

THE **UNION POST**

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NEWS YOU CAN USE

MAY 2012

New Congress report charts pathway to economic recovery

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WORKERS' JOY AS EPIC SIT-IN ENDS



CONGRESS general secretary David Begg has praised the "fortitude and resilience" of Vita Cortex workers following the end of their epic 161-day sit-in.

The 23 workers ended their occupation of the Kinsale Road plant in Cork at 2.30pm on May 24. The sun was shining and there were cheers from family members and supporters as they walked out together for the last time.

It came after company bosses paid the staff an agreed sum as a final settlement to the dispute.

David Begg told *The Union Post*: "The extraordinary fortitude and resilience shown by the workers in securing this deal is an example to trade unionists everywhere."

He also paid tribute to SIPTU for crucial role played by the union in bringing the dispute to a successful conclusion.

Shop steward Sean Kelleher, a Vita Cortex employee for 47 years, said: "Five months was a very long time but I'm just glad we never decided to walk away."

He said the workers wanted to thank SIPTU, the people of Cork, "and those further afield" for their solidarity and support.

SIPTU organiser Anne Egar said the Vita Cortex dispute should show workers "that if you stay

together and never give up, justice can be achieved."

Jack O'Connor, the union's general president and past president of Congress, added: "The courage and determination shown by the workers has provided inspiration to people in Ireland, and abroad, who are struggling against unfair treatment. I wish to congratulate them for maintaining their resolve and achieving a successful outcome."

Congress unveils plan to deliver 100,000 jobs

CONGRESS has unveiled details of a major new investment programme that could create up to 100,000 jobs over three years and significantly boost prospects of an economic recovery.

At the May 23 launch at Congress House in Dublin, general secretary David Begg said: "Ireland desperately needs to create jobs, boost domestic demand and generate growth if there is to be any hope of recovery. This programme can help spark growth and provide hope after years of unrelenting austerity."

The Congress programme, titled *Delivering Growth & Jobs*, proposes an investment of more than €3 billion a year for the next three years and it is intended that this cost would be "kept off the state's balance sheet."

Mr Begg claimed it would be possible to fund the programme from a mix of private, public and European sources, including private Irish pension funds, the National Pension Reserve Fund and the European Investment Bank.

He said: "The mood music across Europe has changed. The political discourse has shifted – growth is now firmly on the agenda as manifested by the election of Francois Hollande along with recent political developments in the Netherlands and even Germany."

"Ireland needs to place itself firmly within the 'growth camp' and the Irish government should give full support to France in the attempt to make growth the main priority."

Mr Begg added: "We need a New Deal for Europe and a New Deal for Ireland."

The Congress programme would see investment in key infrastructure and would expect to see some 30,000 jobs created each year.

It would also help restart domestic activity, boost long-term growth and enhance competitiveness.

The investment programme would help reduce the deficit due to higher tax revenues and lower unemployment.

The full programme is available at:



SIPTU researcher Marie Sherlock with Congress general secretary David Begg at report launch

Picture: Photocall Ireland

http://www.ictu.ie/download/pdf/delivering_growth_jobs_funding_a_major_new_investment_programme_for_ireland_may_2012.pdf

Report sets out impact recession has had on retail staff

A MAJOR new report by Mandate has revealed the extent to which workers in the retail sector in the Republic have been hit by the economic downturn.

The study, *Decent Work? The Impact of the Recession on Low Paid Workers*, found that 39% of Mandate members had seen an average fall of €109 a week in their take home pay over the past year.

The findings also show that the drop in retail workers' wages is primarily driven by cuts in working hours as well as increased taxes and levies.

Mandate's general secretary John Douglas said: "This research shows that Ireland's labour market crisis will not be solved with a more jobs at any cost strategy. We need to look at the quality of jobs that are being created, otherwise



Picture: Conor Healy

Mandate general secretary John Douglas, centre, speaks at the Decent Work? launch. Policy analyst Camille Loftus, pictured left

we will just increase the number of working poor."

Other points flagged up in the report, based on a survey of Mandate members carried out by market research firm Behaviour & Attitudes, include:

- Retail workers' hours have declined by an average of 4.3% over the last year. For part-time workers the decrease was 5.6% and for student workers it was 12.9%;
- Six in 10 Mandate members were willing and able to work extra hours but less than half of the part-time employees who asked for more hours got them;
- Many retail workers' hours are

subject to frequent change – almost half of part-time workers have their working hours changed at least once a month, while only a third have stable working hours.

The report also highlighted how the decline in income was having a very real impact on workers' lives.

Almost a third told researchers they were having problems adequately feeding and clothing their families. Four in every 10 were experiencing difficulty paying their mortgage or rent and half reported problems in paying utility bills. Three-quarters said that they are finding it more difficult to cope in general and were suffering much

more stress than a few years ago.

An analysis of the data was carried out by research and policy analyst Camille Loftus.

Speaking at the May 24 launch in Dublin, she pointed out that there is little or no acknowledgement at policy level of the precarious position facing many retail workers and this needed to be addressed by government.

She said: "Reforms to the JLC and REA wage-setting mechanisms announced by Minister Bruton last year have the stated aim of making them 'fairer, more competitive and more flexible' with the hope of increasing job creation."

"However, these reforms fail to address the vulnerability of those in precarious work; rather they are likely to increase its incidence and compound the vulnerability of these employees, leaving a growing proportion of the workforce without access to decent work."

Ms Loftus also called for a "re-examination" of how the EU Directive on part-time work will be incorporated.

She said: "A more formal process, requiring employers to justify a decision to deny part-time workers access to longer hours would help to provide a better balance between the needs of employees and employers."

"Without it, we are likely to see a growing incidence of precarious work in the Irish economy."

Check out the full report on...

http://issuu.com/mandate/docs/mandate_decent_work_report_2012?mode=window&backgroundcolor=%23ffffff

THE UNION POST

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Irish Congress of Trade Unions
31/32 Parnell Square, Dublin 1, Republic of 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



In the vanguard... Lagan Brick workers head up May Day parade in Belfast

Pictures: Kevin Cooper/PhotoLine

Lagan Brick workers lead May Day parade

Talks start to resolve long-running dispute

SIPTU representatives and bosses at Lagan Brick have begun talks to find a resolution to the long-running dispute at the firm's manufacturing plant in Kingscourt, Co Cavan. Both sides held initial meetings with an agreed dispute assessment on May 24.

The welcome move comes a little over three weeks after a contingent of Lagan Brick workers took pride of place at this year's May Day parade in Belfast. SIPTU organiser John Regan said the workers were "extremely

pleased" with the support shown to them by the people of Belfast – the city where Lagan Brick's parent company is based.

The workers – who were informed of the closure of the factory just hours before it ceased operation in December 15 last year – have been fighting a campaign to secure established redundancy terms.

Commenting on the new developments, Mr Regan added: "This dispute has dragged on for 163 days since the company

initially locked these workers out of their workplace.

"The determination and resolve of our members to secure fair and equitable severance terms as a recognition of their long service with this company is similar in many ways to the struggle confronted by the Vita Cortex workers.

"The Lagan Brick workers can be assured they have the support and solidarity of their local community as well as fellow trade unionists across the country."



DISPUTE ENDS

Irish Cement workers OK deal in ballot

WORKERS at Irish Cement have voted by a large majority to accept proposals brokered in a deal between company bosses and worker representatives.

The dispute arose after the firm failed to adhere to a Labour Court recommendation to pay amounts ranging from €5,500 to €9,500 owed to employees.

Pickets were placed on the entrances to Irish Cement Ltd plants at Castlemungret, Co Limerick, and Platin, Co Meath, on April 3 after the Irish Cement Group of Unions, which includes SIPTU, TEEU and Unite, decided to take industrial action.

Speaking after the May 17 vote, SIPTU organiser Christy McQuillan said: "The implementation of these proposals will result in the workers being paid the monies which the company owes them.

"The agreement, which contains procedural commitments on future engagements between the company and worker representatives, will be registered with the Labour Court."

CHECK OUT LATEST ISSUE AT
<http://www.mandate.ie>



NORTHERN REPORT

Sectarianism at work still a feature of life

SECTARIANISM remains a common feature of working life in Northern Ireland, a new report has revealed.

A study carried out by Belfast-based research and training organisation Trademark found evidence of low level but persistent sectarian harassment in workplaces across the North.

The report, titled *Sectarianism in the Workplace*, concluded that in order to build a durable peace, it was necessary to forge "inclusive and shared" working environments and not to brush the problem under the carpet.

It warned: "If we choose to avoid addressing identity politics generally and prejudice and discrimination specifically, there is a very real danger of losing opportunities for reconciliation."

The research also suggests the low numbers of cases taken to tribunal did not indicate more harmonious working environments and that a closer analysis of the figures was needed.

Joe Law, of Trademark, told *The Union Post*: "Our workplace relationships are still dictated by politeness, avoidance and denial. It's clear that unions and management have a joint responsibility to work together on this issue." Check out the report at:

<http://www.trademarkbelfast.com/downloads/sect.pdf>



SEVERAL hundred people took to the streets of Dublin to celebrate International Workers' Day on May 1. Unfortunately the heavens opened to drench participants but that didn't dampen the enthusi-

asm of those who took part in the Dublin Council of Trade Unions-organised march and rally. Check out Trade Union TV coverage of the day on:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3gOYgF_E20

Jumbo TUC demo plan for London

THE TUC is to stage a mass demonstration through London later this year, culminating in a mammoth rally in Hyde Park.

The event – under the banner *A Future That Works* – will be held on Saturday, October 20.

More than half million people attended the TUC March for the Alternative demo in London last March.

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: “The tide is turning against austerity.

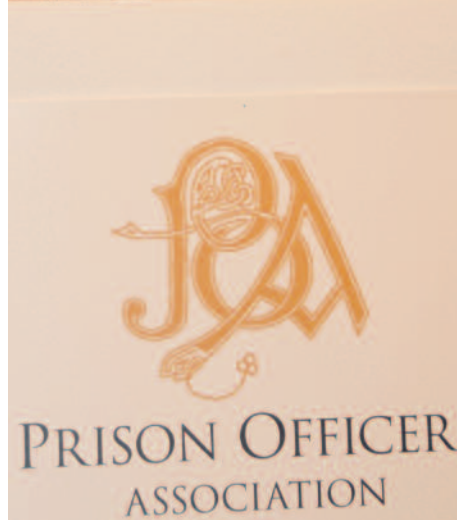
“We were told that spending cuts were needed to get the economy growing, yet they have driven the UK back into recession.

“It is becoming ever clearer that this government does not have the policies – or even much of a commitment – to build a prosperous economy that can generate the jobs and industries we need for the future.”



Picture: TUC

POA



Cramped jail system ‘most serious’ issue

THE Prison Officers' Association has warned of the dangers posed by “appalling, cramped conditions” in the Republic’s jails.

Delegates gathered for the POA’s 65th annual delegate conference in Galway in April, were told that overcrowding represented “the most serious problem” facing the prison system in Ireland.

To illustrate his point, POA president Stephen Delaney, left, gave delegates a “snapshot” of the Irish Prison Service on March 29 – which showed overcrowding in a number of facilities, including Mountjoy, Dochas Centre, Castlereagh, Cork and the Midlands prisons.

He told delegates: “In the Midlands Prison we will have a capacity of 650 from May 1, up from a figure of 624, established on March 27 and up from a previous declared capacity of 616.

“And how many extra cells have been built at the Midlands? None! So we have found an extra 34 spaces by playing around with the figures.

“We have highlighted how the Irish Prison Service has interchanged the terms ‘cell capacity’ with ‘bed capacity’ in order to massage the figures and make the situation appear better than it really is.”

Mr Delaney also warned that overcrowding meant that attacks on other prisoners and on prison warders was “more likely and less difficult to control”.

He added: “A reduction in overcrowding can be a first step in tackling other issues such as violence, drug use, intimidation and gang culture.”

Picture: POA

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Our fight goes on

NIPSA general secretary Brian Campfield has told union members that the fact the austerity agenda is being implemented across the UK means that a UK-wide response from trade unions and other groups is needed.

Writing in the union's quarterly journal *NIPSA News*, he flagged up the necessity of rebuilding the trans-union alliance that had brought hundreds of thousands of workers on to the streets to protest changes to public sector pensions on November 30 last year.

His comments follow a second public sector strike to highlight the issue on May 10.

Along with NIPSA members, more than 200,000 workers from PCS took part in the action. They were joined by tens of thousands of workers from Unite, RMT, POA and the Immigration Service Union.

Mr Campfield said: "If we are to successfully challenge this government's plans to roll back the welfare state, slash public services and undermine the pensions, pay and terms and conditions of employment of public service, the alliance seen on November 30 needs not only to be rebuilt but broadened to include all those in our society who are bearing the brunt of the austerity measures."

The May 10 actions were, he added, designed to send a clear message to government that workers would "continue to resist attacks on their pensions and on staffing levels".

He claimed that central to the government's agenda was both a move to cut public services and to transform what was left into "profit centres for the private sector".

Speaking after a pensions rally in Belfast on May 10, Mr Campfield told *The Union Post*: "What we are witnessing is not just a series of measures to reduce public expenditure but a strategy to introduce US-style public service provision."

"This will have the private sector at its heart and will undermine the provision of important public services free at the point of use, in favour of an insurance and direct payment based approach, which will lead to greater inequality and social exclusion."

Pamela Dooley, who chairs the Northern Ireland Committee of Congress, gave the committee's full backing to the May 10 strike.

She said: "The Tory assault on the modest pensions of public servants is driven by spite and not economics. There is no evidence that these pensions are unaffordable, but there is plenty of evidence that these cuts will increase poverty for the working poor, especially women."

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said: "The government refuses to accept that their pension robbery is deeply unpopular."

"Civil servants along with health, education and local government workers are being forced to work longer, and pay more, for smaller pensions – all to pay for the bail out of greedy, irresponsible bankers."



Brian Campfield addresses May 10 meeting in Grosvenor House, Belfast



**MAY
10
ACTION**



35,000 at cops demo

MORE than 35,000 UK police officers took time off the beat to march through central London on May 10. Left, to vent their fury at cuts to pay and pensions as well as changes to working conditions.

According to the Police Federation, the body which represents them, it was the only action the officers were legally able to take.

Some of the marchers wore T-shirts demanding full industrial rights while other carried 'Police for public not for profit' banners.

All the police personnel had taken a day off work to join the demo.

Police Federation chairman Paul McKeever said: "The reality of the cuts to policing is really beginning to bite; numbers are beginning to fall rapidly. In the past year alone, we have lost over 5,200 police officers from the frontline and we are witnessing the privatisation of core policing roles as chief officers struggle to cope with budget restraints."

"The government needs to be realistic about the outcome of severe cuts to policing – we cannot afford to compromise on public safety."



Picture: John Cheney/Mandate

Fiscal Treaty won't create a single job

MANDATE general secretary John Douglas has warned the Fiscal Treaty will "not create one job" but, rather, will "legally lock down" economic activity at current levels, further shrinking domestic demand.

Calling on members to vote no in the Fiscal Treaty referendum, he said the austerity policies being pursued by the government as part of the Troika bailout agreement were choking the life out of the Irish economy.

Mr Douglas made the claims during his keynote address at the union's biennial delegate conference in Wexford on April 22.

He told delegates: "There are over 400,000 Irish workers without jobs, 50,000 are leaving the country each year, tens of thousands of families are being crushed under the burden of unsustainable mortgages and living in fear of eviction.

"Living standards, welfare and services are

being slashed, the government is introducing a raft of regressive charges and taxes, a recent Irish League of Credit Unions report showed that 50% of those surveyed had less than €100 left to spend at the end of the month after paying all bills – what sort of an existence is this?" Mr Douglas underlined again that growth was vital in turning around Ireland's economic fortunes.

"Since the start of this crisis, the trade union movement has advocated that while we must manage our budgets, economic growth is key – economic growth to turn our domestic economy around. The trade union think-tank, the Nevin Economic Research Institute has identified funding sources of up to €15 billion for investment in vital infrastructure and services. This level of investment would clearly improve our national infrastructure, boost demand by creating much needed economic activity and jobs."

Mandate chief John Douglas speaks to delegates in Wexford

MANDATE's call for a 'No' vote on the Fiscal Treaty referendum is a position that is also endorsed by Unite, TEEU and the CPSU.

'Solidarity in action'

MANDATE national co-ordinator Brian Forbes has called on delegates to persevere and to be steadfast as trade unionists in these "terrible times".

Pointing out the vital importance of their role as activists, he claimed they made a "real difference to people's lives".

Mr Forbes said: "These are terrible times, beyond the life experience of anyone in this room. But still we must persevere as we are all that stands between the workers of this country and the continuing race to the bottom.

"You are leaders in your workplaces – you might have chosen a better time to be in that position – but in it we are and we must never give up."

He claimed that core values of trade unionism could be summed up in one word – solidarity.

"Solidarity is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good – to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.

"Solidarity is what you do as trade unionists every day.

"Every time you try to protect a person from unfair treatment, every time you try to save a job, every time you insist on a member's entitlement to proper pay and conditions, every time you expose exploitation of a vulnerable person – that's solidarity in action."

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IMPACT general secretary Shay Cody addresses conference

Deal audit will verify 'substantial' savings

IMPACT general secretary Shay Cody has predicted the body overseeing the implementation of the Croke Park agreement will again verify that "substantial" savings have been made.

The implementation body is due to make its second annual report on the deal in June.

Mr Cody, who is a trade union representative on the body, told delegates gathered for the union's conference in Killarney, Co Kerry, on May 17 that savings were exceeding government and Troika targets.

He claimed that "significant cost extraction" was being delivered through reforms "in organisations large and small".

Mr Cody, pointing out that a series of measures in the first year had led to €680m in savings, said: "Next month, the implementation body's second annual report will quantify the savings delivered under Croke Park in the year to mid-2012. I am confident that they will be substantial."

The IMPACT chief underlined that though public servants

understood the need for more savings, the union was determined that this would not be achieved through a "further erosion of their pay".

Mr Cody noted that an increasing number of governments, economists and even market commentators recognised the need for growth as the "only realistic way" to deal with the crisis in public finances.

He continued: "We want alleviation of the annual burden of the Anglo promissory notes and we strongly support calls for higher taxation on higher earnings. But we also know that this alone won't bridge the gap, and that public spending will continue to be curtailed until the gap is bridged."

"We have to continue to tell IMPACT members the facts because, as long as the public finances are in this state, there will be unrelenting pressure to erode public services, wages and working conditions. Our job is not simply to bemoan that – it's to try to prevent it."

Laws must change

IMPACT president Kevin O'Malley has called on the Irish government to honour commitments given to revise laws on collective bargaining which he described as "shameful and embarrassing legislative shortcomings".

Mr O'Malley, who made the comments in his address to conference, warned the union would hold the coalition to account on the issue.

He told delegates: "It is a national embarrassment to have shortcomings in Irish collective bargaining rights criticised at the United Nations Human Rights Council, as they were last October."

"But, as a result, Ireland's ambassador has since confirmed to the UN that a commitment on collective bargaining rights in the programme for government will be honoured and Irish law made consistent with recent judgments of the European Court of Human Rights."

Mr O'Malley said this was a welcome development but insisted ministers needed "to get on with it" and make it a priority before the centenary of the 1913 Dublin Lockout. He added: "It is unthinkable that we would mark the centenary of that dispute, which helped change the course of Irish history, before the government honours its commitment and brings Irish rights in line with international standards and rulings."

IMPACT has recommended its members vote 'Yes' in the Fiscal Treaty referendum. The recommendation, which came after the union's executive met on April 26, was strongly endorsed by delegates at IMPACT's conference on May 17.

Earlier in the month, CWU delegates at their conference in Galway voted in favour of a motion calling for a 'Yes' vote.

Picture: IMPACT

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Sheila Dickson bows out as INMO president with an impassioned address to conference delegates in Killarney



Pictures: INMO



Claire Mahon with outgoing president Sheila Dickson

'A govt in thrall to markets can't serve all the people'

IN her last address as INMO president Sheila Dickson described every nurse and midwife as a "quiet hero" and spoke about her pride in working on their behalf over the last four years.

She made her comments in reply to a speech given by Irish health minister James Reilly at the union's annual conference in Killarney on May 11.

Ms Dickson, who became president in 2008, slammed the "greed and disgraceful behaviour" of "bankers, speculators, large builders and risk-taking bond holders" and said it was "patently clear" that no country "particularly one as small and open as ours" could hope to beat the markets.

She told delegates: "The markets do not care about any society, any community or any individual citizen and their families."

"Any government that is enthralled to the markets is a government that cannot serve all of

the people that elected them."

With this in mind, Ms Dickson, personally addressing Minister Reilly, insisted INMO members did not need to be lectured to by government.

She told him: "We do not need to be told, as some of your colleagues seem to relish, that workers, and particularly public servants, do not fully understand the plight of the country and that we do not fully get the seriousness of the situation."

Ms Dickson added: "We are the families, with ordinary incomes, that are living this reality. We are the families that have intimate experience of family members who are unemployed. Minister, we know the loss and desolation that comes with forced emigration."

The outgoing president welcomed the investment initiative put forward by Congress in which funds from private pension schemes would be used to kickstart the economy. She pointed out: "You

cannot starve a country out of a famine and you cannot, and will not, grow the Irish economy by continuing to withdraw money from literally every sector of Irish society."

Ms Dickson described the recruitment moratorium as a "most destructive and irrational tool" that was doing huge damage to frontline health services.

Calling the government approach "fundamentally flawed", she told the minister: "If we are ever to bring security and certainty, to the provision of public health services, then the recruitment moratorium must be significantly amended."

"Once and for all, frontline nursing and midwifery posts must be exempted and all posts that fall vacant filled without delay."

And Ms Dickson warned: "The Irish public health service has suffered enough and no amount of redeployment, reconfiguration or re-rostering will cover the gaps."

Claire takes on chain of office at INMO

INMO delegates have elected Claire Mahon, a clinical nurse manager at Waterford Regional Hospital, as the union's new president.

Ms Mahon, who has 30 years experience as a nurse, served on the INMO EC for the last four years.

She said as president she wanted to be a strong and vocal advocate for both members and patients – particularly in demanding a clinical environment where safe practice and care can always be maintained.

Ms Mahon told *The Union Post*: "I am proud to be a nurse – as my mother was before me."

"Safe practice and safe care will be my priorities, during the coming two years, as will the protection of pay, and other conditions of employment, currently held by our members."

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US nurses take transaction tax protest to Windy City

Robin the rich!



THOUSANDS of American nurses demanding a Robin Hood tax on financial transactions took to the streets of downtown Chicago on May 18, ahead of a two-day NATO summit in the city.

National Nurses United members, kitted out in Robin Hood-style felt hats, took over Daley Plaza for the noisy but good-natured and colourful protest.

They were joined by activists from other unions, members of the Occupy movement as well as military veterans. Karen Higgins – one of the co-presidents of NNU – claimed US nurses wanted to see healthcare funded not warfare. She vowed: “We will not go away – this is the beginning.”

The NNU is demanding a levy of 50 cents on \$100 of trades of stocks, bonds, derivatives and other financial instruments. It claims such a move could raise up to \$350 billion a year.



Pictures: National Nurses United



CONGRESS staff members at Carlin House joined colleagues from NIPSA and the neighbouring Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre for a IDAHO Day ‘tea break’ on May 17.

Equality officer Pauline Buchanan explained: “May 17 has been designated as the International Day Against Homophobia to mark the 1990

decision by the World Health Organisation’s decision to remove homosexuality from the list of mental health disorders.

“Today is also a great opportunity to highlight positive aspects of homosexuality and celebrate the contribution of lesbian and gay people to society.” The ‘tea break’ is seen as a symbolic gesture in working towards a preju-

dice-free world where a place at the table is provided for everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation. Trade union tutor Brian McAnoy added: “It is shocking that in 2012 there is a huge amount of intolerance around sexuality and we as the trade union movement must be at the forefront in challenging all forms of discrimination.”

PHOTOLINE

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CONTACT

Kevin Cooper

E: photoline@supanet.com
T: 028 90777299
M: 07712044751



'Stand with the people' call to govt

CPSU general secretary Eoin Ronayne has called on the government to "stand with its people" and put in place an economic strategy based on growth and jobs creation.

He told delegates at the union's annual conference in Cork on May 18: "What we need is money [put] back into the economy not taken out – no more cuts, no more austerity."

Referring to the upcoming review of the working of the Croke Park agreement, he said the union needed an action plan to "kick-start" the debate on "what it's like to survive on low pay".

Mr Ronayne also claimed proposals to move to monthly pay struck "fear and panic in the minds of members."

He said: "Let me say clearly from a CPSU perspective, we cannot see any significant cost saving from this move. Again, it's time for a reality check. Try living on €400 a week and then go four weeks without pay."

Mr Ronayne concluded by reiterating the CPSU's commitment to support "all workers" in their "just and rightful" struggle to break free from "the shackles of austerity" and demand that those who benefited the most in the Celtic Tiger years now "pay most in helping this country out of its economic crisis".

Got a union story?
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AHCPS

Crisis looms over 'skills and numbers'

DELEGATES attending the AHCPS annual conference in Dublin have been warned of an impending crisis in civil service numbers and skills.

General secretary Dave Thomas said this was due to the double whammy caused by retirements and recruitment restrictions.

Calling for a more targeted approach to filling critical vacancies, he said: "Within the civil service there are considerable problems where certain posts are left unfilled. This situation is set to get worse over the next five to 10 years."

"The average age of a civil servant is 45, and 70% of civil servants are over 40 years of age. Within the next five to 10 years 50% of those currently serving will have retired."

COMMENT

The healthcare horror story in the US reminds us of the importance of fighting creeping privatisation in the NHS, says California-based labour activist Desi Murray

Save the NHS

... a warning from America

HEALTHCARE activists in Northern Ireland and across the UK should recommit themselves to saving the National Health Service.

As creeping privatisation enters the NHS, they should look to America to truly understand what private health insurance and for-profit healthcare looks like.

A recent study released in April shows that one in four working-age Americans went without health insurance coverage at some point in 2011, often through unemployment, employers removing coverage and workers changing jobs.

This represents 26% of non-elderly adults (aged 19 to 64) who went without insurance – that's 50 million people.

On top of that, many more are under-insured and only one accident away from bankruptcy.

Without insurance, people quickly disconnect from the healthcare system by avoiding basic medical services such as doctor visits and screenings for cancer, cholesterol and high blood pressure.

When they do end up in hospital, it is in the emergency room with serious complications that could have been avoided with basic care.

The study provides a disturbing snapshot of the \$2.6 trillion US for-profit healthcare system. America spends much more per head of population than any other industrial nation, yet the health outcomes are seriously inferior.

On quality, the US continues to lag far behind. A recent report revealed two breathtaking examples:

- More than 80% of US counties trail life expectancy rates of nations with the best life expectancies. Some US counties are more than 50 years behind their international counterparts.

- The US ranks 41st in the world in death rates for child-bearing women, and it has been getting worse according to the World Health Organisation. The average mortality rate within 42 days of childbirth has doubled in two decades, partly due to cuts in Federal spending for maternal and child health programmes.

- Healthcare insurance premiums have jumped 50% on average, with more than six in 10 Americans now living in states where their premiums consume a fifth or more of

median earnings. In the 1960s, healthcare costs were 5% of GDP. Today it stands at 18% of GDP.

Medical bills for years have been the leading cause of bankruptcies in America with many losing their homes and jobs. For many, it is the stark choice between healthcare coverage or food on the table.

Why is it that a system that spends so much more on healthcare than other countries in the world,

should have such poor outcomes with millions left outside of the system?

In short, it is due to the profit motive, the control of the "industry" by insurance companies, hospital corporations that pay millions to their CEOs and an overburdened bureaucracy dominated by pen pushers and debt collectors. A total of 30% of all costs in healthcare go to overheads.

Obama's Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, even it survives a Supreme Court ruling, will do little to ease the healthcare crisis.

The Act left the main culprits, the insurance companies, in control and, indeed, their profits are predicted to greatly increase, if the Act survives.

In many ways, we take the NHS for granted. We are guaranteed healthcare, whether rich or poor, working or unemployed.

But it is under attack and international health company sharks are watching, probing and waiting to see the break-up of the NHS system before they can strike, offering their for-profit health insurance coverage plans.

Today, the new civil rights campaign in America is for guaranteed healthcare for all. That struggle will be greatly enhanced by a vibrant and growing NHS, so let's renew our commitment to defending the NHS and redouble our efforts to ensure it stays in public hands.



'For many in the US it is a stark choice between healthcare coverage or food on the table'



The demand for universal healthcare is focus of a new civil rights campaign in the US, spearheaded by National Nurses United



We want our union at the talks table

THE CWU has warned management at **RR Donnelley** it will escalate industrial action if talks are not opened over proposed restructuring and redundancy plans.

It follows a 48-hour strike

at the **US** multinational's printing plant in **Sandyford** on **May 3** and **May 4**.

According to the union, **RR Donnelley**, which prints and processes bills for a number of the Republic's top tele-

coms and energy companies, is currently using a staff forum to communicate its proposed changes.

However, the **CWU** – which represents two-thirds of staff at the plant – wants

to negotiate on members' behalf. **Mr Delany** told *The Union Post*: "Our members said they don't want such issues to be dealt with at the forum and are seeking the union to represent them."

BEECROFT REPORT

'Pathway to workplace misery'

UNITE has described proposals contained in a new Tory party report on UK employment law drawn up by venture capitalist **Adrian Beecroft** as a "pathway to workplace misery".

Beecroft's most controversial recommendation – to rip up the rules on unfair dismissal and make it easier to sack "under-productive" staff – was disclosed last October, after the first two of the report's 24 pages were leaked.

But, according to the union, analysis of the full study, titled *Report on Employment Law*, shows Beecroft was planning to go much further than that effectively cutting deep into decades of employment protections for millions of UK workers.

Unite general secretary **Len**

McCluskey accused the UK government of being "in thrall" to the business lobby and the right wing of the Conservative party.

He said: "With every day they remain in office, this country becomes a more unhappy and unequal place."

"UK workers are already the cheapest and easiest to sack in the EU. Now **David Cameron** plans to take the nation further back to the dark days of hire and fire."

"That is not in any way a plan for growth – it's a pathway to workplace misery and a demoralised and less productive workforce."

Under Beecroft's plans, firms should be allowed to opt out of a whole range of regulations including forced pension contributions,



Dave Prentis and Len McCluskey

flexible parental leave and equal pay audits. For the smallest firms – those with fewer than 10 staff – **Mr Beecroft** suggested scrapping pension auto-enrolment, a right to request flexible working, equal pay audits and flexible parental leave for new staff.

UNISON also slammed the Beecroft recommendations and

warned that austerity – and not labour market flexibility – lay at the heart of the UK's economic woes. General secretary **Dave Pentis** said: "Plans for no-fault dismissal are an anti-growth strategy that will only make the recession worse. As well as hampering the growth of companies beyond 10 employees, it would force people into working for lower wages, with poorer conditions."

"By making people insecure at work, Beecroft's plans would create a damaging tier of second-class workers who would face higher charges for credit, loans, insurance and mortgages."

"This is totally unnecessary when you consider that the UK already has one of the most flexible labour markets in Europe."

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<http://www.youtube.com/user/TradeUnionTVIreland#p/u/0/ATDACnrVrQg>



Austerity doesn't make sense

THOSE who have "peddled the lie" that "ordinary workers were responsible for the present crisis" were attacked at the CWU conference in Galway.

In his May 11 address, president Gerry Cuirc, left, claimed to delegates there was "one law for the rich and one law for the poor".

He said: "Five years into the crisis, we still wait with baited breath for the prosecution of any of the individuals who were responsible for the collapse of the Irish economy and its horrific consequences for the Irish people."

Mr Cuirc also slammed those who were trying to set "public sector workers against private sector workers, citizens against immigrants, employed against unemployed, those who push for

more and more cuts in workers' pay, conditions and fundamental rights".

It seemed, he added, that employers were following "the old adage... never miss the opportunity to exploit a good recession".

Mr Cuirc pointed out that capitalists were damaging their own capitalist model with the current approach.

"If people don't work, then people don't spend, less people will work and you end up in the inevitable downward spiral."

He continued: "Less people working equals less of a take in taxation and so an increase in welfare spend. In simple terms, the cure is more likely to kill us than the disease."

The CWU president slammed

Vodafone and claimed it had used its "international power" to "export Irish jobs".

"It is time this government linked the provision of government contracts and the application of its generous corporation tax to the provision of jobs within the Irish state."

The CWU was, he said, punching "well above its weight" but needed to focus on working with other unions, both nationally and internationally, to forge a "single union voice".

Mr Cuirc said: "The reality is from a political and financial point of view, workers throughout the world are under constant attack. We need to ensure we can protect our members and indeed hit back at the perpetrators."

Europe faces stark choice

CONGRESS general secretary David Begg has called on the government to delay ratifying the Fiscal Compact treaty in the event of it being passed.

He made his comments in an address to the CWU conference on May 11.

Mr Begg told delegates the elections in Greece and France had signalled that the "tectonic plates" were shifting again across Europe.

Mr Hollande's victory in France had, he said, broken the "group think" that had gripped the European establishment in recent years.

Europe now had "a stark choice" to make – either to "persist with a singular policy of dogmatic austerity" and "bring the house down" or "start buying into some of our solutions".

In that context, Mr Begg added, the Irish government should consider delaying ratification of the treaty, if passed, on May 31.

He pointed out there was no requirement to ratify it until December. Mr Begg said: "If they feel unable, for whatever reason, to



David Begg: Hollande victory has shattered austerity 'group think'

defer the referendum, then I suggest they consider giving people an assurance that they will not ratify the treaty until they have to, at the end of this year.

"In the meantime they should

stand four square behind Hollande and assist him in every way possible to achieve his stated objective of a growth strategy."

Mr Begg claimed such an approach "could give us some influ-

ence on our destiny rather than being passive objects of experimentation by neoliberal ideologues. It would put us in the vanguard of the drive for growth while not isolating ourselves from the European mainstream."

He said Europe needed its own 'New Deal' in the form of a "massive growth stimulus" and a means of dealing with public and private debt. Irish unions were championing a growth and stimulus plan that could see major investment in key infrastructure projects at no cost to the taxpayer, through incentivising the use of private pension funds.

And he urged the government to make "growth and investment" the theme of Ireland's EU Presidency next year.

Mr Begg added: "Ireland has been a poster child of globalisation and, more recently, a poster child for austerity. Let us seize the opportunity to be a beacon of something good for a change."

FULL SPEECH: http://www.ictu.ie/download/pdf/d_begg_address_to_cwu_conference_may_2012.pdf



Hands across the table... and the Irish Sea: CWU chief Steve Fitzpatrick, left, greets his CWU UK counterpart Billy Hayes, while CWU deputy general secretary Terry Delany, above, addresses delegates in Galway

Pictures: John Chaney/CWU

Colombian delegation in call for help to exploit window for peace

By Fiona Dunne

JUSTICE for Colombia (Ireland) joined with the group's UK branch in inviting leading members of the Colombians for Peace campaign to meet a number of Irish trade unionists, politicians and government ministers in Dublin on May 22.

The delegation comprised Dr Carlos Lozano, of Colombians for Peace, Congressman Ivan Cepeda Castoro, a politician and leading human rights campaigner, and Marleny Orjuela who is director of AS-FAMIPAZ, a group representing the relatives of soldiers and police personnel held captive by the FARC and ELN.

Their aim was to highlight the importance of the new peace campaign, to galvanise international support and bring pressure to bear on the Colombian government.

Although time was short and the schedule was packed, the visit proved hugely successful.

The delegation met Minister for State Joe Costello, members of the Foreign Affairs Committee and members of the Friends of Colombia parliamentary group.

Most importantly they managed to get their message about peace publicised and underline what shape



Dr Carlos Lozano

they would like the process to take.

It was important, they argued, that this should be a just process with social justice and equality as clear outcomes to allow their country to recover from six decades of conflict.

A number of important issues were raised during the visit which included, their opposition to the EU



Ivan Cepeda Castoro

Free Trade Agreement, which they felt economically rewarded those involved in the conflict, the destabilising effects of the conflict on the entire region and the issues of mass displacement and human rights abuses.

Under President Santos, there has been some change in thinking and a recognition that a conflict exists,

which is a massive shift since the last regime.

There have also been important gestures and commitments by the FARC who released their remaining military prisoners last April.

With these recent developments, the delegation believe that there is a commitment towards peace and a small window of opportunity exists for action.

However, they emphasise that this won't last long and have said that it is imperative that the international community acts and acts quickly.

Colombia remains the most dangerous place in the world to be a trade unionist – and it isn't too pleasant for the rest of society either.

Currently there are 7,000 persons forceably disappeared, 7,000 wrongfully imprisoned and four million internally displaced. Colombia also has the third highest level of inequality in the world.

Whatever happens over the next few months, one thing is certain, we must continue to campaign on behalf of our comrades in Colombia and hope that a real sustainable solution to peace can be found.

For more information, check out: www.ictu.ie/justice_for_colombia.ie

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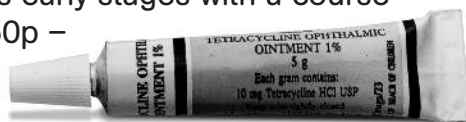


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Talla is just five. He has trachoma, a painful eye disease which can lead to a lifetime of blindness. Repeated infections cause the eyelashes to turn inwards and slowly and painfully every blink damages the eye and leads to blindness. Trachoma can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



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