

**BEGG TELLS EUROCRATS CONFIDENCE
IN SOCIAL EUROPE MUST BE REBUILT****EU CHILL
FACTOR
FOR
UNIONS**

CONGRESS general secretary David Begg has warned of a "growing disaffection" with the European project within the trade union movement.

Speaking to a gathering of EU officials and diplomats in Dublin last month, he said: "It is imperative that confidence in Social Europe be rebuilt.

"Expecting workers and social welfare recipients to carry the burden of macro-economic adjustment is unfair and unreasonable."

**Osborne's
'austerity
cult' inflicts
more pain**

UK chancellor George Osborne's slavish belief in "the ruinous cult of austerity" has inflicted terrible harm on working people in the North, Congress deputy general secretary Peter Bunting has claimed.

Osborne's March 20 Budget statement came on the same day as Northern Ireland recorded its highest unemployment rate in 15 years.

Speaking after the jobless total was revealed, Mr Bunting said: "Today Northern Ireland's unemployment rate hit its highest level since the Good Friday Agreement – further proof that austerity isn't working, that it is in fact causing lasting damage to the Northern Ireland economy.

"In his Budget today George Osborne sought to reinforce this discredited strategy. Despite the absence of growth and despite the increase in unemployment and public debt, George Osborne sees no reason to change course.

"Today's unemployment figures give him 17,000 new reasons – the number of people added to Northern Ireland's official unemployment total over the past year.

"The imposition of an effective wage cut for public servants will only ensure that economic demand is kept down, ensuring that the private sector cannot 'take up the slack' by employing more workers.

"We believe that a real plan is needed to invest in real jobs and real growth. The alternative is the slow spiral of decline and stagnation being inflicted upon the people of Northern Ireland by a far-away chancellor with a far-out dogma – the ruinous cult of austerity."

UNITE & NIPSA reaction P15

FULL STORY PAGE 2

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See page 5

ECONOMY

Unions are growing cold on Europe, EU officials warned

GROWTH must become the first objective of policy across the European Union and confidence in 'Social Europe' must be rebuilt, Congress general secretary David Begg has told an audience of senior EU diplomats.

Speaking at a gathering of EU ambassadors and key EU officials, Mr Begg also highlighted the wider impact if the UK left the EU, claiming such a move would mark a "critical juncture" for the Irish Republic.

He compared current EU austerity policies to the "needless sacrifice" of World War I and warned of a "growing disaffection" with the broader European project across the European trade union movement.

"Growth must become the first objective of policy and action must be taken to reflate the European economy.

"It is imperative that confidence in Social Europe be rebuilt. Expecting workers and social welfare recipients to carry the burden of macro-economic adjustment is unfair and unreasonable."

Mr Begg pointed out that the Irish bank debt had to be dealt



Are you listening, Brussels? Ireland's debt burden as seen on Feb 9

with and called for the EU Council agreement of June 29, 2012 to be honoured.

That deal committed Europe to breaking the link between private bank debt and sovereign debt. Ireland has taken on some €64 billion in debt in order to rescue the banking system and prevent any threat to the wider eurozone banks.

Mr Begg explained that this meant everyone in Ireland had

already paid almost €9,000, while across the EU the average cost of the banking crisis was just €192.

He also warned that the total number of people out of work across the EU – 25 million – was "politically and socially unsustainable", adding, "If this is left to fester it will foreclose many other options. If necessary, member states must be encouraged to become employers of last resort."

Senator's call for min wage cut 'nonsense economics'

CONGRESS has slammed a call by Senator Feargal Quinn for the minimum wage in the Republic to be scrapped as "misleading, nonsense economics".

Mr Quinn, founder of supermarket chain Superquinn, had claimed the €8.65-an-hour rate hampered the creation of new jobs.

But Congress chief economist Paul Sweeney hit back.

He said: "Senator Quinn's claim that the minimum wage acts as some sort of mythical barrier to job creation is utter nonsense and has no basis in economic reality.

"Recession, endless austerity, and a huge bank debt burden are the real barriers to job creation. Cutting wages doesn't create jobs, it creates poverty and depresses spending in the economy, particularly the retail sector."

Mr Sweeney pointed out that "despite five years of crisis", Ireland still had the second highest cost of living in the EU.

He said: "Unlike Ireland, many European countries do not operate a minimum wage backed by law – their minimum rates are set by agreement in each sector of the economy. This is true of Denmark, Italy, Finland and Sweden where the hourly rates are higher.

"Germany – which was cited by Senator Quinn – operates legal minimum pay rates across a number of sectors covering most of the workforce. The opposition SPD is proposing the introduction of a legal, national minimum wage.

Mr Sweeney added: "When you take this into account, Ireland's hourly minimum wage rate falls to about sixth or seventh position. The minimum wage in France rose to more than €9 an hour in January, while Iceland has increased its rate by 35% in recent years."

Top UK CEOs showing little wage restraint

DIRECTORS' pay in the UK is rising in some cases SEVEN times faster than average wages, new figures have revealed.

The Income Data Services findings, published on March 3, detailed how take-home pay of top execs in FTSE 100 companies far outstripped both average wages and the rate of inflation last year.

Reacting to the news, TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady called for "urgent reform of boardroom pay".

She said: "Top directors are showing little restraint while millions of workers are suffering real-term losses to their incomes and are really feeling the squeeze on their living standards.

"FTSE 100 directors' pay rose over seven times faster than average wages in some cases last year, with rises well above inflation. These bumper settlements bear little relation to performance. Allowing workers a seat on remuneration committees would help inject a much-needed dose of reality into pay-setting."

PUBLIC SECTOR

Differing views on Croke II

TENS of thousands of public sector workers in the Republic are to be balloted in the next few weeks over whether to accept or reject terms recently brokered in Croke Park II negotiations at the Labour Relations Commission.

The state's public sector pay roll will be slashed by €1bn over three years under the terms of the deal.

The agreement also sets out pay cuts for some public servants, increased working hours, the freezing of increments as well as the cutting of premium pay and overtime.

Other savings will be made by not replacing retirees and through voluntary redundancies.

Various union negotiating teams have taken contrasting positions on Croke Park II and accordingly have through their union structures issued differing recommendations to members.

Others, such as the INTO, have decided not to issue any recommendation for or against the proposals ahead of a ballot of members.

IMPACT, with 63,500 members, is recommending a Yes

vote. General secretary Shay Cody claimed its negotiators had succeeded in reducing the severity of management proposals.

SIPTU's national executive committee is also recommending a Yes vote to the 63,000 of its members who work in the public sector.

In a March 14 statement, it said: "Voting No will not make the problem go away" and claimed that voting Yes was the "best strategy for these extraordinary times".

The PSEU, which represents about 10,000 mid-ranking civil servants, joined IMPACT and SIPTU in calling for a Yes vote.

And the TEEU, which has 1,500 members employed in the public sector, recommended acceptance of the deal, but warned government that its members were "at the end of their rope". "After this, there is a line in the sand," an official added.

The Prison Officers Association also recommended its 3,300 members vote in favour of the deal while the Garda Representative Association and the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors have come out against

the deal. The 24/7 Frontline Services Alliance have described the deal as "grossly unfair" and "inequitable".

Other unions have recommended their members reject the Croke Park II proposals, including Unite, the CPSU, the Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants as well as the INMO and the Irish Medical Organisation.

CPSU claimed its negotiators had left the talks table after judging that it was "too deep, too wide and too unfair" to the lower paid in the civil and public service and that it was "unconnected to the real world experiences of such workers".

UNITE regional co-ordinator Walter Cullen said the 6,500 members of his union who work in the public sector could not endure any more cuts to their salaries while AHCPs general secretary Dave Thomas said his union had "no other other choice but to strongly recommend a No vote" given the scale of the pay cut.

Teachers unions IFUT, the TUI and ASTI are also calling for a No vote.



McGlone: women unrepresented at top levels



Suarez: living in fear from right-wing terrorists



McKeown: paid tribute to Inez McCormack

Building on the legacy of 1913

TRADE UNION activists from across Ireland flocked to Liberty Hall, Dublin, on March 9 – International Women's Day – to attend Congress' annual Women's Seminar.

This year's theme was 'Building on the legacy of 1913 – Facing up to modern challenges' and Congress president Eugene McGlone set the historic tone in his opening address, referencing the contribution of a number of women who had risen to prominence in the Irish labour movement.

In a wide-ranging address, he also touched on the under-representation of women in leadership roles within the movement.

He said: "Examine the structures of the trade union movement, looking beyond the headline figures of 50% plus women membership – and we will see that obviously the figure is not reflected in the visible leader-

ship." Mr McGlone told the audience: "No matter what gloss we put on things it is impossible to ignore the fact that in its 50-year history only two women have been elected president of ICTU, both from UNISON, both from the North, and in the 60 years preceding only two had been elected as president of the ITUC, when the office was for a one-year term."

And he asked why had the Republic had not yet produced a female president of ICTU.

Underlining the importance of ensuring the "public face" of the trade unions "reflects our constituents in all ways, including gender", he suggested that leaders must be chosen because of their ability to lead.

"I am only comfortable being represented by people of ability not of specific gender," he added.

"The title of this seminar is not

designed, however, to be an invitation to merely look back in anger, it must be about what we all need to work towards to achieve real genuine involvement by more trade unions – particularly women in their unions."

Concluding, he told activists: "If I suppose there is one lesson that must be learnt from 1913 and the past century, it is that the time is now, women won't wait, or as mother would often say – she was like time and tide, she waited for no man. *Carpe Diem*."

Betty Tyrell Collard, of Dublin Trades Council, spoke to the seminar about the increasing privatisation of public services and in particular the impact this was having on women.

Congress legal affairs officer Esther Lynch outlined to delegates the ongoing battle to secure collective bargaining rights for workers in

the Republic. In the afternoon, delegates heard harrowing stories from a number of women who had worked in the infamous Magdalene Laundries.

Colombian human rights activist Gloria Amparo Suarez also spoke about her experiences working for the Women Against Violence Organisation (OFP).

She told delegates about how she had recently received a death threat from right-wing paramilitaries. They had delivered photos of her two teenage sons to her front door with a warning that they would be killed if she did not leave the OFP.

Sarah King, ETUC, and Emer Costello MEP also discussed the issue of gender equality at EU level, including Irish government plans to transpose the Parental Leave Directive.



Pictures: Paula Geraghty

The Women's Seminar heard moving first-hand accounts from survivors of the Magdalene Laundries, including Mary Carrington, right. Delegates stood and clapped in an emotional tribute to the women



Women hit hardest since 2008 crash

WOMEN workers have been hardest hit by the collapse of domestic demand following the 2008 slump, new research carried out for International Women's Day has revealed.

Speaking ahead of Congress' annual Women's Seminar on March 8, Dr Micheal Collins of the Nevin Economic Research Institute said those women still in the workforce were worst hit because of their over-representation in sectors that had suffered most from the 26% fall in domestic

demand. "Reduced demand in sectors of the economy where female participation is higher – retail, catering – has impacted on the numbers of women at work, the number of hours available for them to work and, consequently, the income of their households."

Dr Collins, left, claimed that high concentrations of women in low paid and precarious employment also contributed to ongoing gender inequality and the gender pay gap.

"The gender pay-gap persists in

Ireland. Women earn on average 14% less than men and this widens further when they have children. Clearly, the issues of low pay and precarious employment must be addressed if we are to make any tangible progress on reducing gender inequality.

"In this context, the provision of decent work and a living wage is of great significance. Sustainable recovery and more equal societies cannot be built on the back of precarious employment and low wage jobs," he added.

EDUCATION

US teachers union sends fact-finding delegation to Ireland



Pictures: Tommy Clancy/TUI

AFT chief Randi Weingarten, above centre and below right, meets with students from Deansrath Community College, Clondalkin, during the recent visit by AFT delegation

A DELEGATION from the American Federation of Teachers visited Ireland last month to find out more about the education system here and meet with fellow trade unionists in the teaching profession.

The delegation, which included the union's president Randi Weingarten and vice presidents Dick Iannuzzi and Mary Cathryn Ricker, also wanted to outline how the AFT had developed a number of key strategies to revitalise the union – which now has a membership of 1.5 million.

The AFT represents educators from right across the spectrum in the US, including kindergarten, first and second level teachers and higher education lecturers.

A round table discussion, which included TUI, ASTI and INTO officials, was held at the TUI head office in Dublin.

A TUI spokesperson said: "We wanted to share information and ideas on industrial relations structures in the Irish education system, as well as outline the whole area of education cutbacks and how trade unions can respond."

Ms Weingarten explained how the AFT had encouraged members to tell their stories, had forged links with other education stakeholders and focused on developing leadership within the union.

She said the AFT paid particular attention to "ideas" and "being part of the solution".

"We need to solve problems as opposed to win arguments," Ms Weingarten added.

This point was echoed by Ms Ricker: "We never let them hear us say no. we say how about?"



'We need to see union membership like health club membership – the more you put in, the more you get out'

She also flagged up the need for union members to "relearn activism".

"We need to see union membership like a health club membership, the more you put in, the more you will get out."

During their stay, the AFT delegation, accompanied by TUI general secretary John MacGabhann, visited a number of schools and spoke to pupils, teachers, management and parent representatives.

The Americans were particularly interested in the level of engagement by schools with the communities they serve.

They also remarked upon the extent to which students seemed genuinely motivated by the culture of the school and were impressed by the breadth of curriculum provision.



Talking class issues: the AFT visiting delegation pictured with TUI, INTO and ASTI officials



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Pictures: ITF/UNITE

Memo to Willie: We are all Iberia

UNITE members demonstrate outside the International Airlines Group offices at Heathrow Airport on March 6 in support of fellow workers at Iberia.

Staff at the Spanish airline held two five-day walkouts in the past month over management plans to lay off 4,500 employees – nearly one in four of the total workforce.

General secretary Len McCluskey, inset, said he had a simple message to IAG chief executive Willie Walsh: “The message from Britain to IAG is clear – we are all Iberia.”

UNITE national officer Oliver Richardson added: “The Spanish workers are defending their jobs and their airline from an unacceptable attack. BA cabin crew know only too well the pain and the struggle the Spanish workforce are having to endure.”

These comments were made before an agreement was reached on March 13 after the Spanish government brought in an independent mediator. Strikes scheduled for later this month have been called off.

ITF civil aviation secretary Gabriel Mocho said: “We are glad to see the airline accept the phased restructuring deal that was on offer all along. We know that both the airline and the Spanish government consider it as feasible and sensible now as it was when the unions first suggested it.”



UNITE workers show solidarity with Iberia colleagues, while Willie Walsh, below, watches on

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IFUT sponsors €1,000 media award

AS PART of celebrations marking its 50th anniversary, the Irish Federation of University Teachers is sponsoring a €1,000 award for excellence in writing on the theme of Higher Education or related to Higher Education.

The award, which will be made early next year covers work published across Ireland North and South from December 31, 2012 to December 31, 2013. Eligible submissions include a news report,

article or series of articles published in a newspaper, magazine, book or pamphlet, a programme or series of programmes featured in the broadcast media or material published on the internet or on blogs. Entries may be made by the person who produced it or by any other person provided the producer of the work consents to its submission.

Submissions will be judged by Press Ombudsman Prof John Horgan, a former Professor of

Journalism at DCU, and ex-University College Cork VP Prof Áine Hyland. Nominees should submit five copies of the work along with a covering letter explaining why the award is merited.

Nominations, which can be made by post or email, should be sent to IFUT general secretary Mike Jennings at the union's offices, 11 Merrion Square, Dublin 2 or emailed to generalsecretary@ifut.ie

PARENTAL LEAVE

EU Directive is a 'missed opportunity'

CONGRESS has claimed the Irish government's March 8 transposition of an EU Directive on Parental Leave represents a "missed opportunity" to tackle parental inequality in a more comprehensive manner.

Assistant general secretary Sally Anne Kinahan said: "The minimalist approach adopted in transposition will copperfasten inequalities in the workplace and the home in relation to parental leave and childcare.

"We know the gender pay gap widens significantly when women have children. Ireland falls below the EU 15 in relation to leave and childcare support, which in turn ensures women remain over-represented in lower paid work. Fathers in Ireland have no right to paternity leave, which means the burden falls primarily on women."

She added: "Government has committed to consolidating all family leave legislation into one Act. Congress believes any such process should seek to rebalance care duties to ensure there is greater equality. A statutory right to paternity leave would be a step in this direction."

The directive sets out an increase in parental leave from three to four months with the extra month being non-transferrable between parents and the right to request flexible working arrangements upon the return from leave.



Nissan, we're gonna grow this union

WORKERS from a Nissan plant in Mississippi travelled all the way to Switzerland to appeal to visitors at the Geneva Auto Show to "look beneath the shine" of the Japanese car manufacturer.

And they held a tree planting ceremony outside the auto show venue on March 7 to mark the event.

According to IndustriALL Global Union, Nissan USA

has denied its employees in Mississippi a fair union election as workers attempt to organise there.

Nissan workers outside of the US are unionised.

Speaking at the ceremony, car worker Michael Carter described the situation he and his colleagues faced.

"Nissan lets us know, they don't want a union in Mississippi," he said.

"They imply the plant will close if we support a union. We need a fair process so that workers can make up their own minds."

Fellow worker Chip Wells, who also spoke at the ceremony, said: "We want to work together with Nissan. It is a good company that makes good cars. With a union representing us we can make better cars and be more productive."

Picture: UAW

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Why it makes sense to invest

INVESTMENT in teachers is essential if the Northern Ireland economy is to be driven forward, it has been claimed.

INTO northern secretary Gerry Murphy made the comments during the union's northern conference in Derry on February 27.

He said: "INTO is about representing teachers and serving education as a whole. Our message is two-fold; firstly, teachers wish to have their overall contribution to society acknowledged and secondly, a significant investment in the teaching profession is a meaningful way this can be achieved.

"INTO has led the demands for a refreshed teaching workforce to drive the Northern Ireland economy forward. Such a workforce must be valued and motivated.

"We must reform our employ-



INTO chair Mary Dorman and northern secretary Gerry Murphy share a joke with Stormont education minister John O'Dowd, centre, at the union's northern conference. Mr O'Dowd was guest speaker at the event in Derry. During his address to delegates, the Minister said he was "determined to take action to break the link between social disadvantage and educational underachievement" Picture: Kevin Cooper/Photoline

ment processes to ensure unemployment for newly-qualified teachers becomes a thing of the past; that we invest in continuing professional development for teachers and that we support those who wish to leave the profession after a lifetime of service to do so with dignity."

Earlier delegates roundly rejected any attempt to impose regional performance pay on teachers in the North.

Speaking after a vote on the issue, Mr Murphy said: "The message from this conference to those in authority is NO to any form of regional pay or payment by results.

"During this debate we have had clearly articulated the views of the teaching profession that regional and performance pay are divisive and will not improve pupil performance in any shape or form."



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Principals & deputies tied up by 'fire-fighting' due to cuts

SECOND-level school principals are increasingly engaged in "fire-fighting" because of cuts and have less and less time to manage their schools, it has been claimed.

John O'Donovan made the comments to 140 principals and deputy principals gathered in Athlone for an ASTI seminar on March 6.

Mr O'Donovan, who chairs the union's principals and deputy principals committee, said: "At a time when strong leadership is more vital for schools than ever before, principals and deputy principals are increasingly tied-up with trying to cover up the cracks caused by education cuts.

"They are fulfilling the duties of retired post holders who have not been replaced. They are undertaking extra administrative and pastoral care.

"They are engaged in additional fundraising activities due to cuts to the student capitation grant.

"In some cases principals and deputy principals are teaching classes as a result of reduced teacher numbers."

He claimed this was happening at a time when schools needed "strong leadership if they are to continually adapt and innovate".

NUJ wins €160k for ex-Tribune journo

SEVEN former Sunday Tribune journalists have received payments of nearly €160,000 between them after a two-year battle waged by the NUJ.

The payouts follow a number of successful hearings at the Rights Commissioner Service of the Labour Relations Commission.

The *Sunday Tribune* folded in February 2011 with employees only receiving statutory entitlements.

Other workers, who bosses claimed were self-employed, were told they were not entitled to anything.

At the time, NUJ Irish secretary Seamus Dooley said the closure of the title meant "a light had been extinguished" and that Irish journalism

had been "significantly diminished".

The NUJ fought hard to prove that the journalists the company claimed were freelance were actually employees and were therefore entitled to annual leave pay, public holiday pay and written terms of employment.

Once the NUJ proved they were employees on these issues, it followed they would also be entitled to redundancy and minimum notice pay.

The NUJ won all the cases but there was an 18-month delay in securing payment from the Department of Social Protection.

NUJ assistant organiser, Ian McGuinness said: "This has been a long fight on behalf of our members



Picture: NUJ

McGuinness: NUJ 'a fighting union'

but eventually they got their entitlements. Being told you have no job any more is bad enough but to add insult to injury, our members were also told by the company that they weren't entitled to anything because they were not employees.

"Redundancy is stressful enough without the pressure of having to fight for nearly two years for your entitlements.

"The NUJ is a fighting union and we fought for two years to make sure all of our members got what they were entitled to.

"I'm just relieved that the seven members we represented can now put it all behind them and carry on with their careers."

Following the closure of the paper, more than a 100 people staged a show of solidarity outside the *Tribune's* Dublin offices on February 24, 2011 as staff gathered to collect their final pay cheques.

One employee, who had worked at the title for 20 years, spoke to Trade Union TV after collecting his cheque. He said: "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."

SIPTU community sector defence drive launched

SIPTU is to launch a national campaign to defend the Republic's under-threat community sector.

The campaign will initially involve the lobbying of politicians as well as informing local communities of how government plans to "rationalise structures" will impact on community jobs and services.

SIPTU sector organiser Darragh

O'Connor claimed the plan, announced in the Dail last month by Environment Minister Phil Hogan, would mean 2,000 workers in the sector would face "an uncertain future".

He warned: "The local government reform document, *Putting People First*, proposes an 'alignment' between local authorities and local

development companies that will have major implications for both workers and local community services. Under the minister's plans the future of over 50 local development companies is uncertain and his proposals to align these services within local government structures may also put millions of euros of European funding at risk."

Congress backs Govt proposals to criminalise forced labour

CONGRESS vice president John Douglas has welcomed Irish government proposals to criminalise forced labour.

In January, the Minister for Justice and Equality Alan Shatter published the general scheme of the *Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) (Amendment) Bill* including a definition of forced labour that will provide greater protection for victims.

Mr Douglas, who is also general secretary of Mandate, said: "We welcome the proposal by the government to bring forward a law to criminalise all forms of modern-day slavery. This sends a strong message to employers that inhuman treatment of workers will not be tolerated.

"This law needs to be monitored to ensure that victims of slavery are identified and steps need to be taken to ensure the phenomenon is clearly understood by the authorities."

The amendment will bring Irish law into line with the International Labour Organisation Convention No 29 of 1930 on Forced or Compulsory Labour.

Under the proposed legislation the perpetrators of



Picture: MRC

Bhatti: fight for justice

forced labour could face a maximum sentence of up to life imprisonment.

Migrant Rights Centre Ireland says it has dealt with more than 180 cases of forced labour in Ireland over the past six years.

Mariaam Bhatti claims she was treated as a slave by her employer.

She said: "My passport was taken, I was not paid for my work, I was not allowed to go out of the house and I was threatened. I still have not found justice.

"My fear is that the authorities do not fully understand the modern day phenomenon and therefore they are unable to protect us."



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'His legacy will endure'

CONGRESS general secretary David Begg has paid tribute to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez following his death after a long illness earlier this month.

He said President Chavez had made an enormous and lasting contribution to the lives of millions of Venezuelans.

"On behalf of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, I wish to extend my sympathy and condolences to the family of President Chavez on their loss. That loss will be felt keenly both in Venezuela and in wider Latin America.

"During his 14 years in office – despite coup plots and campaigns of destabilisation – President Chavez virtually transformed Venezuelan society, lifting millions out of poverty and providing free education and healthcare to huge numbers of

people who had never before seen the benefits of either.

"He has left an enduring legacy in Venezuela and one which will reverberate across Latin America for many years to come."

SIPTU president Jack O'Connor also expressed his "deep regret" at President Chavez's death.

He said President Chavez's vision of an egalitarian society "offered a humane and radical alternative to the collapsing edifice of the neo-liberal project which has wreaked such havoc across the globe".

He added: "His death from cancer at such a young age is a sad loss for all progressive people and movements that aspire to fairness and justice in society."

Unite general secretary Len McCluskey said his union stood "shoulder to shoulder" with the Venezuelan people and vowed to work with "like-minded forces" to defend the gains made under Chavez "in the pursuit of justice and equality."

He added: "President Chavez embodied and represented a people who refused to accept that grinding poverty and social exclusion could be tolerated while massive wealth was stockpiled in the hands of a few."

Congress: Action Plan for Jobs 'small step in the right direction'

CONGRESS has welcomed the Irish government's renewed focus on job creation in its *Action Plan for Jobs 2013*, but insisted that "significant and real progress" won't happen until the collapse in domestic demand is addressed.

Congress chief economist Paul Sweeney called the plan a "small step in the right direction" pointing out that it contained some worthy initiatives.

He added: "But small steps are insufficient – we need giant steps to address our jobs crisis. Ireland's real economic problem is the lack of demand, especially domestic demand which has collapsed by a massive 26% in just five years, with the loss of almost 360,000 jobs."

The 2013 plan outlines a series of what the government claims are "disruptive reform" measures designed to have a significant impact on job creation.

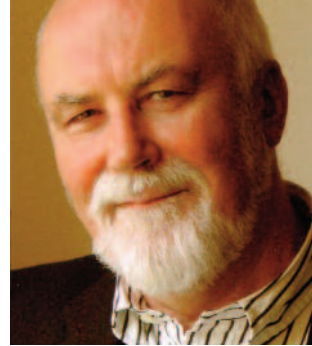
These include boosting the number of ICT graduate level professionals and putting in place a €70m Energy Efficiency Fund to support 20 major projects over the coming

year. Other measures include JobsPlus – where over two years the State will pay €1 of every €4 it costs an employer to recruit a long-term unemployed person off the Live Register – and an initiative to encourage more small businesses to trade online.

Moves to encourage growth in the medtech and healthcare sectors and changes to the licensing application system for retailers are also set out in the plan.

Mr Sweeney said: "Congress has published its own detailed and costed action plan for jobs. This would see close to €10 billion invested in job creation over the course of three years, with huge dividends for the public purse."

"This sort of investment could create up to 100,000 jobs and save the state billions. Given the depth of



Picture: Congress

Sweeney: 'Real progress is needed'

our crisis, these are the sort of measures that we need to focus on with unemployment close to 15% and 'potential unemployment' now at 25%, as per official statistics."

Mr Sweeney said the government's initiative was welcome for the renewed focus it placed on job creation and also the emphasis on building indigenous firms rather than the over-dependence on foreign firms.

He warned, however, that the plan suffered from a view of state intervention and official regulation which pre-dated the crisis and contributed directly to the banking collapse and the current horse meat scandal.

"Both here and Ireland and across Europe, officialdom seems incapable to learning the lessons of either the banking collapse or the horse meat scandal – regulation and oversight are necessary to prevent the free market from corruption and collapse."

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Standing with Los Mineros...

UNITED Steel Workers assistant director Salvador Aguilar, left, speaks to union members outside the Mexican consulate in Chicago on February 22. This was one of dozens of actions carried out in support of Los Mineros – the National Miners' and Metalworkers' Union of Mexico – in its fight for labour and human rights. According to the USW, Mexican workers have faced escalating violence, persecution, mass dismissals, and ongoing violations of basic rights to form unions, bargain collectively, strike and defend their rights without repression. Picture: USW



Eviction call 'unspeakable cruelty'

SIPTU chief Jack O'Connor has described calls for increasing the eviction rate in the Republic as "unspeakable cruelty".

It comes as official figures released earlier this month showed that 94,488 households were in mortgage arrears of more than 90 days in December 2012.

Some 143,851 private households were in some form of arrears – worth a total of €1.8 billion. Mr

O'Connor called on the government to come up with "better solutions" to the mortgage crisis than "reverting to the tactics of colonial lackeys in 19th century Ireland".

He said: "The parallels between the graphic images of post-famine Ireland and the prospect of our own authorities evicting people from their family homes to pay off debts to those at the top of the European banking

system are striking. I suspect that the recent intensification in calls for such unspeakable cruelty is about pandering to the vultures of the global banking system in the context of the effort to return to the markets.

"We desperately need to escape the Troika's strait jacket and access funding ourselves, but descending to the crucifixion of ordinary families is a step too far."

Picture: SIPTU

'Most UK kids will live below breadline by 2015'

TAX and benefit changes coupled with lower-than-forecast wage growth will leave most children in the UK living below the breadline by 2015, the TUC has warned.

The TUC report, *A Bleak Future for Families*, is based on analysis carried out by economist Howard Reed and examines the impact of various benefit and welfare changes, including Universal Credit, direct and indirect tax changes and real wage growth since 2010 on the incomes of different households and family types.

The analysis reveals that nine in 10 families will be worse off by 2015, with only the poorest 10% of

households better off – and then only by a measly 57p a week.

A middle income household will be nearly £1,200 a year worse off by 2015 – a 6.6% cut in their income – with the biggest single loss as a result of tax credit cuts (-£505). The research shows that while all but the top 10% of households are net gainers as a result of changes to the personal allowance and the primary threshold for national insurance, all these gains are wiped out by 2011 VAT rise.

The poorest 10% of households gain just a penny a week from direct tax cuts but lose £3.38 by the VAT rise.



General secretary Frances O'Grady, left, said: "Families are suffering the tightest squeeze in their living standards in nearly a century. On top of wages that do not keep up with prices, government policies are making life even more miserable for millions of low to middle-income families through tax increases and cuts in benefits and tax credits.

"By the 2015 election, the majority of children in Britain will be living below the breadline. For any civilised society, that should be shaming."

A Bleak Future For Families is available at www.tuc.org.uk/Bleakfutureforfamilies

Respect – just a little bit!

A group of registered nurses – members of the National Nurses Organizing Committee in Florida – take part in the National Nurses United day of action on March 11 in Palmetto. The nurses who work for Tenet Healthcare are calling for fair collective bargaining contracts and, as one commented, "the respect reflected in a just labour agreement". Picture: NNU



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Unions voice fury over Govt plans to cut the wages of bank workers



THE Irish Bank Officials Association has vowed its "implacable" opposition to any attempt to cut the wages of its members.

It follows the publication earlier this month of a report on banking pay undertaken by Mercer consultants.

The Irish government is looking to slash pay rolls in state-supported banks and Finance Minister Michael Noonan has already indicated to bank chiefs that he wants to see reductions of between 6% and 10%.

Management at the bank are set to respond to the Minister's request with cost-saving plans over the next few weeks. As many as 26,000 bank staff in the Republic could be affected and the IBOA has urged members to contact local TDs to voice their anger at the move. The IBOA claimed the 125-page

report, commissioned by the Department of Finance, had taken "insufficient account of the extent of losses experienced by many bank workers in the last five years".

General secretary Larry Broderick, left, said the government demand could not be justified even on what he called the "partial evidence" in the report.

He added: "Like many other workers, bank employees have taken considerable pain in recent years – in the form of significant reductions in remuneration as well as substantial jobs cuts." Around 10,000 bank jobs have gone since 2008.

Mr Broderick added: "Overall, it is IBOA's view that the government is being opportunistic in seeking to impose further salary cuts at this time."

UNITE, which represents 10,000 bank workers, slammed the lack of consulta-

tion before the report was published. Regional officer Colm Quinlan said: "The report suggests that many of the financial cuts should fall on lower paid workers below management level.

"We were told we could have no input and no sight of the findings before publication and it now says that lower paid workers are the ones most out of line with other industries."

SIPTU sector organiser Adrian Kane pointed out that state-supported banks had already reduced labour costs of between 23% and 31% in the last five years.

He warned the proposals, if implemented, will result in "branch closures, the de-skilling, out-sourcing and the displacement of decent jobs and the replacement of these jobs with low-paid call centre type jobs".

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Workers brave Brussels chill to hammer home anti-austerity message

It's snow way to run Europe's economy...



MORE than 15,000 workers braved ice-cold conditions and took to the streets of Brussels under the slogan 'Our democracy against their austerity' on March 14.

The ETUC-organised protest was staged to coincide with a meeting of the European Council and to underline to EU legislators the need for a Social Compact and for a change in austerity-dri-

ven economic policies. In a statement, the ETUC said "the limits of what is socially acceptable" had already been reached in several member states.

ETUC general secretary Bernadette Ségol, right, said: "Austerity is a failure. It has not succeeded in reducing deficits and is having a devastating social and economic effect.

"Applied in a deteriorating economic context, this blind austerity has only

worsened the situation. It has widened inequalities and further increased the loss of job security. The social models are coming under attack because of the crisis. Everywhere in Europe, employment is becoming precarious and wages are being revised downwards."

She called on EU chiefs to concentrate on two priorities – ending austerity and fighting against youth unemployment.



Pictures: ETUC

MORE than 430 social and labour lawyers from across Europe have signed a manifesto urging EU chiefs to respect fundamental social rights.

The lawyers took the action in response to the austerity policies being backed by EU institutions. These have resulted in systematic attacks on social dialogue and labour law provisions.

Lab lawyers blast Troika

The manifesto – initiated by the Transnational Trade Union Rights Experts' Network (TTUR) – in particular slams the actions of the EC/ECB/IMF Troika. It stated: "The Troika imposes on specific members states a large and sometimes

dramatic deregulation of their labour markets and social protection systems, leading to a weakening of trade unions, increasingly precarious employment relationships, insecurity and high unemployment, increased poverty and social un-

rest." Greece was cited as an example in the manifesto where austerity measures imposed by the Troika have triggered the suspension of collective agreements and violations of social fundamental rights.

These included the right to a fair remuneration, the right to vocational training and, for workers under 18 years of age, the right to paid annual leave.

Unions call on Minister to reverse ‘crazy’ cuts

SIPTU and IMPACT have called on the Republic’s Children’s Minister Frances Fitzgerald to reverse €600,000 of “crazy” cuts which they warn will impact heavily on youth projects in Dublin’s inner city.

It’s thought that up to 70 youth projects and 200 youth clubs could be affected in the move.

Community workers and their supporters voiced their anger at the proposals in a protest outside the City of Dublin Youth Services

Board’s Morehampton Road offices on March 1.

Gerry McCarthy, of Ballyfermot Youth Services, appealed to the minister to reconsider the cuts.

He said: “The decision to impose even more funding cuts is crazy.

“This directly affects young people in the most vulnerable areas of the city. Increasingly, they will be denied the opportunity to attend youth clubs, homework clubs and youth services. This has a very

serious knock-on effect. These are services that help to sustain vulnerable communities and help young people to make positive choices about their lives.

“In the absence of these services, with nothing to do and nowhere to go, we know from experience what kinds of social problems can emerge as a result.”

Ashling Golden, a youth worker in the SWAN youth centre, added: “Youth services provide a vital safety

net for vulnerable young people in many communities.

“These cuts will lead to a reduction in the numbers of professional staff in the service, which will result in some projects closing and a reduction in the effectiveness of others.

“These cuts are an attack on the future of communities that are already suffering the worst consequences of the economic recession.”

It's the voice of the people

THE percentage of Spanish workers out of work reached a record 26.02% in the final quarter of last year – the highest level since Spain returned to democracy following the death of General Franco in 1975. Youth unemployment has reached a staggering 55.13% of Spaniards aged between 16 and 24. But this choir of Spanish workers showed they were in fine voice despite the latest jobless figures as they belted out Songs of Hope to conclude the CCOO Congress in Madrid on February 23. Picture: ITUC

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Mandate calls on Dunnes to respect right to representation

MANDATE has called on Dunnes Stores management to respect the rights of its workers to be appropriately represented by a trade union.

The call comes as the retailer announced it would pay its 14,000 employees across the Republic a 3% pay rise – the first since 2007.

The January 17 announcement green-lighting the pay hike came on the eve of a Labour Court case initiated by the union.

In its subsequent recommendation, the Court found that Dunnes failed in obligations set out in a national agreement brokered in 1996 by not meeting with union representatives to process the wage claim.

The Court went on to further find that it had no hesitation in recommending in favour of the union’s claim for a 3% wage increase.

Assistant general secretary Gerry Light said: “The findings of the Court are clear in that they found Dunnes failed in their obligations contained in collective agreement and that our claim for a 3% pay increase had real and obvious merit.

“Hopefully, Dunnes might learn from some of its competitors that treating people with respect is in fact a business asset – not a liability.”

Osborne's economics have let down NI youth

UNITE has claimed Northern Ireland's economy was flat-lining, after new unemployment figures were revealed – the worst for 15 years.

Regional secretary Jimmy Kelly said: "The figures confirm our fears that the economy has flat-lined and the stagnation is not only a blow to chancellor George Osborne but a tragedy for those who have lost their jobs because of his policies."

"Our young people are bearing the brunt of this crisis with the

numbers of jobless youngsters nearly approaching one million in the UK-wide statistics.

"The Northern Ireland figures would have been clearly worse if those 25,000 people who had emigrated in 2012 – and who continue to do so daily – had been added to them.

"Northern Ireland and the UK needed a budget for jobs but what we got instead was another dose of medicine to make the patient even worse. The economy is

shrinking, Britain has lost its AAA rating, and unemployment is rising. We desperately need a plan B."

Meanwhile, NIPSA general secretary Brian Campfield attacked the threat to public sector pay and progression contained in the Budget.

He said: "Our members have had years of pay freezes – in real terms wage cuts – and now has had the 1% limit on public sector pay confirmed for 2015/16.

"Osborne has also made clear

that he intends to attack the progression/incremental system.

"This comes on top of increased pension contributions imposed by this government of millionaires – forcing workers to work longer, pay more in contributions and receive less in pension."

Mr Campfield added: "The confirmation within the Budget that Northern Ireland departments will face a further extra 1% cut to their budgets also shows that the failed austerity measures will continue."

ORGANISING

Unite hails recognition agreement for Quinn Group staff

UNITE in Northern Ireland has secured a major recognition agreement with the Quinn Group.

The deal allows the union to represent employees of the Fermanagh-based firm on all matters affecting workers' terms and conditions of employment.

A Quinn Group spokesperson confirmed to the *Fermanagh Herald* that union recognition had been given to 36 drivers in the Glass Division.

Regional co-ordinating officer Eugene McGlone, who is Congress president, explained some employees had been joining the union as individual members for a number of years.

But more recently employees had sought to join in a more organised way.

Mr McGlone said: "We took a decision to assist the workers organise and initially gained more than 60% of the glass factory's drivers into the union.

"We pursued a recognition agreement for them and this was agreed by the Industrial Court."

He added: "The company now accept this and we are in the process of agreeing a full trade union recognition agreement."



MANDATE'S Liffey Valley Local Council Committee last month launched a petition to promote decent work principles.

Organisers hope to secure 1,000 signatures by April 19 and in doing so to promote public awareness about the issue. And it is understood the decent work petition

could shortly be rolled out across the country.

Last year, Mandate commissioned a study to look into precarious working practices within the retail sector in the Republic.

The Behaviour & Attitudes report painted a grim picture of low pay, insecure working and increasing employer

demands for flexibility from retail workers.

Mandate official Jonathan Hogan told *The Union Post*: "We're seeking support from all workers within the area to back the initiative and expose the difficulties often associated with retail work."

Picture: Mandate

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