

THE

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UNION POST

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MAY 2011

EU POLICY RISKS IRISH DEFAULT



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Irish Congress of Trade Unions
31/32 Parnell Square
Dublin 1
Ireland
Tel: +353 1 8897777
Fax: +353 1 8872012
Email: congress@ictu.ie
www.ictu.ie

Northern Ireland Committee
Irish Congress of Trades Unions
4-6 Donegall Street Place
Belfast BT1 2FN
Northern Ireland
Tel: 02890 247940
Fax: 02890 246898
Email: info@ictuni.org
Web: www.ictuni.org

DESIGNED & EDITED BY BRAZIER MEDIA
Email: braziermedia@btinternet.com

Begg tells Brussels Finance Forum



Commissioner Rehn



President Barroso



DEFAULT WARNING

CONGRESS general secretary David Begg has warned a major EU economic gathering that "Ireland is being pushed towards default" because of policies governing the EU/IMF/ECB bailout.

Mr Begg made his comments at the Brussels Economic Forum on May 18.

The Forum is an annual event, billed as "the EU's premier platform for debate on economic issues".

The 2011 Forum was also addressed by EU commissioner Olli Rehn, commission president Jose Manuel Barroso

and German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble.

Speaking on the theme of 'Sharing the Burden of Adjustment', Mr Begg told the Forum an insistence on repaying all private bank debt coupled with a programme of austerity would inevitably lead to Ireland defaulting.

"It makes no sense to persist with a policy that is pushing the country towards default in circumstances which, if they could be separated from (private bank) debt, are manageable."

Pointing out that the austere-

ity programme was undermining any chance of economic growth and longer-term recovery, Mr Begg told delegates: "To deal with public debt we need to generate a sufficient level of primary surplus. This depends on growth but there is no growth because deflationary budgetary policy has collapsed domestic demand."

While acknowledging that domestic policy failures played a key role in the crash, Mr Begg claimed the EU and European Central Bank also shared a responsibility.

CONGRESS GENERAL SECRETARY DAVID BEGG'S SPEECH IN FULL AT:

Jobs Initiative promising but more must be done to boost employment



CONGRESS has described the Irish government's Jobs Initiative as a "promising first step" but cautioned that it needed to be the start of a concerted campaign to create good jobs and restore economic well-being.

Assistant general secretary Sally Anne Kinahan said: "There are some promising measures outlined in these proposals.

"But this has to be seen as a beginning – the opening shot in a coherent, concerted drive to create jobs and get people back to work.

"We would hope that the labour intensive projects outlined by government should become operational as soon as possible to deliver immediate

gains for families and the economy." However, Ms Kinahan expressed concern about the impact of a levy on pension funds as many were already in considerable difficulty. She claimed that a small levy on top earners would have been a "better prescription" instead.

Ms Kinahan, above, called on the government to deploy the skills and expertise of large semi-states on bigger infrastructure projects, such as the national retrofitting programme. She added that there also needed to be greater emphasis placed on skills training and education to target the long-term unemployed.

"We need to tailor a skills programme specifically for peo-

ple in this situation and give them some hope of a return to the workplace."

Ms Kinahan emphasised that Congress supported workplace training "where there is a genuine benefit for the trainee, where real work experience is gained" but that its success relied on "voluntary participation, good monitoring and clear oversight".

She added: "It must ensure that existing jobs are not undermined, key services diminished or young workers treated as a source of cheap labour.

"Interns and trainees have rights and we must ensure they are upheld, when the full details of these schemes are finally agreed."

EU's current approach make 'no sense'



Pictures: European Union



ON BAILOUT POLICY

"I make this point because the people from the EU and the ECB who are dictating the terms of our existence are not without responsibility for the crisis in Ireland, nor are they disinterested actors in determining who bears the burden of austerity."

"Economic and monetary union was based on the idea of an optimal currency area."

"Monetary policy dominated and the ECB operated an interest rate policy that suited France and Germany but was pro-cyclical for Ireland and unsuitable. Moreover, deregulation

of financial markets combined with low interest rates was irresistible to the Irish banks and at least facilitated the orgy of lending."

Mr Begg also contrasted the disastrous impact on people's lives and livelihoods with the fact that the European financial system that gave rise to the crisis remained entirely unformed.

"Despite the hardship they are enduring, they see little by way of real reform of the European financial system."

"The hedge funds remain unregulated, there has been no re-

instatement of the equivalent of the Glass-Steagall Act to separate retail and investment banking and, of course, the bonus culture operates as it always did."

Mr Begg said Congress supported the plan for the creation of a European Bond Market, as put forward by Professor Paul DeGrauwe of Leuven University, pointing out that this would create a "huge incentive" for countries to reduce their debt and lead to the development of a European Bond Market that would make "ample liquidity" available.

http://www.ictu.ie/download/pdf/sharing_the_burden_of_adjustment_to_the_crisis.pdf

TRAINING

Skills and training is in need of major overhaul

CONGRESS has called for the national skills and training system to be overhauled and for investment in key infrastructural projects to help boost job creation and economic growth.

The proposals, submitted to the Irish government before it launched its Jobs Initiative earlier this month, also called for the harnessing of the semi-state sector in any drive to boost employment.

In a letter to Taoiseach Enda Kenny, general secretary David Begg said: "Growth in domestic demand is essential to job creation. To get growth, we need investment."

Congress wants to see a new training agency set up that would focus on work-based training and identify where future skills deficits might emerge.

The new fund, financed through diverting part of the existing National Training Fund, was described

by Mr Begg as "one of the surest forms of insurance against unemployment".

The skills proposals are contained in a new Congress report, 'A New Skills Policy for a New Economy'.

Making use of semi-states' resources and skills on "big ticket" infrastructure projects would, according to Mr Begg, be "the best way of getting early results on employment".

This is because semi-states already have the "financial strength, management capacity, geographic spread, administrative infrastructure and the procurement capability" to make a real difference.

Mr Begg suggested that making use of labour and social clauses in all public contracts, to maximise "employment and skills impact" of the projects would also ensure a better "social return".

IMPACT call for balanced approach on internships

IMPACT has warned that widespread unpaid graduate internships in the health service could introduce unnecessary risk to patients while exploiting vulnerable young workers.

It could also close off graduate careers to young people from poorer backgrounds.

Instead the union is pressing for a balanced approach providing graduates with experience through "genuine structured internships".

The call was made at IMPACT's health conference in Tralee on May 12.

Social worker Adrienne Byrne, a member of the union's health executive, told delegates: "The line between meaningful supervised internship and wholesale ex-

ploitation of free labour is easily crossed."

She warned "blanket opposition" to all internships risked putting unions "off-side" with young people seeking experience.

"At the same time, unions have to offer protection to the same workers, who are otherwise ripe for exploitation, and stop employers from displacing real paid jobs with unpaid internships."

The conference also heard how unpaid internships could perpetuate inequality.

Ms Byrne added: "It effectively excludes graduates from less well-off backgrounds from access to these professions. People not supported by the bank of mum and dad are excluded."

POSTAL SERVICE

9,000 UK post offices could go following sell-off

THE Communication Workers Union has warned plans by the Conservative/Lib Dem government to sell off the Royal Mail, ending the inter-business agreement with the Post Office, could lead to the closure of 9,000 post offices across the UK.

The warning comes after a poll of sub-postmasters commissioned by the union found that more than nine in every 10 – 92% – thought that they could not continue trading without Royal Mail business.

Currently, the Post Services Bill does not include this vital link.

CWU general secretary Billy Hayes said: "These figures clearly demonstrate the fears of sub-postmasters and mistresses about the fate of our cherished post office network."

"Based on these projections, the post office network faces a greater threat than anyone previously dared believe."

"Through the privatisation of Royal Mail, refusal to guarantee business and the removal of government contracts, the government is failing post offices."

"It must listen to the opinions of those who work in the Post Office and decide whether the threat of mass closures is something it wants on its hands."



Hundreds of Irish POs could close

THE Irish Postmasters' Union has warned hundreds of post offices will close if An Post loses the contract for making social welfare payments.

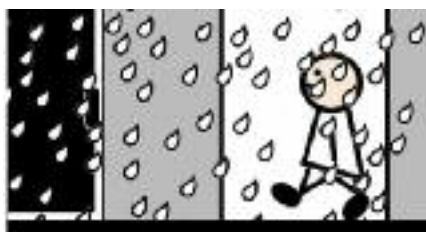
Speaking at the union's annual conference in Letterkenny earlier this month, IPU general secretary Brian McGann predicted the network would be "decimated" if the Department of Social Protection pushes ahead with plans to put welfare payments contracts out to tender.

Claiming that post offices were "open for business", Mr McGann called on Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton to give a greater role to post offices in delivering welfare services.

He said: "All our offices are automated, open five-and-a-half days each week and we are an accessible part of every community throughout the country."

"However, we won't be open for business if the department pulls the plug on the welfare payments contract."

"The last thing that communities across the country need is a decision that will force the closure of hundreds of post offices."



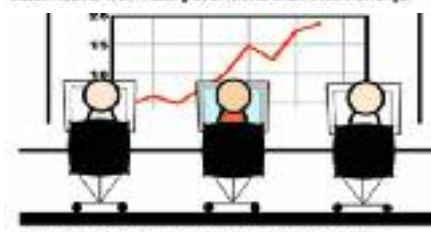
...Liam arrives at work feeling down...



...Liam leaves work feeling even worse than that morning...



...Liam decides to call in to the CWU office to ask for advice...



...The next day in work Liam is feeling more positive...

CWU LAUNCHES RECRUIT DRIVE

THE Communication Workers Union has launched a month-long recruiting drive and is asking members to invite at least one other non-union colleague to join the union.

The initiative, dubbed 'Organising Month – For a Stronger, Better Union', is based on research that suggests that one of the primary reasons workers do not join a trade union is simply because they were never asked.

According to the CWU, the logic is simple – as more people join, more will follow, and the stronger the union becomes in the workplace.

It has organised a series of events to promote Organising Month and it is hoped that it will encourage members to take on a more pro-active role within the union.

A CWU source said: "We all know people who work in non-union companies and who would benefit from the advice, guidance and representation that we can give them."

"The main reason that people don't join is that they haven't been asked – it's often that simple! We are asking our members to tell non-

unionised workers of the benefits of trade union membership."

"We want to let them know that by joining a trade union they are giving themselves a voice in their workplace and are arming themselves with the information and support that they need to navigate these difficult times."

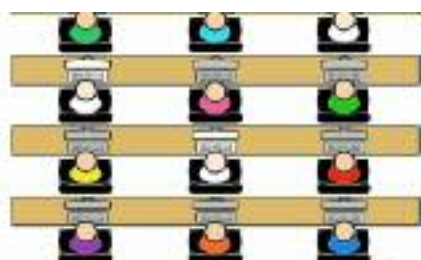
Currently, the CWU represents 17,000 members working in the postal and telecommunications industry in the Republic.

The source added: "It is crucial to a union's success to understand that organising and recruitment are essential for the future."

"Only by building a strong, stable membership base can the union use its influence to represent all its members."

"This is why we are asking everyone to recruit a new member this month."

As part of the drive, the CWU commissioned a short cartoon about Liam, a down-in-the-dumps call centre worker, whose mood lifts when he discovers the benefits of joining a trade union...



...The unionised workers decide to go to management with their views...



...The unionised workers decide to go to management with their views...

<http://www.cwu.ie/Activists/Organising-Month-May-2011.964.1.aspx>

'Constructive' on health

IMPACT has said it will work "constructively" with the Irish government and health service managers in setting up a single-tier health service free at the point of delivery, but warned it needed to be properly resourced and managed.

Delegates at the union's health and welfare divisional conference in Tralee backed a motion calling for a single-tier system based primarily on "accountable public services" rather than the "failed agenda" of outsourcing and pri-

vatation pushed by the last administration.

Health and welfare executive member Martin Bridgeman told the conference he was wary of "easy answers" and "off-the-shelf solutions" to complex issues such as health delivery and reform.

He said: "Our bodies are complex, our needs are complex, and many of the health conditions that we will encounter are complex too. That's where the privatisation model falls down."



Care 'compromised'

INMO general secretary Liam Doran has called for new legislation to ensure there is a safe ratio of nurses to patients.

And he warned that the safe care of patients was being compromised by the HSE recruitment embargo.

Mr Doran, left, made his comments earlier this month as nurses gathered for the INMO's annual conference in Kilkenny. He told delegates the union had proposed to the HSE that the 1,600 nurses due to graduate in the autumn should be employed for two years under the government's Jobs Initiative.

Speaking before the conference, Mr Doran pointed out that members were "delivering change every day in all areas of the health service" despite having their wages cut by an average of 25% over the last two years.



Picture: ASTI

Aoife Ni Mháille: Jobs hunt

Emigration best option for teacher graduates

THE best chance for a newly-graduated teacher to get a job is to go overseas, ASTI's annual conference was told last month.

Aoife Ni Mháille, a student teacher from Trinity College Dublin, claimed teaching posts at home were "as hot as Adele tickets for the Olympia last month".

She told 450 delegates gathered at the Sliversprings Moran Hotel, Cork, that emigration was the "new permanency" for graduates.

"As graduate teachers struggle to become part of the school community through part-time teaching hours, it is becoming apparent that our best chance of finding secure work is to find it abroad.

"Emigration is the new permanency."

A recent ASTI survey found 12% of graduating teachers do not plan to seek teaching work in Ireland because of the lack of secure jobs.

More than half believe that they will not have a secure teaching job in five years time.

General secretary Pat King pointed out new entrants to the teaching profession are at a most vulnerable stage in their careers.

He said: "These teachers face poor job prospects, a severe pay cut and a pension scheme which will see them pay more in contributions than they will ever receive in benefits.

"Instead of helping us to rebuild our society and economy, our highly educated and motivated young teachers are being forced to emigrate.

"We are investing in their education, only to export them at the end of it."

'U-TURN' DAVE'S UNI IDEA IS SHOT DOWN

THE UCU has blasted the "breeding rather than brains" suggestion that students from wealthy families could pay for extra places at top UK universities thereby freeing up more subsidised places for undergrads from poorer households.

Universities Minister David Willetts later clarified the reports and insisted there was "no question" wealthy students would be able to buy a place in third level education.

However, sources at Number 10 did not rule out a limited version of the idea appearing in the forthcoming university white paper but stressed that no proposal would be backed if it reduced social mobility. UCU general secretary Sally Hunt said she was

Picture: UCU



Sally Hunt



David Willetts

"amazed" such plans were under consideration.

She added: "We have seen considerable changes made to government

policy recently and it is clear these plans need an urgent rethink.

"Far from increasing social mobility, it is hard to see how this is anything other than the government entrenching privilege for the wealthy in response to its failing university fees policy.

"We risk turning the clock back to a time when breeding rather than brains were required to get on in life."

Shadow business secretary John Denham, who held the universities brief under the last Labour government, claimed Mr Willetts had performed the "fastest U-turn in the history of this discredited government".



Bay of Pigs veteran visits Ireland

Bay of Pigs veteran Victor Dreke with Congress president Jack O'Connor after a wreath-laying ceremony at the James Connolly statue outside Liberty Hall in Dublin on April 16. Earlier they had taken part in a special symposium marking the 50th anniversary of the infamous CIA-led invasion. Victor, a former commander in the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces, commanded two companies of the 117th Battalion during the abortive attack. He was wounded in the action. He told SIPTU's Liberty newspaper: "In 50 years' time, the 100th anniversary of the Bay of Pigs, I will not be here – but my grandchildren will be. And they will be living in a socialist Cuba."

Picture: Cuba Support Group Ireland

Home helps stage demo at the Dail

HOME helps from across Dublin staged a demo outside the Dail on May 14 in protest at threats to privatise their jobs.

SIPTU Health Division organiser Louise O'Reilly told protestors: "The HSE knows that we are watching them and that we will not allow them to hive off our jobs and

our services to line the pockets of people who seek to make a fast buck off the back of hard working people like yourselves.

"We are having our hours cut while money is spent on private contractors."

Check out full report on Trade Union TV at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFq9JImUkiE>



Screen grab: TUV

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Picture: Mandate

Striker: Damian Keegan

Mandate calls on Connolly's to foot bill

MANDATE has called on the owners of Connolly's Shoes to pay thousands of euro owed to four workers on strike for over a year.

It follows a series of awards made to them by the Rights Commissioners.

The four, who worked at the firm's Dun Laoghaire branch, are said to be in good form despite the length of the dispute.

Divisional organiser Joe Donnelly said: "Unfortunately, Connolly's Shoes have refused to pay over any of these awards."

"In addition, they have not attended hearings with either the Labour Relations Commission or the Rights Commissioners."

"However, despite this, the four strikers' spirits remain remarkably high."

Damian Keegan, one of the strikers, added: "The four of us, collectively, gave 110 years of loyal service to Connolly's Shoes. We have been so disappointed by how we have been treated by the company over the last year."

Review finds REAs & JLCs should stay

A REVIEW has backed the continued use of wage-setting mechanisms as a way of protecting decent employment standards for vulnerable workers.

However, the review's authors, Labour Court chairman Kevin Duffy and UCD economics prof Frank Walsh, also underlined the need for a substantial reform of the system.

It is thought the pay and conditions of 240,000 workers in the Republic are set through Joint Labour Committees and Registered Employment Agreements.

About 100,000 of these work in the retail grocery sector and earlier this month, Mandate general secretary John Douglas warned that the review should not be used to attack existing pay rates of low-paid workers.

Business groups had claimed the current set up was not affordable and that it hampered job creation.

Accusing these groups of deploying a double standard, Mr Douglas said: "During periods of economic boom, employers are quite happy to



Picture: Mandate

Double standard: John Douglas

accept the wage rates set by the JLCs because they act as an effective ceiling on wages in sectors such as retail and restaurants.

"However, during recessionary times they are not prepared to accept the same wage levels despite the fact that they provide a very effective protective floor to ensure that low paid workers don't fall into poverty or are not exploited."

IMF/EU/ECB delegations to Ireland

had also recently raised "competitiveness" concerns about JLCs and REAs.

The review's authors called for the current set-up to be overhauled to make it more responsive to changes in the economy.

Business interests had argued that the JLC structure was no longer needed because of the statutory minimum wage.

But the authors found existing employment rights law did not cover matters dealt with by JLCs and REAs.

They claimed that lowering the basic JLC rates to the national minimum wage would be unlikely to boost employment.

However, they added that if minimum wage rates were cut in future, JLCs should consider revising their rates.

Mr Duffy and Prof Walsh also recommended the Labour Court should report every five years into the scope of JLCs.

They also said the JLC system could only operate where collective bargaining did not take place.

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Pictures: Marie-Anne Venoura/Amnesty International

Spelling out support for the Arab spring...



HUNDREDS of Amnesty International activists have sent a clear message of support from Belfast to those campaigning for human rights in North Africa and the Middle East.

The activists, gathered for the group's AGM at Queen's University on May 7, each held a placard aloft that together spelled out the word 'freedom' in Arabic.

Amnesty's Northern Ireland director Patrick Corrigan said: "In the

50 years since it was formed, Amnesty has always been about standing up for freedom.

"Our supporters have been transfixed by the changes sweeping across North Africa and the Middle East, and inspired by the courageous people who have faced down batons and bullets to demand their freedom.

"We want those brave people to know that we support their struggle."



Corrigan: Activists inspired by events in Middle East

Fears for Bahraini medics

Picture: INMO



THE Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation has backed a call by the International Council of Nurses for an external investigation into the arrest of healthcare workers in Bahrain.

It follows the arrest of 24 nurses and 23 doctors – several of whom are Irish-trained – by authorities in the strife-torn Gulf state.

Police entered several hospitals in February and arrested health workers who had provided treatment to injured pro-democracy protestors.

They have been charged with "anti-state activity" because they treated these wounded civilians.

INMO president Sheila Dickson, left, said: "It is appalling that nurses and physicians can be charged with a criminal offence while fulfilling their professional duty.

"Human rights entitlements, medical neutrality and the ethical responsibility of healthcare professionals must take precedence over political issues in times of conflict."

Congress flags up ESRI cuts contradiction

CONGRESS has underlined the "huge contraction" in the Economic & Social Research Institute's recent backing for deeper spending cuts.

Warning that such a move would push the Republic deeper into recession, general secretary David Begg pointed out the ESRI cuts call was a complete reversal of a position it took in autumn last year.

He said: "Just a few months ago, the ESRI was warning that planned gov-

ernment spending cuts were too big and could tip the country into prolonged recession.

"That was in October 2010, when government planned to cut just €4 billion – but it went on to cut over €6 billion in the budget.

"And we are living with the negative consequences of this austerity, with suppressed demand and bigger job losses.

"Previously, the ESRI warned that we were

going too far and too fast in terms of cuts.

"They said we should slow the cuts and extend the period of deficit reduction to 2016 – a proposal first made by Congress.

"Now they've reversed that and say we need to go much further and much faster. Which is it?"

Mr Begg added: "Leaving aside the serious inconsistency in their position, the ESRI's latest recommendations would

tip the economy into deep recession and could have terrible social consequences for very many people who are already struggling with debt and reduced incomes.

"The Institute cannot divorce itself from the consequences of what it recommends and the potential damage to peoples' lives.

"And ultimately, that is what this is all about – the quality of peoples' lives. It is not just an accounting exercise."

Picture: Congress



David Begg: Damaging report

Picture: Jess Hurd/PCS



'Don't treat us like paupers'

THE PCS staged a 'Fair Pay for Royal Cleaners' protest outside Buckingham Palace on April 28 – just 24 hours before Prince William tied the knot with Kate Middleton at Westminster Abbey.

Cleaners at Buckingham Palace, St James's Palace and Clarence House – who are paid just £6.45 an hour – are campaigning for an increase to the 'London living wage' of £7.85 an hour.

The living wage, introduced by previous mayor Ken Livingstone and endorsed by current office-holder Boris Johnson, is paid to cleaners in the Houses of Parliament.

Speaking before the royal wedding, general secretary Mark Serwotka said: "As the royals prepare for the prince's lavish wedding, our members are being treated like paupers. The royal family is seen as a major contributor to the tourist industry and many people visit London specifically to see the palaces.

"We'll be asking them to show their support for the people on poverty pay who keep these palaces clean."

The cleaners are employed by private contractors but the PCS claims ultimate responsibility rests with the Royal Household.

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'Billion could be raised in jobs levy'

AN EXTRA €1 billion a year could be raised by slapping a levy on incomes of more than €100,000 to invest in job creation through a State Investment Bank.

Congress president Jack O'Connor made the claim in an address at the Jim Connell festival in Crossakiel, Co Meath, on April 31.

He suggested that high earners would receive a dividend on the performance of the funds "and could ultimately hope to get their money back".

Mr O'Connor, who is also SIPTU general president, warned growth was the only way the Republic could avoid default.

But he also cautioned against those who saw default as a quick fix for the economy. "It is tactically

and strategically wrong for the left to assert that we do not have options within the, admittedly restrictive, troika agreement with the IMF, ECB and EU.

"Those on the right do not think so. They had no sooner secured the recent further commitment of €24 billion for the banks when they returned to their favourite target – emasculating public services.

"The left must seize the initiative, suspend consideration of default and concentrate on the only question that matters – how to grow the economy, providing jobs and hope for our people."

Mr O'Connor pointed out that a residue of €4 billion to €5 billion remained in the Pension Re-

serve Fund and said that this "should be immediately transferred to set up the SIB".

A further billion euro a year could be raised by a tiered levy on all incomes over €100K.

He added: "The bottom line is that there is no way out of the current mess without jobs and there will be no jobs without growth, and there will be no growth without investment."

"We can follow the pied pipers down the spiral of austerity and deflation condemning thousands of our people to on-going unemployment, emigration, misery and despair. On the other hand, we can be innovative and co-operate generating jobs, growth and hope. One is the social solidarity route, the other entails recourse to social cannibalism."



Moving tribute: Ken Layland Picture: Unite

WORKERS' MEMORIAL DAY

Safety at work cuts put lives on the line

THE brother of a man killed in a workplace accident has called on unions to campaign for stronger health and safety legislation.

Ken Layland was speaking at a special meeting of health and safety representatives at the Unite offices in Belfast on May 5 to mark International Workers' Memorial Day.

GMB member David Layland died, aged 22, at his place of work at the Biffa waste centre in Mallusk in 2008.

In a moving tribute to his brother, Ken spoke of how

close he was to David and of his brother's dedication both to his job and to the health and safety of his fellow workers.

He also talked of the terrible impact the loss has had on his family and of the need for trade unions to redouble their efforts to campaign for beefed-up legislation on the issue.

Barbara Martin, who chairs the NIC-ICTU health and safety committee, called on politicians to ensure that measures protecting workers – such as unannounced inspections – are not affected by public sector cuts.

She said: "In this time of savage spending cuts, the tragic story of the Layland family reminds us that reducing spend on health and safety at work and relaxing health and safety legislation puts workers lives at risk.

"Every person has a right to have their health and welfare at work protected."

Ms Martin added: "On this sad day, the thoughts of the trade union movement are with the Layland family as they remember David."



Congress President Jack O'Connor joined fellow trade unionists and others representing churches as well as faith-based and civil society organisations in remembering Workers' Memorial Day on April 28. The group stood in silence outside the Irish Labour History Museum in Dublin. This year's commemoration underlined the need for stronger regulation and enforcement in making workplaces safer Picture: Paula Geraghty

No paring back on safety laws

ITUC general secretary Sharan Burrow has warned any attempt to weaken health and safety protection for workers worldwide will cost lives.

Speaking on April 27 – International Workers' Memorial Day – she instead underlined the need for strong regulation and effective enforcement to

secure safer workplaces.

Ms Burrow, right, said: "Business groups and companies in a succession of countries, including some of the world's largest economies, are pushing to reduce protection from hazards at work.

"If they succeed, more lives will be lost and the toll of

work-related injury and illness will increase."

She added: "Trade unions are challenging the rigged statistics and bogus arguments that are being put forward by business interests that care more about profit than the lives of the people who work for them."



Picture: ITUC

Kelly blasts 'state sponsored burglary'

UNITE has likened the idea of a levy on private pensions to a "state sponsored burglary" and a "blunt hammering of regular people".

The union attacked the portrayal of the levy as a "harmless tax" that did not take money of people's pockets today as "easily seen through".

Regional secretary Jimmy Kelly claimed the idea should have been rejected "when first mooted".

He said: "This will put extra strain on households when they have made their financial contribution to society. Retirement should allow some relaxation and reward. This would raise fear and anxiety and in that sense is akin to state sponsored burglary."

Mr Kelly noted that there was no mention of a threshold targeting those who had benefitted most from tax relief.

"Instead, as ever, it will be those who have the least to give that will be asked to give the greatest proportion. That is wrong.

"We have been sold throughout that austerity was a short sharp shock to restore the public finances.

"This is a levy which people could be paying the price for in 50 years. That makes it a long blunt hammering of regular people."



'Fear & anxiety': Kelly

INTO CONFERENCE



'Unfair & unjust': Sheila Nunan

Future of the Class of 2011 gambled by the last govt

INTO general secretary Sheila Nunan has contrasted the plight of newly-qualified teachers facing the dole queue with bankers heading into retirement on massive pension pots.

She made her comments at the union's congress in Sligo on April 25.

Ms Nunan pointed out that the "class of 2011" shared the history of the banking crisis.

She told delegates: "They went into college in September 2008 – the very month that the disastrous blanket bank guarantee was given by the then government.

"They were not to know then how their futures were being determined on that fateful night."

Ms Nunan claimed that administration had gambled the futures of these young people to save Irish banks that had gambled their way to the brink of disaster.

She said: "Now as these young teachers exit colleges with hard-earned and well-deserved teacher qualifications, they see those in the banks who caused or contributed to the crisis exiting the banks with obscene retirement packages."

This was in contrast to young teachers facing pay cuts of up to 15%, a much reduced pension scheme and very slim employment opportunities.

Ms Nunan added: "This is unfair, unjust and unwarranted. No one has yet adequately answered the reason for this unfair treatment."

Pictures: INTO



Industrial action call rejected

PRIMARY teachers in the Republic have rejected calls for industrial action against education cuts, despite blasting the government over its decision to slash teaching posts.

Delegates at the union's annual conference in Sligo condemned the government move to cut 700 primary teaching posts from this September.

They also slammed the proposal to abolish 500 English language posts within four

years. But the conference rejected a call on the executive to launch an immediate campaign to restore these positions, up to and including the use of industrial action.

The proposal in favour of taking industrial action was opposed by the Executive.

Speaking against the proposal, Noreen Flynn – incoming president of the union – said delegates had to consider the Croke Park Agreement which precludes industrial action.



INTO president Jim Higgins presents a long service pin to northern secretary Frank Bunting at last month's INTO northern conference in Newry Picture: Kevin Cooper Photoline

Short-sighted IMF/EU deal set to cripple us

INTO president Jim Higgins has predicted the IMF/EU deal will cripple primary schools in the Republic.

He told delegates at the union's annual congress in Sligo last month that the system could not cope with fewer teachers having to deal with rising enrolments of 10,000 each year.

"The pupil population will increase by more than 10% in the next five years. The employment control framework agreed under the EU/IMF deal takes no

account of this." Pointing out that other countries could restructure education budgets because of falling school rolls, Ireland could not do this as the birth rate is at an all-time high.

Mr Higgins told delegates that Ireland could not afford to have pupils in primary schools pay the price of economic restructuring, adding: "Such a short-sighted approach will impair economic recovery and damage social cohesion."

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MAY DAY BELFAST



UNISON's Pamela Dooley, Grahame Smith, STUC, and Congress president Jack O'Connor spoke at rally





Cuts of 25% will push UK fire service to the edge

THE Fire Brigades Union has warned government cuts of 25% over the next four years will push the UK's fire and rescue service to breaking point.

It claimed ministers had not factored in the impact climate change will have on the frontline service and came weeks after hundreds of fire crews and appliances were deployed across parts of the UK and Ireland to contain numerous wildfires.

According to the FBU, these large-scale and prolonged emergencies are, by their nature, enormously labour intensive. FBU general secretary Matt Wrack said: "In the last few years we have faced huge numbers of incidents caused by climate changes.

"In 2003, we had 152,700 grassland fires, which was a near record and officially attributed to warm weather. There was major flooding in early 2004 and serious flash flooding in 2005.

"There were 93,500 wildfires in 2006 – another spate year – when fire crews were stretched to breaking point dealing with large numbers of major fires and then flooding across the UK. In recent winters serious weather conditions also have stretched fire crews for weeks.

"The impact on the fire service of climate change is established, sustained and on-going.

"Frontline fire crews are demanding to know how the government expects them to cope with large-scale and prolonged labour intensive incidents with far fewer frontline fire crews.

"We're over-stretched now, and frontline crews are making it clear we'll be at breaking point when the cuts bite."

Screen grab: TUTV



Parents' Dail demo over cap on SNAs

CONCERNED parents of children with special needs have called on the government to lift the cap on special needs assistants in schools.

They staged a May 4 protest outside the Dail as Education Minister Ruairi Quinn took questions on the issue.

SNAs give one-to-one assistance to a child with a learning or physical disability and are seen as providing essential support in the classroom.

One mother of a child with Down's Syndrome, speaking to Trade Union TV at the demo, claimed the restriction had placed "an additional struggle" on her family.

She said: "We want our daughter to go to mainstream school – to participate in education. And we can't send her to school unless she has a special needs assistant."

The child's grandmother added: "When the children have this education, it's marvellous how they come on in life.

"If it's taken away, it's like going back to the 1800s. They probably want the children locked away, kept quiet and out of the way."

She added: "Children with special needs are entitled to an education, to live their lives to their full potential. They're entitled to the best."

Trade Union TV coverage of demo at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m07-NYEoXHs>

UK civil & public servants balloted over cuts

MORE than 250,000 UK civil and public servants are to be balloted on taking strike action over cuts to pensions, jobs and pay.

It follows an overwhelming vote in favour of the move at the Public and Commercial Services union annual conference in Brighton on May 18.

The ballot will close in mid-June, with the first action possible later that month.

It is understood the union will work closely with education unions currently balloting over pensions.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka told delegates: "Everything we have ever worked for is under threat – but we know there is an alternative and we are committed to fighting for it and, if necessary, striking for it."

"The economic crisis was not caused by our members' jobs, pensions or pay and it is shameful and wrong that the coalition government is attempting to scapegoat them in its bid to slash and burn the welfare state."

PHOTOLINE

Experienced photographer specialises in campaigning photography for trade unions and NGOs.

For conferences, campaign launches, street demos, May Day parades, magazine and PR photography. Shared commission rates for ICTU conferences.

CONTACT

Kevin Cooper

E: photoline@supanet.com

T: 028 90777299

M: 07712044751



MAY DAY DUBLIN





Lucia Fay, Sam Nolan, People Before Profit TD Joan Collins and Mary Lou McDonald of Sinn Féin spoke at May Day rally





Pictures: Amnesty International

50 years fighting injustice

AMNESTY International, the world's largest human rights organisation, is celebrating 50 years of work on May 28.

Like trade unions, we have always relied on people power and the collective action of individuals to change the world.

Amnesty was started in London, in 1961, when barrister Peter Benenson read an article about two Portuguese students who had been arrested for raising a "toast to freedom".

Benenson wrote an article entitled 'The Forgotten Prisoners', in which he highlighted the plight of similar prisoners who had been jailed around the world for peacefully expressing their views.

In an impassioned plea, he coined the term 'prisoner of conscience' and called for like-minded people across the world to unite in an appeal for amnesty on their behalf.

The response was immense, and within weeks Amnesty International had been born.

Today Amnesty has more than three million supporters, members and activists working at the forefront of human rights issues across the globe.

In 1977, Amnesty International was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for contributing to "securing the ground for freedom, for justice, and thereby also for peace in the world".

In Peter Benenson's 1961 article, one of the cases he raised was that of Tony Ambelitos, a trade unionist who had been imprisoned by the Greek junta solely for the exercise of his union rights.

Today, wherever labour rights are under attack – whether it is in Greece or Gambia, in the United States or Turkey – Amnesty International continues to stand up and be counted, because labour rights are human rights and we will be defending them in another 50 years from now.

If the bad news is the world still needs Amnesty, the good news is Amnesty is going strong.



Peter Benenson coined phrase 'prisoner of conscience' back in 1961

<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/50>



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SIPTU holds open day for unemployed members

SIPTU's Manufacturing Division held its first open day for unemployed members last month.

More than 20 unemployed members attended the April 14 event at Liberty Hall in Dublin which saw the election of a representative committee. Further meetings will be held and it is understood other SIPTU divisions are looking at following the initiative.

Ray Stanley, of the Manufacturing Division, told the union's newspaper Liberty: "Our division has been hit hard by the return of mass unemployment with numerous factory closures. In light of this it was decided to organise our unemployed members so they can better have their interest represented and to keep union policy informed of the difficulties they face."

"The idea is to keep members active within the union and playing their part as many want to do."

Dooley backs Fol reforms

NUJ Irish secretary Séamus Dooley has welcomed the Irish government's commitment to reform freedom of information legislation and to introduce a Whistle Blowers Act.

In a statement issued on World Press Freedom Day on May 3, Mr Dooley said any reformed legislation should be extended to include NAMA.

"Irish citizens deserve to know how NAMA makes decisions, why NAMA makes decisions and the cost of these decisions."

He called for an end to what he termed "the culture of secrecy" within the Department of Finance.

"While confidentiality may be appropriate in limited circumstances, the shroud of secrecy around NAMA is unacceptable."

"Transparent governance is an essential component of regulation and all agencies associated with the financial sector must be open to ongoing scrutiny."

TUC lashes May Day plan

THE TUC has lashed UK government proposals to move the holiday now allotted to May Day to October.

It has called instead for an EXTRA day's holiday in October and claimed messing around with the established bank holiday in May "makes no sense".

General secretary Brendan Barber said: "Rather than shifting the deck chairs, the government should instead end the UK's embarrassing honour of having the fewest public holidays in Europe."

"A new bank holiday in late October – focused on community work and volunteering – would give the country a huge boost and help break the four month slog between the August and Christmas breaks."

VIEWPOINT NIALL CROWLEY ON INCOME EQUALITY

WHY INCOME EQUALITY IS GOOD FOR ALL



Pictures: Claiming Our Future

INCOME equality is good for almost everyone in society. Societies with greater income equality achieve higher levels of educational attainment, longer life expectancy and greater social mobility.

Why then is there so little concern about income inequality?

We do get angry about the high earnings of bankers that led their institutions into ruin and our economy with it.

We are concerned at the attack on welfare rates and the mechanisms established to protect the earnings of low paid workers. But we seem to hold back in the demand for greater income equality.

The politics of income equality will be the focus for the next Claiming our Future event.

This is to be held in Galway on May 28. Registration is through www.claimingourfuture.ie.

The event will debate tackling high incomes and inequality and tackling low incomes and poverty.

It is a deliberative event where all participants get a chance to discuss their views.

There will be no keynote speeches, panels or workshops – just 50 tables with 10 people each all engaged in the debate.

Work done by the Fabian Society in Britain gives us some insights into the barriers to progressing income equality.

They found a strong commitment there to the idea of "deserved inequality".

High incomes were seen as justified on the basis of ability, effort, performance or social contribution.

They found an emerging tendency to question whether high salaries were really deserved.

They also found strong judgemental attitudes towards people on out-of-work benefits based on a widespread belief that opportunity was readily available and on a lack of belief in the ability of people on these benefits to contribute to society.

There is no such research in the Republic but it is possible that such attitudes are embedded in our culture too.

They present real barriers to making income equality an issue. Yet income inequality, with all its attendant health and social problems, is very much an Irish issue.

Figures presented by Social Justice Ireland show that the top 10% of households in Ireland earn nearly a quarter of all income.

They earn 11 times the income earned by the bottom 10% of households.

It is getting worse. Poverty is increasing. Adult poverty grew from 4.2% to 5.5%, and child poverty from 6.3% to 8.7%, in 2008/9. The rich are getting richer.

The World Wealth Report found that the number of high net worth individuals (people with investable assets of more than \$1m) in Ireland grew by 10% in 2009.

Claiming our Future hopes that this event will support debate and action on income equality as well as identifying initiatives that would progress these issues.



<http://www.claimingourfuture.ie/claiming-our-future-ideas-reducing-income-equality/>



Sightsavers

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



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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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