

THE

PUBLISHED IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS

# UNION POST

NEWS YOU CAN USE

MAY/JUNE 2013

## EUROPEAN UNIONS IN DUBLIN SUMMIT

# HIGH NOON FOR SOCIAL EUROPE



Picture: John Mueller (CC BY 2.0)

- ORGANISATION
- SOLIDARITY
- EQUALITY
- MINIMUM STANDARDS

ETUC chief Bernadette Ségol



EUROPEAN trade unions are to set out a range of alternative policies to deal with the economic crisis at a major summit in Dublin next month.

Leading trade unionists will be demanding that EU governments make radical changes to restore growth, tackle unemployment and build a fairer Europe.

The two-day event,

organised by the European Trade Union Confederation and hosted by Congress, starts on June 5 in Dublin Castle.

A Congress source said: "The conference theme is *High Noon for Social Europe* and no doubt speakers will be training their big guns, so to speak, on the disastrous austerity policies being pursued by many EU governments that cause so much harm to working people."

The conference consists of a number of panel discussions – on trade union organisation, solidarity, equality and minimum standards – that involve, among others, ETUC chief Bernadette Ségol, left, Congress general secretary David Begg, TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady, EPSU chief Carola Fischbach-Pyttel, Oliver Rothig, who heads up UNI Europa, and CGT leader Thierry Lepaon.

## Benefits fraud: UK public being 'brainwashed'

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady has claimed the public is being "brainwashed" into believing the benefits system in the UK is "riddled with fraud".

She made the comment after Department for Work and Pensions data published earlier this month revealed that benefit fraud accounted for just 0.7% of the welfare budget.

This is in stark contrast to the popular perception of benefit fraud – hyped up by sections of the media and by some politicians. Polling carried out by the TUC in January, showed that on average people think that 27% of the welfare budget is claimed fraudulently.

Ms O'Grady said: "While benefit fraud is a problem, these figures show there is a significant issue with underpayment too, with one in 10 housing benefit claimants being underpaid at a time when living costs are soaring.

"Instead of seeking to demonise those on benefits, ministers should be getting tough on tax-evading companies who are cheating the Treasury out of £25bn a year."

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said: "At just over £1 billion a year fraud in the benefits system is dwarfed by tax fraud, which is 70 times as much and whose perpetrators are not subject to the same level of vitriol from politicians and sections of the press.

"While more resources in the DWP would bring the benefit fraud and error rate down even more, the government must also aggressively chase down the tax dodgers who deprive our economy of tens of billions of pounds a year."

## UK & Irish workers trail in hols league

WORKERS in the Irish Republic are second only to UK workers when it comes to having the worst holiday entitlement in Europe, according to a survey carried out by travel company hotels.com.

They enjoy seven fewer days off a year than their Italian or Swedish counterparts. In Ireland, the average annual leave entitlement is 20 days, supplemented by nine public holidays, the same total as Germany and Switzerland.

UK workers are entitled to only an average of 28 days off whereas the French, Finns and Norwegians get to put their feet up on 35 days each year.

The total for the Danes and Spanish was 34 while in take-it-easy Russia, employees had an annual tally of 40 days off.



Rescue workers desperately search for survivors after the Rana Plaza factory collapse

Picture: Qamrul Anam Coordinator, Textile & RMG, IBC

## Labels sign up to safety accord after factory collapse horror



Jennings: 'turning point'

UNI Global Union general secretary Philip Jennings has described a new accord on fire and building safety in Bangladesh as "a turning point", following the horrific April 24 collapse of the Rana Plaza which claimed the lives of 1,100 garment workers.

Dozens of leading retail companies have already signed up to the new safety guidelines.

The legally-binding agreement between the signatories and IndustriALL, UNI Global and many local unions provides for independent safety inspections, mandatory repairs and renovations as well as a vital role for workers and their unions.

At the heart of the accord is a

commitment from the companies to pay for the renovations and repairs necessary to make factory buildings in Bangladesh safe.

Mr Jennings said: "We are putting in place rules that mark the end of the race to the bottom in the global supply chain."

Retail labels that have signed up so far include: H&M, Inditex, C&A, PVH, Tchibo, Tesco, Marks & Spencer, Primark, El Corte Inglés, jbc, Mango, Carrefour, KiK, Helly Hansen, G-Star, Aldi, New Look, Mothercare, Loblaws, Sainsbury's, Benetton, N Brown Group, Stockmann, WE Europe, Esprit, Rewe, Next, Lidl, Hess Natur, Switcher, Abercrombie & Fitch.



## Journo safety seminar to mark IFJ Congress

HUNDREDS of journalists from across the world are attending the 28th Congress of the International Federation of Journalists in Dublin between June 4 to June 7.

The event, at Dublin Castle, is being hosted by the National Union of Journalists UK and Ireland.

And the NUJ's Belfast & District branch is holding a special event North of the border to mark the IFJ World Congress.

The branch has invited a panel of national and international speakers to present a number of practical workshops on safety for journalists working in conflict zones and in public order situations.

Branch secretary Gerry Carson told *The Union Post*: "Since the start of this year journalists, photographers and camera operators have, in the course of carrying out their work, been subjected to verbal and physical abuse, been threatened, harassed and suffered serious injury.

"Now, in the light of the 'flag protests', the forthcoming 'marching season' and 'G8' meeting, to help better inform individuals, management and owners about self-protection and how best to perform risk assessment, our branch has organised a special seminar on Wednesday, June 5 in the Linenhall Library, Belfast."

Irish secretary Séamus Dooley added: "It is fitting that as the World Congress of the IFJ discusses global threats, in Belfast our colleagues will be offering practical assistance based on experience of conflict."



## 'Wheels have come off austerity wagon...'

**CONGRESS** general secretary David Begg has called on the Troika to do "the honourable thing" and admit that austerity as a cure for Ireland's problems is wrong, socially destructive and damaging to prospects for economic recovery.

He delivered the blunt message as part of a Congress delegation that met with officials from the IMF/EC/ECB Troika in Dublin on April 29.

Mr Begg said: "The wheels [have] come off the austerity wagon as more evidence of its unsuitability and destructive impact emerges.

"The IMF concedes that the approach taken here was wrong. Equally, the case for austerity is now known to be based on flawed calculations.

"But most damning of all, we have heard Prof Ashoka Mody – an architect of the Irish bailout – admit major errors in the construction of Ireland's rescue package.

"In other words, the ideological underpinning of this entire policy approach – in Ireland and across the EU – has been utterly discredited. The Troika should now do the honourable thing and admit their policy failure."

He added: "It's time for a new departure. It's time for a new deal for Ireland."

## ICTU call on Sharps Directive

CONGRESS has claimed the health of healthcare workers in the Republic is being endangered by the Irish government's failure to implement an EU 'Sharps Directive' on the use of medical needles.

Legal affairs officer Esther Lynch said: "Sharps and needlestick injuries are a silent epidemic as they are notoriously unreported – estimates for Ireland range from 1,000 to 6,000 injuries a year."

In 2011, an INMO study revealed that one in three nurses south of the border had suffered needlestick injuries.

The EU directive protects healthcare workers through

increased safety precautions and safer working procedures through the use of medical devices that shield or retract the needle after use.

It specifically bans the practice of 'recapping' needles.

The Republic failed to meet the May 11 deadline for the transposition of the directive, but Ms Lynch has called for its swift implementation.

She said: "Acting now is essential. The directive requires a partnership approach and Congress is recommending the setting up of needlestick and sharps injury prevention committees to oversee the implementation of the directive. These committees

should include representatives from employers and unions, including health and safety reps, occupational health, risk management, purchasing, housekeeping, infection control, employee education and training."

Ms Lynch pointed out the directive applied to all healthcare workers but noted that prison officers, refuse collectors, teachers, tattoo artists and thousands of other workers "who may come across discarded hypodermic needles" were not included.

And she urged the government to extend the directive's protection to "all workers at risk of needlestick or sharps injury."

Picture: stevendepalo (CC BY 2.0)



# Business efficiencies cannot be made at expense of workers' lives

CONGRESS has warned that cuts to health and safety budgets will turn the clock back on progress made in safeguarding employees while at work.

A total of 47 people were killed in workplace accidents and 7,000 non-fatal injuries were reported in the Republic last year.

Speaking ahead of Workers Memorial Day (April 28), TEEU general secretary Eamon Devoy said: "The Health and Safety Authority is facing devastating cuts in its government grant over the next three years, which will hit health and safety inspections and the body's

prevention work hard. In recent years big strides have been made in protecting people at work from injury and ill health.

"Health and safety inspections are the backbone of this approach and there still more needs to be done, especially as increasing numbers of employers are contracting out core work."

He added: "Cuts are jeopardising the progress made and the price will be paid by ordinary, hardworking people."

Congress legal affairs officer Esther Lynch claimed progress had stalled on efforts to get employers

to report occupational diseases and illnesses and urged the government not to buckle to opposition from business groups "in the mistaken belief that health and safety rules are a burden on business".

She said: "Congress is calling on the Health and Safety Authority to think again about removing the requirement on employers to report on the range of internationally recognised occupational diseases caused by chemical, physical and biological agents.

"In spite of advances in occupational health and safety practices over the last few decades, the

impact of the crisis has meant increased work intensity and less time dedicated to prevention, poor maintenance schedules for equipment and machinery, and a lack of investment in newer equipment.

"Moreover, psycho-social factors such as stress in the workplace, are exacerbated as employment becomes more precarious and those who retain their jobs often work longer hours to compensate for job cuts.

"Obeying safety rules is a responsibility, not a burden. Business efficiencies cannot be at the expense of workers' health and lives."

## NUJ hits out at death threats

**THE NUJ** has condemned death threats issued earlier this month by loyalist paramilitaries against two Northern Ireland-based journalists.

Bob Miller, chair of the union's Belfast & District branch, told *The Union Post*: "The naked threat of violence by paramilitaries, whatever their background, against members of this union is to be deplored."

"We ask those behind these threats to withdraw them immediately and we call on their public representatives to issue a statement to that effect."

NUJ general secretary Michelle Stanistreet said: "A free press is a hallmark of a democratic society and anyone making threats against journalists for carrying out their work attempts to undermine democracy as well as press freedom. Threats against journalists from any quarter must stop."



From left: NUJ's Barry McCall, Jim Aughney, Seamus Dooley (NUJ Irish secretary), Gerry Curran, Martin Fitzpatrick, Des Coughlan and Tony Jones. Front row: Ashling Seely and Noleen Hartigan from Amnesty International lay a wreath at the Veronica Guerin memorial in Dublin Castle on World Press Day *Picture: Maxwell's*

## Media plurality 'must be protected'

NUJ President Barry McCall has demanded action to protect media plurality across Europe.

He made his comments on World Press Freedom Day – May 3 – at a meeting of the union's Dublin branch in Liberty Hall.

Mr McCall said: "It is standard practice for governments and competition authorities to intervene when a firm becomes dominant in any sector."

"But the media industry is even

more sensitive to such dominance as with it comes potentially immense political power and influence.

"This is why different standards and thresholds must be applied to this bulwark of democracy and why the NUJ is supporting the European Citizens' Initiative aimed at gathering a million signatures to a petition calling on the European Commission to bring forward to protect media pluralism and press

freedom." He added: "We need 9,000 signatures from Ireland to play our part in this critically important initiative. The NUJ will be campaigning to get its own members to sign up to the petition and we are calling on all trade unions, political parties, and the Irish people generally to get behind it so that we can prevent abuses of media power in this country in future."

Later Mr McCall joined senior

NUJ and Amnesty International Ireland figures in laying a wreath at the Veronica Guerin statue in Dublin Castle gardens.

He said: "It is our duty to ensure that each one of those journalists [killed in the course of their work] is remembered."

"Here in Ireland we know the pain felt by the murders of Martin O'Hagan and Veronica Guerin, both NUJ members committed to the highest principles of journalism."

## Govt needs change of emphasis

THE Republic's next Budget will be fairer, and more likely to hasten economic recovery, if it has a "greater orientation towards collecting more taxes rather than cutting spending and services", a leading economist has claimed.

Dr Micheál Collins, from the union-backed Nevin Economic Research Institute, made the comments in an address to the IMPACT conference in Portlaoise earlier this month.

He said this changed emphasis in government policy was needed to end the prolonged period of austerity predicted by most economic commentators.

Dr Collins outlined NERI's forecast of continued stagnation, with sluggish growth and high unemployment, over the next two years.

He told delegates: "While there are signs of some stabilisation in domestic demand, the amount being spent by households, companies and the government remains depressed.

"The lack of any 'pick-up' in domestic activities remains a key problem for the Irish economy. As this is the job-intensive sector of the economy, recovery is dependent on things getting moving on the ground around the country."

Dr Collins called on the government to change course in three ways:

- It should adopt a large scale investment programme drawing on funds from the European Investment Bank, the borrowing abilities of commercial semi-state companies, pension funds, and the savings from various debt restructuring deals,
- It should address the unemployment crisis in a more focused way with investment in additional retraining and upskilling, and
- It should ensure that the next Budget takes a fairer approach to the distribution of the adjustment, with a greater orientation towards collecting more taxes rather than cutting spending and services.



**Dr Collins: 'fairer approach to distribution of adjustment' required**  
*Picture: Dylan Vaughan Photography*

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# 'No jobs for Ireland' warning

THE Construction Industry Committee of Congress has claimed the Supreme Court judgment on REAs paves the way for a devastating attack on the living standards of building workers in the Republic.

The warning followed a May 15 meeting of the CIC to discuss the implications of the ruling.

CIC member Fergus Whelan said: "When taking on contracts employers are now free to ignore existing rates of pay set by the Labour Court and free to offer skilled experienced craftsmen the national minimum wage. This will amount to a 50% pay cut."

And he warned that the May 9 court ruling could lead to the end of the Construction Industry Pension Scheme.

Mr Whelan told *The Union Post*:

"This pension scheme – which has served hundreds of thousands of Irish workers well since 1964 – has been killed off by a stroke of the judicial pen.

"The clauses in public procurement contracts designed to ensure that public projects and any stimulus package would result in decent jobs for experienced unemployed workers have been struck down.

"Unless something is done, these jobs will go to companies based outside the state who will milk the projects with exploited foreign labour. There will be no jobs for Ireland and little or no indigenous Irish construction industry in the near future.

"The Supreme Court judgment has left construction workers exposed to a level of exploitation



**Whelan: Construction workers have been 'left exposed' by ruling**

and abuse unknown in this country since the 1930s. The judgment is the latest and most blatant attack on the

protections developed over a long period, protections designed to avoid gross exploitation of vulnerable workers."

Mr Whelan said that unions intend to ensure that all construction projects are carried out under the terms agreed in the Labour Court and "will fight for the national agreement country wide, project by project and contract by contract."

He added: "It behoves the political system to work to fix this problem.

"Employers now celebrating the victory the Supreme Court has given them could yet find that they might have been better to honour Labour Court agreements rather than watch idly as our industry is destroyed by social dumping and exploited foreign labour."

## Supreme Court ruling 'dark day for employment in Ireland'

**THE TEEU has described the May 9 Supreme Court ruling that Registered Employment Agreements were unconstitutional as "another dark day for employment in Ireland".**

The five-judge court's decision – which ruled that Part 3 of the *Industrial Relations Act 1946* raised serious issues of incompatibility with the Constitution – would have "a profound effect" on thousands of construction workers, the union warned.

The court said the REAs "passed un-

mistakably into the field of legislation which was the sole preserve of the Oireachtas".

However, the TEEU has countered that the decision – prompted by a legal challenge from electrical contractors group, the NECI – did not overturn existing pay rates and conditions.

A TEEU statement said: "While existing contractual rights of workers in sectors covered by REAs are unaffected by the ruling and contractual rights can be altered only by agreement between

the parties involved, it will no longer be possible to enforce minimum standards against foreign contractors competing for Irish contracts and who can pay as little as €8.65 per hour for all hours worked up to 48 hours per week without interference."

TEEU general secretary Eamon Devoy warned that any attempt to undermine current standards would be met "with the wrath of the TEEU who will use all means at its disposal to protect our members in the industry".

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CWU UK's Billy Hayes and Andy Kerr greets the President along with CWU chief Steven Fitzpatrick



## Michael D opens refurbished CWU HQ

THE newly-refurbished headquarters of the CWU was formally opened by Irish President Michael D Higgins on March 28. The building, which has been located at 575 North Circular Road since 1982, has been renamed William Norton House.

Union officials are very proud of the new building which was refurbished "to the highest standards to create an exciting and dynamic office and conference venue".

A CWU source told *The Union Post*: "It's a venue like no other and the beautifully appointed building still incorporates a real

sense of history. The original building, which once housed St Canice's School, had the staircase lovingly restored, honouring the school's position as the essence of the local community.

"The new facility includes a conference hall, five boardrooms, break-out areas, complimentary WiFi, and state-of-the-art teleconferencing facilities.

"Every CWU member can be enormously proud of William Norton House and take the opportunity to avail of its superb facilities."



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## NUJ backs anti-bullying measures set out in BBC report

THE NUJ has welcomed recommendations to address the "toxic problem" of bullying at the BBC.

A number of measures are set out in the *Respect at Work* review conducted by Dinah Rose QC.

General secretary Michelle Stanistreet claimed the report backed up the union's own probe into bullying and harassment at the broadcaster.

She said: "It is quite clear that bullying has become an institutionalised problem at the BBC, one that has taken hold over many years

"The report's findings underline the fear factor that exists, particularly for those staff on freelance and short-term contracts."

She added: "That the BBC is now taking action and getting a grip of what is a toxic problem can only be a good thing. It is positive news that investigations will be carried out by an independent panel in future, although we remain concerned about how efficiently this can be delivered by an in-house approach.

"It's vital that this is a genuine fresh start, one that marks the dismantling of a culture that has allowed bullying and harassment to take hold."



G8 protestors at the May 2011 Le Harve summit and, below, at the Quebec summit in 2010  
 Pictures: Guillaume Paumier; Socialist Canada, Socialist Quebec (CC BY-SA 2.0); NIPSA



# NIPSA chief calls for big G8 protest

NIPSA general secretary Brian Campfield has called on union members and their families to join a protest march and rally in Belfast on Saturday, June 15 to coincide with the meeting of G8 leaders in Co Fermanagh.

Trade unions in the North have linked up with organisations such as Friends of the Earth and Amnesty International to plan the protest, which organisers hope will ensure a dissenting voice is heard amid all the media brouhaha over the much-hyped summit.

Writing in the latest issue of the union's newspaper *NIPSA Reports*, Mr Campfield said: "While G8 leaders have it in their power to take decisions that could be in the interest of millions of people across the globe, in reality they will pursue policies which are designed to prop up and defend a system that is incapable of tackling world poverty, global hunger and unemployment.

"All the rhetoric around measures to tackle corporate tax evasion and avoidance, behind the use of words like 'democracy', 'peace', and 'development' belies the reality that poverty and in-

equality continue to increase because of the system and the policies they support."

Mr Campfield pointed out that big business interests in the UK had "overflowing" bank accounts – worth more than £700bn – that contributed nothing to "the economy or people".

He said: "If the G8 leaders were serious about tackling hunger, poverty or unemployment, steps would be taken to force the release of some of these reserves for economic development and/or socially-useful investment. However, that is not the mindset of the G8 leaders as they defer to the sacred cow of the free market, the interests of the large corporations and the wealthy."

Claiming that the hosting of the summit in Northern Ireland was "at best, a dubious honour", he added: "We owe it to ourselves and to all those across the globe, who are the victims of an economic system that cares nothing for working people, to mark the G8 summit with a resounding message that there is, as trade union movement has proclaimed, a better and fairer way."

Campfield: 'Resounding message'



## School 'monitors' welcomed

CONGRESS has welcomed the Republic's Education Minister Ruairi Quinn's decision to appoint monitors to audit compliance with terms and conditions of employment in the school building programme.

Congress official Fergus Whelan said: "We have been concerned for some time that unsustainable

tendering and procurement practices have been leading to hidden economy activity, runaway contractors and the exploitation of workers."

He claimed the appointment of auditors would send "the right message" to would-be, non-compliant contractors.

But he added: "We

believe that public procurers will have to go further and adopt a policy of ensuring that tender prices are sustainable, so as not to encourage bad practice and to give contractors the possibility of finishing work without having to rely on cheap, exploited labour."

## Cult of money

POPE Francis has blasted the "tyranny" of free-market capitalism in a speech to foreign ambassadors earlier this month.

He told them: "The worship of the golden calf of old has found a new and heartless image in the cult of money and the dictatorship of an economy which is faceless and lacking any truly human goal."



## WHISTLE-BLOWING

# RCN warns of culture of fear in some hospitals

AROUND a quarter (24%) of nurses in the UK have been discouraged or warned off raising concerns about patient care, a new survey carried out on behalf of the Royal College of Nursing has revealed.

Following the results, the RCN warned of a "culture of fear and intimidation" in some workplaces.

Nearly half (46%) of respondents who had raised concerns had done so the last six months, and nearly one in 10 nurses (8%) in the week leading up to the survey.

Worryingly, just under half (45%) of those who raised concerns said their employer had taken no action and roughly the same number (44%) said fears of victimisation would make them think twice about whistle blowing.

RCN general secretary Dr Peter Carter said: "These responses illustrate that despite the recent attention which has been drawn to the importance of whistle blowing, many nurses are still experiencing a culture of fear and intimidation if they try to speak out. This is putting patient safety at risk.

"Nursing staff want to provide excellent care, but sometimes the systems they work in do not allow this. Staff know what is safe for their patients and what is not. However, they cannot raise concerns if they feel unsure about what their employer's policy is or what the repercussions will be."

The RCN runs a dedicated whistle blowing hotline for its members – 0345 772 6300 – if they have serious or immediate concerns about patient safety in their workplace, which local processes are unable to resolve.

## RECOGNITION

# Action suspended in goodwill gesture

THE TEEU has suspended a work to rule action involving 23 wind farm technicians employed by Siemens as a goodwill gesture in its fight to secure recognition for the workforce.

It is understood the union – which has asked formally for Labour Relations Commission involvement to settle the dispute – has reminded local management that an international agreement on collective bargaining was brokered with the parent company and global union IndustriALL.

A TEEU source said: "The union has been actively seeking dialogue with Siemens since January but to no avail. Ironically Siemens recognises and negotiates with unions throughout Europe, but refuses to do so here in Ireland."

Siemens technicians provide maintenance to more than 200 wind turbines, mostly situated in the northwest and southwest.

## IBOA CALL

# We need Leveson-style probe into Irish banking

THE IBOA has called for a "Leveson-style" inquiry to probe the dramatic collapse in banking in the Republic and its impact on the Irish economy.

General secretary Larry Broderick told delegates at the union's recent Biennial Delegate Conference that it was remarkable that five years into the crisis people were no nearer to understanding the precise causes of the crisis and the interaction of the various players which contributed to it.

He said the purpose of such an inquiry was not to promote a witch-hunt but to achieve a thorough understanding of the role

of bank boards, senior management, the regulatory authorities and government in both the creation of and response to the crisis.

And he claimed the inquiry should also have the power to subpoena witnesses as well as inviting submissions from interested parties and the general public.

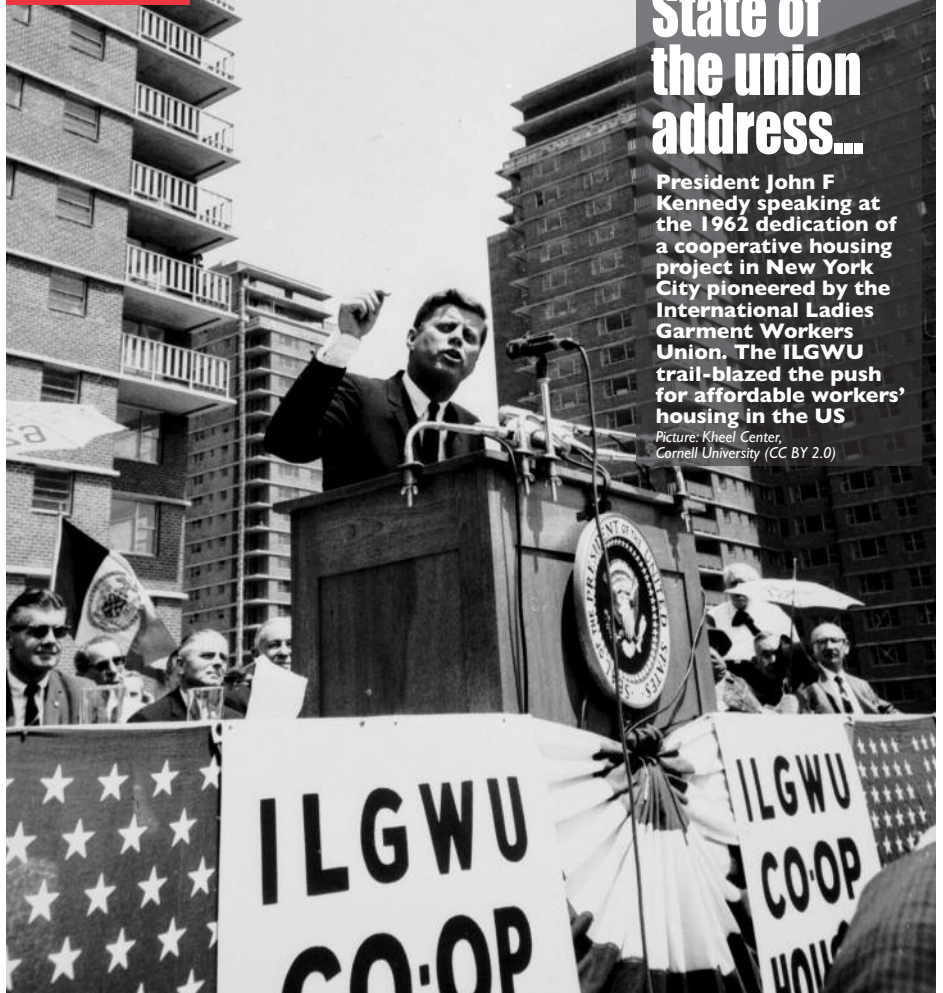
Mr Broderick said: "There may be some expense involved in conducting such an inquiry.

"But how much more expensive is the alternative likely to be? Unless we take the time to find out what went wrong, we run the risk of repeating the same disastrous mistakes in the future."



Larry Broderick: 'disastrous mistakes'

## FLASHBACK



## State of the union address...

President John F Kennedy speaking at the 1962 dedication of a cooperative housing project in New York City pioneered by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. The ILGWU trail-blazed the push for affordable workers' housing in the US

Picture: Kheel Center, Cornell University (CC BY 2.0)

# IMF 'threat to collective bargaining'

A NEW report published by the ITUC has claimed labour market policies being pushed by the IMF pose a real threat to collective bargaining.

The study, *Ideology Without Economic Evidence: IMF Attacks on Collective Bargaining*, analyses how the actions of the finance body

have weakened workplace rights that have been in place for a generation.

ITUC general secretary Sharan Burrow said: "There is no economic justification for these labour reforms. Countries with little or no collective bargaining do not achieve faster growth,

lower unemployment or better export performance than other countries. They do have greater wage inequality.

"The economic strategy being pursued by the IMF, and in crisis countries with its Troika partners, is deeply flawed."

[http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc\\_frontlines\\_summary\\_report\\_april\\_2013\\_web.pdf](http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc_frontlines_summary_report_april_2013_web.pdf)



## POA CONFERENCE

# Young offenders present 'complex challenges'

POA general secretary John Clinton has called for 16 to 17-year-old offenders to be taken out of the prison service and placed in a "separate care and correction system" more suited to their needs.

He made his comments in an address to the POA conference in Athlone on May 4.

Welcoming a recent report from the Visiting Committee at St Patrick's Institution, Dublin, that had praised staff for their attitude and work performance, he pointed out that this did not alter the underlying problem, "namely, that prison officers are not trained to do this work". Mr Clinton told delegates: "St Patrick's is not fit for the purpose of catering for 16

to 17-year-olds. These young offenders must be incarcerated when found guilty of serious crimes and we have no difficulty with that.

"Many of these young people will have committed serious crimes, but they are also most likely to have other issues, such as neglect, addiction, education deficiencies and often homelessness.

"This government must now follow through on its own commitment, to take these young offenders out of the prison service, and into a separate care and correction system, with the facilities and expertise to meet the complex challenges presented in this specific and necessary intervention"



John Clinton: 'Govt must follow through on commitment'



Stephen Delaney: 'something has to give' Pictures: POA

## Extra funding necessary or cut custody numbers

PRISON Officers Association president Stephen Delaney has warned "something has to give" following the release of figures showing an increase of 29% in the daily average of prisoners held in custody over six years.

He told delegates at the POA conference in Athlone on May 2 that there was now 4,275 prisoners in custody compared with a daily average of 3,321 in 2007.

Mr Delaney said: "Something has to give. It is just not possible to continue to provide a rehabilitative service for such numbers with contracting resources and reduced level of funding."

He called for "real action" to be taken either to reduce numbers in

custody or to make extra funding available to boost staffing levels.

Conference heard that the POA agreed with recommendations contained in a recent report from the Oireachtas Sub Committee on Penal Reform.

The report had called for a "decarceration strategy" to cut the prison population by a third over the next 10 years, involving the commuting of prison sentences, increased remission and greater use of open prisons.

Mr Delaney added: "All these measures along with a proper policy to deal with the growing number of protection prisoners in the system must be implemented as a matter of urgency."

## Portuguese tell Troika what they think of them

HUNDREDS of thousands of workers took to the streets of Lisbon and other cities across Portugal earlier this year with a straightforward message for chiefs at the IMF, European Central Bank and the European Commission – "Screw the Troika".

More than half a million protestors packed a boulevard in the centre of the capital on March 2.

The rallies were organised by a group of online activists known as *Que Se Lixe a Troika* or Screw the Troika.

The Troika imposed a series of tax hikes and slashed public sector wages as part of a €78bn bailout deal agreed in 2011. The measures have since push joblessness to record levels of 17%.

A protestor, right, holds a placard bearing the slogan 'Politicians are thieves – give us back hope'

Picture: pedrosimoes7 (CC BY 2.0)





# Boots should 'do right thing' for its staff

MANDATE has referred an ongoing pay dispute between Boots Retail Ireland and its members to the Labour Court.

The union has been seeking a wage increase for staff members at Boots after several years of increased profits teamed with exceptional growth for the retail company's Irish operation.

However, Boots has refused to give longer-serving members of staff a pay rise and has threatened these employees with the loss of productivity bonuses as well as an agreed Christmas bonus unless they accept a pay reduction of up to 18%.

Divisional organiser Brendan O'Hanlon said: "Over the past three

years, the company has reported that it has paid out more than €100 million in dividends to shareholders and yet their workers have not received a single pay increase.

"In fact, with increases in cost of living, Boots workers have taken an effective pay cut while the company has enjoyed increased profits.

"Last year alone, Boots Ireland increased profits to €17.8 million, yet the company is refusing to commit to a wage increase for all workers.

"This is completely unacceptable to our members who have helped build the company during the past number of years."

Mr O'Hanlon added: "Our members in Boots believe it is a very rea-

sonable request to seek a pay increase for all workers in Boots at this time, particularly due to the financial hardship many of them are experiencing at the moment."

According to Mandate, the union referred the pay dispute to the Labour Court due to the exhaustion of the Labour Relations Commission process.

Some of the key issues in dispute between the company and the union are:

- The union has sought a pay increase for all workers in Boots Ireland, whereas the company is only offering a 2% pay increase to all sales assistants earning below €12 per hour.

- Boots is insisting that any sales assistant earning above €12 per hour must reduce their wages below that figure to achieve a 2% increase. This in some cases means an 18% reduction for a 2% increase.

- All workers who do not reduce their hourly rate below €12 will not receive their bonuses including a productivity bonus due in June or the agreed Christmas bonus (worth 2%).

Mr O'Hanlon said: "Mandate is calling on Boots Ireland, a hugely profitable company paying out enormous dividends to shareholders, to do the right thing and reward their workers by committing to a pay increase for all staff members."



Picture: Moya Nolan/INTO

## Ruairi sees red...

Education Minister Ruairi Quinn got his card marked by teachers crying foul over a range of government policies. A number of delegates held up red cards as he addressed the INTO conference last month...

# Freed miners chief awarded top union gong



Picture: Arthur Svensson International Prize (CC BY 3.0)

RUSSIAN miners chief Valentin Urusov, released earlier this year after spending years in jail on trumped up charges, has been named the 2013 recipient of the Arthur Svensson International Prize for Trade Union Rights.

Mr Urusov, whose cause was championed by a number of international trade union bodies, headed the Prosvoboda trade union at diamond company Alrosa.

He led a 2007 hunger strike involving more than 1,000 workers in protest at what he claimed were inhumane conditions and low pay at the firm's mines, but was later arrested on drugs possession charges.

Prize committee chair Leif Sande said: "Urusov was imprisoned on what were clearly false accusations, and both the UN's International Labour Organisation and Russian and international trade union organisations had been involved in trying to get him released."

Mr Urusov was freed in March after it became known that he had been nominated for the Svensson prize, awarded by the Norwegian trade union movement.

The rest of his five-year prison sentence has been converted into a fine of 15% of his income throughout the remainder of his sentence. In addition, Mr Urusov is not permitted to leave the country.

ITUC general secretary Sharan Burrow said: "We are glad that Valentin Urusov has won the prize. We strongly supported him during his time in prison and we will do so with every trade unionist illegally detained."



# Unite 10 celebrate 'Crystal clear' ECJ ruling on pensions

UNIONS have warmly welcomed the April 25 European Court of Justice ruling that the Irish state is in breach of its obligations over pension entitlements for former Waterford Crystal employees.

Unite regional secretary Jimmy Kelly said: "The ECJ ruling follows a High Court case taken by the workers in the wake of the company's 2009 insolvency.

"It comes as welcome news for workers who have seen the value of their defined benefit occupational pensions collapse in the wake of insolvency.

"It is now clear that, as argued by Unite, the state's failure to institute a system of pension protection represents a breach of its



The 10 Unite members who took the Waterford Crystal test case to the ECJ show their approval at the ruling

obligations under the EU Insolvency Directive."

He described as "regrettable" the fact the state chose to contest the case which had both caused "distress and uncertainty" for the workers and ensured that the Irish taxpayer picked up a substantial legal bill.

Pointing out that workers in the UK are entitled to get 90% of their

accrued pension entitlements in the event of insolvency, Mr Kelly added: "The ball is now in the government's court. They can wait until the matter is heard again in the High Court, or they can come and talk to us.

"Either way, the European ruling is Crystal-clear – it's up to the state to protect Waterford Glass workers' pension entitlements."

SIPTU general president Jack O'Connor, in congratulating the Waterford Crystal workers and Unite for the landmark victory, also called on the government to "waste no time" to change the regulatory infrastructure on defined benefit pensions so schemes are "not forced to close or are diluted by reason of the current arrangements".

# IBEC's ease up on austerity call welcomed but SIPTU warns over pensions

SIPTU general president Jack O'Connor has welcomed IBEC's call for an easing of austerity but cautioned over budgetary changes the group may be seeking to promote.

He said: "The decision of IBEC to abandon the sinking ship of one-sided austerity should be welcomed.

"We agree with a call for the alleviation of the tax burden on low and middle-income families alongside increased investment in job creation.

"However, we are concerned that the IBEC call to ease back on tax measures in the forthcoming budget may be a Trojan horse for those lobbying the government to abandon its commitment to abolish pension tax relief for high-end contributors.

"It was agreed in Budget 2013 that this measure would be implemented in Budget 2014.

He added: "The ending of pension tax reliefs for high-end contributors would result in savings of at least €250 million that should be used to alleviate the tax



Picture: SIPTU

O'Connor: pensions warning

burden on lower income earners.

"While tax alleviation for those on incomes at the middle and lower end of the spectrum should form a key part of an economic stimulus package, which is now clearly essential, there is still plenty of potential to raise at least €1 billion by increasing the contribution of those with wealth or high earnings over the next two budgets."





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# Collective bargaining must become legal right

IMPACT national secretary Matt Staunton, right, has called on the Irish government to legislate to compel employers to respect the "fundamental right" to collective bargaining.

Speaking to delegates at the IMPACT conference earlier this month, he said: "When workers want a union to represent them for collective bargaining purposes, there should be a duty on the employer to recognise that right."

"Our analysis is that the 2001-2004 Industrial Relations

(Amendment) Acts have been rendered unworkable by the Supreme Court ruling in the Ryanair case and that Ireland is failing in its duty, under international laws and conventions, to secure respect for the fundamental right to collective bargaining."

He called Irish laws to be amended to require employers to engage in collective bargaining and give unions the right to distribute information and provide opportunities to meet and discuss collective bargaining

with workers. "Employers should not be permitted to create in-house associations to frustrate and undermine trade union collective bargaining."

"Ensuring that workers can organise and bargain collectively, free from coercion, intimidation, interference and retaliation, is essential."

"It is vital that legislation provides effective protection from penalisation, victimisation, and other prejudicial acts arising from members exercising their trade union rights."



Keeping tabs: Shay Cody and Louise O'Donnell give Minister Reilly's Future Health reform programme the once-over

Pictures: Dylan Vaughan Photography

## Reilly gets red-carded by IMPACT

IMPACT has claimed Irish Health Minister James Reilly has missed out on 18 out of 20 implementation dates six months after launching his Future Health reform programme.

And the union has produced a 'scorecard' to hammer home the point.

The scorecard was collated by measuring 20 actions to be implemented by April 2013 against informa-

tion it had received from the Department of Health on how these measures were progressing.

According to IMPACT, the missed implementation dates are linked to measures needed to introduce universal health insurance by 2016.

They include steps towards setting up new hospital groups and primary care structures, assessing the

role of local hospitals, developing new approaches to staff planning and succession, and the putting in place of management systems to enable 'money to follow patients'.

The union also claims Minister Reilly's chosen model for universal health insurance is unlikely either to deliver value for money or universal access to healthcare. IMPACT

national secretary Louise O'Donnell said: "IMPACT believes the minister's reform plans were flawed from the start. They are incapable of delivering value for money and he chose the wrong model for universal health insurance. But even on his own terms, the implementation record so far suggests that he's unlikely to deliver universal health insurance."

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# Young teachers facing years of temporary posts

THE difficulties faced by young second-level teachers in securing employment is impacting on the quality of education in the Republic, ASTI general secretary Pat King has warned.

He made his comments at a seminar for new and recently-qualified teachers at the Gresham Hotel, Dublin, on May 11.

Mr King pointed out that the vast majority of second-level teachers can expect to secure tempo-

rary employment – including on a contracted hourly basis – for at least five years. “Often this means moving from school to school, teaching for maybe four hours or 10 hours a week, year after year.

“For most teacher graduates, the vocational aspect of teaching is key to its initial attractiveness. Yet these teachers face the paradoxical experience of being unable to make a real connection with and commitment to a school commu-

nity.” More than half of all second-level teachers under 30 are on contracts of one year or less and many of these posts are part-time.

Mr King added: “Many teachers face the double whammy of being temporary and part-time.

“Cuts in the salaries of new teachers, coupled with the creeping hours culture, means that those lucky enough to find work in teaching can expect to spend a number of years on low to very

low incomes, and with little employment certainty. This is no way to begin a career as a teacher.”

Commenting on an OECD study detailing how a high level of substitute and temporary appointments had a negative impact on classroom learning environments, he added: “This is not due to the age or experience of teachers, but rather it is due to the perceived status of short-term, temporary teachers within the school community.”

## HOUSING

### Increase in homelessness ‘consequence of austerity’

DEMAND for emergency homeless accommodation is soaring as more families seek emergency accommodation, an IMPACT conference has been told.

Liam Wynne, who works in Dublin City Council’s homeless accommodation services, made the claim at the union’s local government division conference in Wexford on May 22.

He told delegates that while B&B type accommodation had long been a short-term solution for people who had become homeless, the emergency solution has now become a long-term experience for many.

“Now the short-term stop gap solution is the sleeping bag. More and more of them are being issued every week. As demand increases, the emergency solution has become much more basic, as all we can do for many people is just to make sure they stay warm at night.”

Mr Wynne added, “A growing number of the people I meet now are families who’ve just become homeless. It’s also becoming more obvious to me that there are a huge number of people and families who are just one pay cheque away from homelessness.

“That’s the real consequence of austerity.”



Picture: Photoline

Congress assistant general secretary Peter Bunting addresses a Union Learning Representatives development conference in Belfast on March 28 as Stormont Employment & Learning Minister Stephen Farry looks on

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## Unite and SIPTU call over X Case legislation

UNITE has urged the Irish government to legislate immediately for the X Case, and to ensure that rights under such legislation are easily accessible.

The call was made as Unite joined with SIPTU to hand in a statement to the Taoiseach on April 23.

Speaking outside the Dáil,

UNITE regional equalities organiser Taryn Trainor said: “The trade union movement has a proud record of campaigning for equality and human rights.

“Access to abortion where there is a risk to the woman’s life, including from suicide, is a fundamental human rights issue, and Ireland’s failure to

legislate may run counter to its commitments under the UN’s Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women.

“UNITE is calling on the government to bring forward X Case legislation immediately, and to ensure that a woman can easily access her rights under the legislation.”

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## AUSTRALIA



Young CPSU supporters beam out the message...

# Public services are smiles better!

AUSTRALIA'S Community and Public Sector Union has escalated a major campaign to fight proposals that would inflict savage cuts on the public sector.

The Cuts Hurt drive follows a "council of war" by union activists in Canberra in late March organised in the run-up to federal elections later this year where the public sector is set to be a major battleground.

It is understood the Federal Opposition is pushing a David Cameron-style austerity agenda with plans

to cut at least 12,000 public service jobs and slash government spending by between \$50bn and \$70bn.

The Opposition Coalition led by Tony Abbott is also proposing large-scale outsourcing of public sector work to various multinationals.

CPSU national secretary Nadine Flood said the union was stepping up its Cuts Hurt campaign to protect public sector jobs and essential services.

"We will stand up for quality public services and

jobs. It is our duty on behalf of our members to take the fight to those who advocate the destruction of all that we hold dear as a union – jobs, rights and fair conditions.

"Public services will be at the heart of this election campaign and we will mount a robust defence against the cuts and plans by the Coalition and its acolytes to out-source large swathes of it to the private sector with Big Society-style reforms that will benefit no one other than large corporations."

Picture: CPSU Australia

## TAXATION

# Billions lost after cuts to tax collection services

RESEARCH released by the European Federation of Public Service Unions has highlighted the impact austerity policies have had on tax collection services across the EU.

The study, published on March 25, revealed that since the start of the crisis, instead of investing in tax services that collect much-needed revenues to finance public services, 24 out of 28 European governments have done the opposite and cut jobs in the sector.

In total, almost 50,000 jobs in tax services were axed between 2007 and 2011 with most governments planning further job losses.

The research shows the impact the cuts have had on the efficiency of tax administrations – fewer checks and controls, an increased backlog of work, the loss of experienced staff and punishing work demands on those still employed.

EPSU general secretary Carola Fischbach Pyttel said: "The report shows that reducing employment in tax services undermines the good intention to tackle tax dodging. Cutting jobs will cost money rather than save it."

The research also sets out examples of how much revenue employees bring in and how much is being lost by cutting staff.

In Denmark, it is estimated that 400 job cuts in tax administration cost more than €1.3 billion in non-collected tax. In the UK, €1.2 billion of additional revenue was lost following the shedding more than 3,300 staff.

Ms Fischbach Pyttel added: "It is estimated that around €1,000 billion a year is lost as revenue in the EU as a result of tax fraud and tax avoidance. We urge the European Parliament and Council to beef up the proposed EC action plan against tax fraud and support investments in tax services to make it effective."

An advertisement for Unite the Union. It features two women in the foreground, one in a green jacket and one in a purple jacket, both holding large blue and red striped flags with the "unite" logo. To the right is the "unite the UNION" logo. Below the image is a list of three bullet points: "PROMOTING EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS", "PROTECTING WORKERS' RIGHTS", and "PROMOTING JOBS", followed by "PROTECTING JOBS" and the website "www.unitetheunion.com".

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