights in the state.

And in January this year, organisers of a petition to force anti-union state governor Scott Walker to go before the voters again managed to secure more than a million signatures.

Though unions plan to spend upwards of \$400m on national, state and local elections over the coming year, it is their ability to put "feet on the street" during the campaign that will prove to be most effective way of securing Obama four more years.

Strongly unionised blue-collar states – such as Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin – will be key election battlegrounds.

AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka admitted the Republican Party's well-resourced political action committees – or super PACs – would throw tens of millions of dollars in a bid to unseat the president.

He said: "We're going to counter that by getting people out. We'll never be able to match them with money."



# Have a think before you drink on St Paddy's Day, US workers told



**AMERICAN union AFSCME called on its members to slake their thirst with union-made beer on St Patrick's Day.**

**Unfortunately – and perhaps surprisingly – none of our favourite Irish-produced beers were put forward as suitable beverages for consumption Stateside on March 17.**

**Instead, the union suggested revellers knock back**

**Anheuser-Busch Bare Knuckle Stout or Mad River Steelhead Extra Stout.**

**A spokesperson added: "If you fancy a lager, reach for a Budweiser, Busch, Henry Weinhard's Private Reserve, Iron City, Labatt's Blue, Lionhead, Michelob, or Pabst Blue Ribbon.**

**"If you are drawn to ale, try a Budweiser American Ale,**

**Henry Weinhard's Blue Boar Pale Ale, or Moosehead Clancy's Amber Ale."**

**And Union Plus – an initiative backed by US unions to endorse products made in unionised workplaces – even offered to text trade union members a list of "the most worker-friendly suds" to their phone.**

## Ex-SIPTU activist conquers mighty summit

**A retired SIPTU organiser has reached for the skies after conquering Mount Aconcagua – the highest mountain in the western hemisphere – last month. Keen mountaineer Kevin McMahon, from Dublin, summited the 22,834 ft peak on February 20. Mount Aconcagua – from the Inca *Ackon Cahuak*, mean-**

**ing Stone Sentinel – straddles the Chilean and Argentine border, and was first climbed in 1897. A colleague speaking to SIPTU's monthly newspaper *Liberty* described Kevin's achievement as a "rare feat... only achieved by the most dedicated and determined of people".**



Picture: SIPTU

## Usdaw warning over Sunday trading move

SHOPWORKERS' union Usdaw has slammed any further deregulation of Sunday trading laws in the UK. It comes after chancellor George Osborne's March 8 announcement that he is to introduce emergency legislation forcing through an eight-week suspension of trading laws this summer to facilitate the London Olympics.

General secretary John Hannett claimed there was little backing from either retailers or the public for such a change.

He said: "Deregulation would do little to stimulate growth or create jobs, but would have a very detrimental impact on the lives of millions of shopworkers and their families."

Mr Hannett added: "To suggest that the current legislation – which allows shops to open for 150 hours a week, – means Britain is 'closed for business' is frankly ridiculous.

"...there is understandable suspicion that the government is trying to use the London Olympics as cover for its wider deregulation agenda."

# DESIGN

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# Teachers are saying 'enough is enough'

THERE is a growing recognition among teachers in Northern Ireland that "enough is enough", it has been claimed.

INTO northern secretary Gerry Murphy made the comment at the union's northern conference on March 7.

Delegates gathered at the Canal Court Hotel in Newry called on the incoming executive to resist any further attempt to cut their pay.

Teachers were scathing in their attacks on the Northern Ireland Executive for agreeing to implement a hike to pension contributions, pay freezes and even considering bringing in regional pay.

Mr Murphy said: "There is a clear anger within the teaching community and a growing view that enough is enough."

"Teachers are living through difficult times

with report after report threatening their job security, or criticising that after 30 years service they can be given a severance package.

"The message of this conference to those in power is clear – invest in the teaching profession; teachers are critical to the success of the overall economy and without their professional and valued input today, future executives will reap the cost."

## Lay-offs warning

**HUNDREDS** of teachers in the North face a bleak future as sweeping redundancies hit the profession, a senior INTO official has warned.

Brendan Harron, speaking just before the union's conference earlier this month, predicted the scale of lay-offs would reach an all-time high.

He said: "The notifications of redundancies INTO has received to date already exceed the total number of job losses for last year and the year before."

"Hundreds of teachers are very worried about their futures. INTO is calling on teachers' employers to do everything in their power to redeploy those teachers who are made compulsorily redundant."



Gerry Murphy gives keynote address

Pictures: Kevin Cooper/Photoline

## Word 'cannot' not in our vocabulary



INTO's northern chief Gerry Murphy with Education Minister John O'Dowd

INTO northern secretary Gerry Murphy has signalled his union's willingness to "engage" in a changing agenda for education.

In his keynote address, Mr Murphy called on Education Minister John O'Dowd to grasp the nettle of change and work constructively and in partnership with the union.

He said: "The word

'cannot' is not part of the INTO vocabulary. As the leading teaching union in Ireland we have extensive skills and expertise and at this conference we are making these skills available to those who wish to engage in the change agenda."

"In return we expect that Department of Education and the Minister will respect and value the contribution of INTO."

## 'Gekko' culture slammed



UNI chief Philip Jennings: Bankers not paying for their mistakes

UNI general secretary Philip Jennings has claimed policy-makers across that world have been "blinded" by the "financialisation of the economy".

He made his comments following the resignation of Goldman Sachs executive Greg Smith earlier this month.

The South African-born equities specialist spilled the beans on what he dubbed "destructive and toxic" practices at the bank.

Mr Jennings said: "The Gordon Gekkos of this world may no longer preach openly that 'greed is good' mantra but

they are still humming it under their breath and teaching it to the new recruits at investment banks."

He added that governments were unwilling to tackle the "rotten bonus culture" in the sector.

"Policy-makers are blinded by the financialisation of the economy and the bankers while admitting their mistakes are not paying for the consequences of it."

"The debt is being shifted to the public who are paying for it through increased taxes, slashed public services, reduced pensions and soaring unemployment."



# Bosses 'Blitzed' as INM shifts printing of Tele



Picture: Kevin Cooper/Photoline

UNITE regional secretary Jimmy Kelly has slammed bosses at INM, owners of the *Belfast Telegraph*, for moving print workers "like pieces on a chessboard".

He made his comments to more than 100 people outside the historic *Telegraph* offices on Royal Avenue on March 3.

They were gathered to protest management plans to shift production of the weekday editions of the newspaper out of Belfast to a 60,000 sq ft print facility in Newry.

The move will see the loss of 24 jobs on the *Tele*'s day shift in Belfast.

Praising the "fantastic strength" of the *Telegraph*'s print chapel, Mr Kelly pointed out that not even the Luftwaffe had stopped production of the paper. He told the crowd: "It's the proud boast

of this newspaper shown on a plaque that production had never been interrupted – not even when the building was bombed by the Luftwaffe during the Belfast Blitz. Don't let them do what the German air force couldn't do when they bombed this building."

Mark Langhammer, speaking on behalf of Congress, described the *Telegraph* as "one of the city's great institutions".

He warned the shifting of production out of Belfast would "depress wages" and "worsen the conditions of service" of the paper's "real asset... its workforce". Mr Langhammer also attacked the "slash and burn, speculative, casino capitalism" that was "pressing down on wages from Ireland to Italy, from Athens to Lisbon".

Against this backdrop, it was important for legislators and politicians to act. Rather than major firms pursuing a "narrow dash for profit and short-term shareholder return", they should be legally obliged to take "slower, steadier, long-term routes to growth" and to invest in "real productivity, in people and in jobs".

Kerry Fleck, on behalf of Congress, also spoke to the crowd. She warned them that the UK coalition government was being backed by powerful economic and financial forces – forces that were intent on "destroying" public services and trade unions.

The "unashamed culture of corporate greed", she added, was continuing unabated while workers and their families "faced attacks on every front".

## Primark offer to go to ballot

SHOPWORKERS union Usdaw suspended its strike action due to take place on March 16 at Primark stores across the North, following an eleventh hour offer by the company.

The offer will now be put to the 700 Usdaw members who work at the eight stores.

If accepted, the hourly rate of pay for shop-floor workers will rise from the current £6.84 to £7.14 in April.

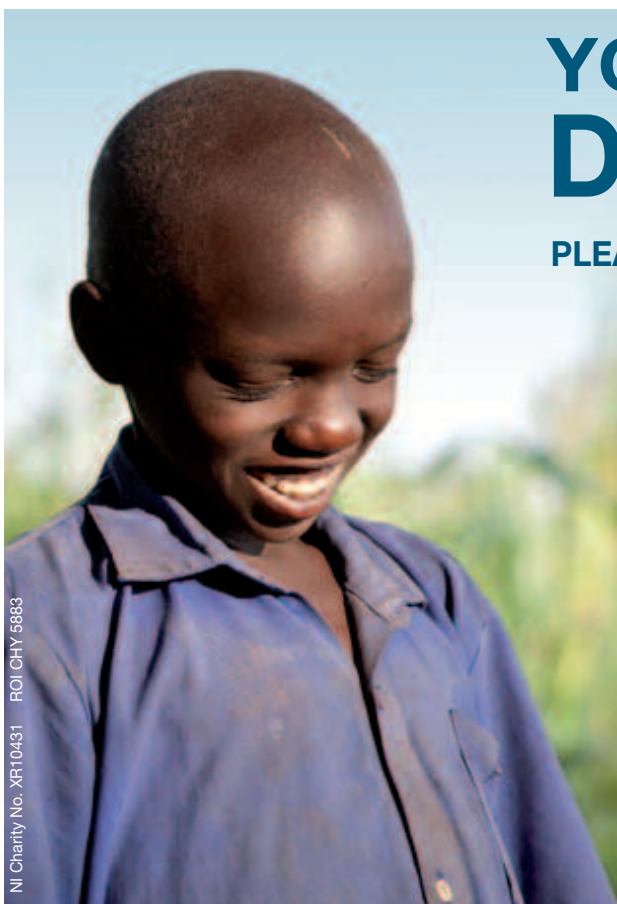
Earlier this month, Usdaw members voted 88% in favour of taking strike action in protest at the retailer's decision to impose a two-year pay freeze.

Ushaw area organiser Nicola Scarborough said: "After lengthy but constructive negotiations at the LRA, Primark has tabled an offer that we have agreed to put to our members in a ballot.

"As a result, we have also agreed to suspend the industrial action in order for our members to consider the offer. We think it offers the best that can be achieved through negotiation."

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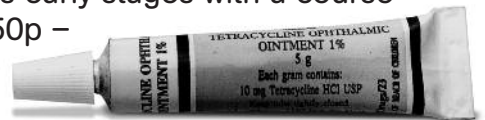


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Talla is just five. He has trachoma, a painful eye disease which can lead to a lifetime of blindness. Repeated infections cause the eyelashes to turn inwards and slowly and painfully every blink damages the eye and leads to blindness. Trachoma can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



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