

THE

FOR CAMPAIGN LATEST GO TO www.getupstandup.ie

UNION POST

PUBLISHED IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS



GET UP STAND UP

for a better, fairer way

**NATIONAL DAY
OF ACTION
NOV 6**



JOBS KEY TO SOLVING CRISIS IN ECONOMY

CONGRESS general secretary David Begg has insisted dealing with the jobs crisis is the single best way of turning around the Irish economy.

Slamming the Irish Government for dishing out massive amounts of public money to bail out the banks, he claimed this was in stark contrast to its paltry response to the 450,000 people now on the dole in the Republic.

Mr Begg's advice to ministers was: "Tackle the jobs crisis with the same level of energy and ingenuity that has been devoted to the banks and all else will start to fall into place."

It comes as Congress prepares an unprecedented mobilisation of 850,000 trade union members and their families in a series of rallies across Ireland North and South on November 6.

FULL STORY: Pages 4/5



Call: David Begg

Subscribe **FREE** at braziermedia@btinternet.com

UNION POST



Congress blueprint for a better future 6



McCarthy Report gets health warning 9



Young doctors in chain gang protest 11



LGB conference makes history 14



New look Liberty Hall revealed 19

UNION POST was produced by Brazier Media for the Irish Congress of Trade Unions

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

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

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



NUJ chief Seamus Dooley addresses crowd outside INN offices Pictures: RONAN BRADY

Protest as INN shuts up shop

THE National Union of Journalists held a demo against the closure of Independent Network News at the company's offices in Dublin earlier this month.

NUJ members were joined at the October 13 picket of the Mount Street offices by strikers from Coca-Cola and members of the Dublin Port cargo workers.

The protest was addressed by NUJ Irish secretary Séamus Dooley and by RTE's Emma O'Kelly.

Mr Dooley said the union wanted the redundancy notice withdrawn and claimed the board had "acted prematurely".

He added: "There is a statutory obligation for a 30-day consultation period and we believe they have breached that."

"There is a house agreement that requires us to exhaust procedures and go to the Labour Relations Commission."

Labour Party communications spokeswoman Liz McManus, who was at the protest, said the closure of INN raised serious questions about media ownership and regulation.

She added: "It seems to me the announcement of the closure was far too hasty and was made without any real consultation with staff or any genuine consideration of alternative business models."

Ms McManus pointed out that the make-up of the INN board was dominated by UTV and Communicorp and, while within the law, claimed this was entirely inappropriate.

Both UTV and Communicorp branch New-

stalk are understood to have bid for a contract to replace the INN service.

Ms McManus added: "This is indicative of an unhealthy concentration of media interests in a small number of hands and needs to be addressed."

INN announced last month it would cease providing news to radio stations at the end of October, with the loss of 16 jobs, because the business was no longer financially viable.

The company, set up in 1997, services 21 local radio stations across the country.

Speaking on Newstalk radio, Communications Minister Eamon Ryan expressed concern about the closure which he described as "a huge loss".

However, Mr Dooley dubbed the minister's words "a series of platitudes which give no comfort to staff".

He added that Mr Ryan appeared "to accept the closure of INN as a fait accompli".

NUJ members at INN have voted to take industrial action up to and including strike action in pursuit of a demand for a

withdrawal of the threat of redundancies on October 30. The NUJ has asked the company to refer the dispute to the Labour Relations Commission and to explore alternatives to wholesale redundancies.

The union has also sought an investigation into the actions of the board of the company by the Director of Corporate Enforcement.

AS NUJ members gathered at Lower Mount Street for the October 13 protest, they were warmly greeted by the staff at the nearby Angel Cafe, who served complimentary hot drinks in a welcome show of solidarity.

There was a less angelic response from a nameless individual in another office close by.

This penetrating economic analysis appeared in a window and was removed when photographers noticed it but not before NUJ activist Ronan Brady snapped the image for posterity.

UNIONS = THE DEATH OF IRISH BUSINESS. YOU'RE HELPING NO-ONE BUT YOURSELVES

NUJ CONFERENCE REPORTS P20

THE UNION POST Get it in A4



Burden must fall on those who can bear it

WHILE we argue and debate the best way forward, we must never forget that real people are suffering, especially those who have lost their jobs.

There are now 428,000 people on the live register. The corrosive effect of this – the risk of long term unemployment and the pressure on the public finances – emphasises the need for a holistic approach to the crisis. Simplistic solutions like the ‘short sharp correction’ don’t cut it at all.

Jobs – their protection and creation – must be at the heart of everything we do.

It is important to realise that finding a way out of our current crisis is not just an economic challenge. A country is much more than an economy and it is this point of departure that motivated Congress to launch the Get Up Stand Up campaign.

This is a political economy challenge of the first order. The National Economic & Social Council has rightly identified five sub crises – economic, fiscal, banking, social and reputational – which cannot be dealt with in a partial or sequential way. Our Better, Fairer Way document offers an alternative solution on these lines.

The response of most governments to the global recession is to try to compensate for a decline in private sector activity by means of a public stimulus.

Because of the unique failure of the banking/developer nexus, and the imprudent reliance on property-related transaction taxes, a large segment of our tax base has evaporated. Thus we have not reacted with a stimulus in response to unemployment as other countries have. In fact, public policy is focussed on reducing the public sector.

From recent discussions it is clear that these problems are viewed through different prisms by Government and Congress. In a nutshell, the Government intends to cut €4 billion from public expenditure in the forthcoming budget.

This is a major change in policy since April, when the stated intention was to achieve this adjustment through a combination of tax increases and expenditure cuts. The intention is also to restore public borrowing to a level of three per cent of GDP by 2013.

This is highly unrealistic and potentially catastrophic. It runs the risk of imparting a severe deflationary shock to the economy which could precipitate a prolonged slump, as happened in Japan during the ‘lost decade’ of the 1990s.

There is an alternative – which will not prevent pain and hardship – but it is better and fairer.

There is no iron rule which says that the adjustment has to be completed by 2013. Whatever other problems Ireland has, it has

at least entered this recession with the lowest debt to GDP ratio in Europe. The Bruges Group, a centre right policy body, recently published a paper forecasting that the average debt to GDP ratio in the EU would rise to 90 per cent and that several countries would exceed that. So we have some headroom to temporarily increase borrowing.

The Bruges paper suggests the desirability of a coordinated EU effort to get the average figure down to 75 per cent again by 2020. This is an even longer timescale than we would suggest.

But I do think it is instructive to look at how Britain is handling a similar challenge, although larger in scope because they have to achieve an adjustment of £100 billion.

Current treasury policy is to make the adjustment more than eight years. Both *The Economist* and *The Financial Times* have opined that fiscal tightening (cuts) should not begin until the economy has started to recover.

This is the context in which we have proposed elongating our adjustment period until 2017. To force a quicker pace runs the risk of not just collapsing public service provision in key areas, but of collapsing the economy.

HIGH STAKES

The Government is playing for very high stakes here, and they are playing with our chips!

The Better Fairer Way also involves progressive taxation. It is believed there is currently €1.8 billion out there in uncollected taxes.

Moreover the huge windfall gains made during the boom cannot all have evaporated. It stretches credulity to suggest that they have. It is also worth noting that Britain is introducing a 50 per cent rate of tax for very high earners. Nothing – except ideological blinkers – stops us from doing the same here.

We cannot see this process solely as an economic issue, in fact the social dimension is far more important. We need to create space for ourselves as a society to engage with the crushing problems of unemployment, home repossessions and the collapse of private sector pensions.

The Better Fairer Way has proposals on these, including keeping people in jobs by means of Government-supported work-sharing. Germany has successfully pioneered this approach and has kept 1.4 million people in employment, a fact that played no small part in getting Angela Merkel re-elected.

There is no pain free way out of our difficulties, whether in the private or public sectors. But what we can do is ensure that the heaviest burden is borne by those with the broadest shoulders.

THE WEB EDITION OF THE UNION POST IS SAVED IN A3 LANDSCAPE FORMAT
IF YOU WANT A4 EMAIL YOUR REQUEST TO braziermedia@btinternet.com



GET UP STAND UP
for a better, fairer way

NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION
NOV 6



JOBS: APPROACH



Picture: Congress

CONGRESS general secretary David Begg has slammed ministers for doing “virtually nothing” to save jobs and tackle rising unemployment.

Claiming that focusing on employment was the best way out of the economic crisis, he contrasted Government’s willingness to hand over massive sums to bankers with the paltry sums earmarked for safeguarding jobs.

Mr Begg, left, said: “What is the best way to tackle this crisis? In a word, jobs.”

“The more people we keep at work, the more revenue Government takes in tax and the less demand there is on social welfare.”

“To date, Government has done virtually nothing to tackle the jobs’ crisis, even as unemployment has risen to 450,000.”

“Contrast the €7 billion that has been handed over to Anglo Irish Bank – money we will never see again – with the paltry quarter of a billion the Government put into a small, limited scheme to help firms trading in the export sector.”

‘SHOCKING’

He labelled this “a shocking illustration” of where Government’s priorities lay and pointed out that when Congress proposed a €1 billion Job Creation & Protection Plan in May, ministers insisted there were no resources available for the initiative.

At the time, Congress said it was vital that “all the machinery of the state [be] harnessed to the goal of tackling the unemployment crisis”.

The Congress plan called for “a range of new, innovative and creative measures” to protect jobs, create new employment as well as to boost training initiatives and protect people’s incomes.

The Government was warned that unless ministers treated the jobs crisis “as being at least equal in magnitude and scale” with the banking crisis, they would simply not be able to deal with it.

Detailed proposals included a wide variety of measures designed to ensure that redundancy



Picture: Brazier Media

BROADCAST BOOS

Protestors outside Broadcasting House in Belfast vent their fury at the appearance of BNP leader Nick Griffin on BBC’s Question Time programme earlier this month



THAT WILL WORK

would be "a last resort". It included ideas such as job rotation, state support for short-term working, a social employment programme to meet gaps in social infrastructure, reforming the social welfare system, changes to employment law and a more focused, strategic approach to training.

In part as a response to the Congress plan, the Government issued a framework document containing proposals on jobs, pensions and home repossessions in June.

One of the proposals included a €250m Temporary Employment Subsidy Scheme.

However, Congress criticised the package for its "poverty of ambition" and slammed the Government's failure to allocate the funds needed to deal with the jobs crisis.

Insisting that "a far greater urgency if not a sense of national emergency" was needed, Mr Begg pointed out that in at least eight other European countries, governments have intervened to protect and support under-threat jobs.

Thus, Germany currently has 1.4 million people on state-supported short-term working.

In effect, the support from German government coffers allows companies faced with a dip in demand to introduce shorter working hours and skills retraining.

The advantage is that people stay in employment, upgrade their skills and maintain a reasonable standard of living.

They also retain spending power, avoiding the deflation of domestic consumption that has happened here.

Without this scheme, German authorities estimate that an additional 500,000 people would be out of work and the national jobless total four million. Mr Begg said: "The German scheme uses social insurance money – social welfare – to make up any difference in wages for workers on short time. This maintains spending power and helps maintain domestic demand."

'Tackle the jobs crisis with the same level of energy & ingenuity that has been devoted to the banks and all else will start to fall into place'

He added that even the traditionally conservative Financial Times has stated economies adopting these measures are coping far better with the recession, adding: "There is no reason why we cannot introduce a similar scheme here."

Mr Begg said: "The evidence and experience is all there. We can learn some very useful lessons from our continental colleagues, if we choose to. Or we can do nothing."

He also claimed that equally prompt Government intervention could help prevent a "wipeout" in the construction industry as well as going a long way towards fill gaps in social and public infrastructure.

A National Recovery Bond could also be used to deliver new schools, clinics and better public transport.

Mr Begg added: "Tackle the jobs crisis with the same level of energy and ingenuity that has been devoted to the banks and all else will start to fall into place."

Rally with us against cuts

THE NIC-ICTU has called on working people across the North to take to the streets on November 6 to protest at cuts in public services and to underline the need for action on jobs.

Congress assistant secretary Peter Bunting said: "Public services have been subjected to so many so-called 'efficiencies' that there is nothing left to cut except vital frontline services.

"This is incredibly short-sighted. The fact that we have lost 43,000 jobs in the past year means that the private sector can no longer play its full role in adding stimulus and demand to the economy.

"The fact is that the private sector is now hugely dependent on the public sector. Private sector suppliers to the public sector will suffer from cuts in the schools and health budget. Retailers depend upon the spending power of public sector workers.

"Action is required now for offering protection for workers who have lost their jobs, such as a Workers' Protection Fund which places their right to a fair redundancy settlement first in the queue when companies go bankrupt.

"Similarly, no worker should be threatened with homelessness, especially from banks which depend upon the public's generosity."

He added: "Now is the time to make known the public opposition to these cuts in services and the loss of jobs in the private sector. Join with the trade unions in showing your opposition to the cuts. Rally with us on November 6."



Produced in association with Congress

WE'RE HERE TO KEEP YOU

POSTED



GET UP STAND UP for a better, fairer way

NATIONAL DAY
OF ACTION
NOV 6



AT the centre of the Congress plan, There is Still a Better, Fairer Way, is a conviction that in a sustainable recovery plan the burden of adjustment must fall on those most able to carry it.

Five guiding principles are outlined in the Congress document which was published on October 22. These are:

- The period of adjustment must be extended over a longer timeframe, to 2017 instead of 2013 as the Government suggests. Debt to GDP ratio should be allowed to rise in line with that of other EU countries;
- Cutting incomes and services makes no social or economic sense and will do serious damage to the economy and our public service infrastructure;
- Investment must be made in keeping people in their jobs. A National Recovery Bond should be promoted to raise funding for infrastructural projects;
- Peoples' homes must be protected from the threat of repossession. Those who have lost their jobs and incomes must not also face losing their homes; and
- The tax base must be rebuilt on the principles of fairness and equity and ensure all pay their fair share.

JOBS JOBS JOBS

Congress claimed from the onset of the crisis that the most urgent priority for Government had to be the protection of jobs.

To date, the official response has been confused and incoherent, the result of attempting to grapple with the problem sequentially rather than developing a coherent overall strategy.

There was April's 'emergency' budget, the NAMA legislation, the McCarthy Report and the Commission on Taxation – all serving to reinforce a sense of continued and ongoing crisis.

But Congress points out that if the above list is taken to represent Government's key priorities, it is telling – and shocking – that it contains no initiative on jobs.

And the lack of priority accorded to this fundamental issue was confirmed what Congress admits was a "meandering and frustrating engagement" with Government, which ended in late June.

A primary goal was to convince ministers that the jobs crisis was, at the very least, of the same magnitude as the banking crisis. Unfortunately that attempt failed.

This was in stark contrast to the speed that characterised the response to the banking crisis.

The Government remains fixated on banking to the virtual exclusion of all else.

Equally worrying is that the Government appears to have learned nothing from the last 12 months and nothing whatsoever from the experiences of other countries over the same period.

Globally, it is not disputed that the policy of pumping money into national economies – in the form of economic stimulus packages – has prevented a recession mutating into a depression.

Equally, other governments in the EU see the logic in intervening to protect employment, to keep people in work and help create new jobs. Congress insists these policies are neither avant garde, exceptional or radical, just plain common sense.

But here at home, the Government appears to exist in some parallel universe, one in which the logic and reason is turned on its head.

It appears Government is willing to sacrifice society in order to save one sector of the economy.

But Congress argues that ultimately, their policy approach could destroy both.

DEFLATION

Some pundits have gone to great lengths to assert that taking substantial sums of money out of the economy amounts to a guaranteed formula for national recovery.

But Congress thinks this a recipe for disaster and a theory based on supposition, hope and a good degree of blind faith.

This 'silver bullet' theory is simply not backed by

PLAN THAT IS FAIR AND EQUITABLE

**FIVE STEP
APPROACH**

**TACKLE
JOBS
CRISIS**

**STOP
CUTS IN
INCOMES**

the evidence.]Even those who advocate cuts – such as the ESRI – acknowledge it will exacerbate deflation and unemployment.

The proponents claim that, over time, such cuts will serve to restore our 'competitiveness', even though wages make up only a small proportion of the overall competitiveness issue.

Congress points out that unless the real agenda is to reduce wages to a developing world level, the impact will be insignificant.

Thus, it is clear that those pushing cuts as a recipe for recovery have based the plan on nothing more than a hunch.

But what is absolutely clear is that cutting peoples' incomes and services will depress the economy further and lead to more job losses which in turn will put more pressure on public resources.

Congress warns that in such a scenario, the Republic would quickly find itself in economic and social freefall and end up like Japan in the 1990s, locked into a 10-year slump.

The Congress plan also points out that is wrong to cut funding for essential public services – at a time when overall need is growing – and insists that taking €4 billion out of public spending will collapse crucial elements of public service provision.

Added to this there is the folly that is NAMA, the 'black hole' for the banking system that sucks in all available resources and elevates the needs of private bondholders and shareholders above the rights of the country's citizens.

Congress points out that this Government stubbornly refuses to learn the lessons from Ireland's past and the experiences of others.

In fact its current strategy, Congress claims, constitutes a real danger to the long-term viability of our economy and the cohesion of our society.

COMMENTARIAT

Of course the Government is not entirely alone in advocating this dangerous approach.

Throughout the course of this crisis, they have been assisted by many within the so-called commentariat, whose only real argument with the powers that be is that they do not propose to cut deep enough or fast enough.

Congress characterises many of these pundits as no more than "cheerleaders" for Government pol-

icy, "fans with laptops and privileged media access".

They have used that access to build a pseudo-intellectual framework to justify cuts in social welfare, the Minimum Wage and essential public services.

In their hands, the unthinkable becomes utterly plausible. Thus we are constantly reassured that ongoing deflation means that social welfare recipients will soon qualify for inclusion on the rich list, while it is received wisdom that the public sector is 'bloated' and 'swollen', its cost having 'spiraled out of control'.

From the same quarters can be heard the assertion that tax rises would be 'deflationary' and also pointless, because there are simply no wealthy left in Ireland. Their every last penny has evaporated!

Congress alleges that while there is some consistency in their case, there is also "intellectual dishonesty on a grand scale".

How can tax rises for the wealthy – who hoard more and spend abroad – be characterised as 'deflationary', while cuts in the incomes of lower and middle earners – who constitute the great bulk of spending in the economy – are presented as a stimulus package in disguise?

Why ignore the fact that the bulk of current deflation is comprised of mortgage repayments that have minimal impact on social welfare recipients, while the price of basic foodstuffs and other essentials have either risen or seen only minor falls?

Is it acknowledged that it was not rapidly rising public spending that caused the shortfall in our public finances, but a rapidly shrinking tax base?

It is like claiming the boat sank because it was in the water and not because of the gaping hole below the waterline.

The tax base was dismantled from the late 1990s on, in order to fund and facilitate the Great Government Giveaway – tax rates for the wealthy and business slashed, tax subsidies and shelters introduced... millionaires paying no tax with the impri-matur of the state.

And all that extra cash sloshing around our system went not on productive investment, but to fuel property speculation, purchase lavish trophy homes and generally push up prices for everyone else.

Of course to keep the focus on 'high' public spending, it is necessary to keep the focus off the



cent in US, 82 per cent in the UK and an astonishing 194 per cent in Japan. In truth, Ireland's net debt position is much better than that of many other countries.

On October 6 the NTMA reported that it "has in effect secured some €28 billion of long term funding."

The agency had borrowed for pre-funding of next year's borrowing requirement and remarked that this "puts Ireland in a very strong position going into the markets in 2010. Ireland had cash balances in excess of €20 billion in the Exchequer Account at the beginning of the year, in addition to the €16 billion assets of the National Pensions' Reserve Fund.

"The Exchequer cash balances currently stand at €23 billion... not counting the €7bn received from today's deal."

Thus the NTMA has some €30 billion in cash on its hands. This gives the lie to the notion that we would not be able to raise new money.

Indeed, if necessary, we could hold off raising new money for a whole year and a half.

While the NTMA is to be congratulated on its prudence, the high level of cash borrowed means that Ireland is paying interest at 4.6 per cent on the more recent loans within this sum, while only getting one per cent on it. Congress insists it would be better to spend more of this investing in jobs and people.

SCAREMONGERING

Congress also hit out at Minister Mary Harney's recent intervention with her claim that the International Monetary Fund would "come in overnight" if Government did not get its way.

The Government had to rush out a very prompt 'clarification' of her remarks.

According to Congress, Mrs Harney's exaggerations were but one more example of the general hysteria that has characterised the official campaign to ensure that low and middle income earners bear the brunt of this crisis. But these repeated apocalyptic warnings are actually draining all confidence from the economy.

This Government is now borrowing heavily for day to day spending and also for investment.

Congress believes we can afford slightly more borrowing and for that money to be put to good use in the economy.

Unfortunately, much of the current borrowing is being used prop up the banks, not to create jobs or help vulnerable people.

It is hardly conceivable that Government can borrow €4 billion to prop up Anglo Irish Bank, with no likelihood of any return to the taxpayer.

In addition, they have taken another €3bn of our members' taxes from the National Pension Reserve Fund and put it into AIB and BOI.

If Government can find €7 billion to prop up the banks, it can certainly borrow a little more to extend our recovery period.

TAX THE RICH

No one could have made the a stronger case for more taxes on the rich than Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan, when he admitted a mere four per cent of earners paid 48 per cent of all tax.

This fact reveals the inequity of the Irish income distribution. It is even more telling when top potential taxpayers – the Tax Exiles – pay nothing at all. And many other top earners only pay at 20 per cent, under the new Minimum Tax regime.

Congress disagrees with Mr Lenihan when he claims "there is no pot of gold."

The same refrain was heard in the 1980s, before Ansbacher and all the other sordid tales of evasion and avoidance.

And what exactly did happen to the huge sums of money made during the boom? All of it was hardly lost on the stock market.

tax base (Ireland actually spends less than the EU15 average on public services).

Keep the focus off the tax base and there is no demand to reform and rebuild it. Point the finger at 'newly-enriched' welfare recipients – in contrast to the impoverished wealthy – and pressure builds for cuts on those who can least afford it.

SHARP PAIN

The default mode of most neoclassical economists is to call for a dose of 'sharp pain'.

But Congress thinks they are not just wrong but doubly wrong especially under current circumstances, where the administering of such pain is likely to kill or render the patient comatose.

In its recent commentary, the ESRI noted that in the first nine months of 2009: "...the total exchequer borrowing requirement increased by almost €11 billion. However, a large portion of this addition was due to increases in non-voted expenditure, primarily the €4 billion injection of funds into Anglo Irish Bank, plus the frontloading of payments in the National Pension Reserve Fund (NPRF).

"Indeed voted expenditure fell slightly, relative to 2008, so the proximate cause of the widening of the deficit has been the continued deterioration in tax revenues."

So public spending has already fallen. And it is already among the lowest of the developed economies, as a percentage of GDP.

The ESRI also concedes what the likely impact of sharp cuts would be: "The consequences of such a further sharp correction are, by our estimation, significantly deflationary. Were there to be a neutral budget in 2010, then our estimates would suggest that the recovery in GDP would occur much earlier in the year leading to positive growth in GDP for the year as a whole.

"Nevertheless, we do believe that it is necessary to implement these measures in full next year to avoid a widening of the deficit and associated increase in interest payments."

In other words, it is not only deflationary but will set back any prospective recovery. For that reason, Congress believes the impact of any process of adjustment could be made more bearable, if the timeframe is extended. The Government plan is to compress the adjustment into the years leading up to 2013. Congress claims this

could – and should – be stretched further, perhaps to 2017. Already the French Government has indicated it will be extending its own adjustment until 2015.

INTEREST

But what of the claim that increased interest payments will result from extending our borrowing over a longer timeframe?

Congress views this argument as erring too far on the side of caution and pessimism and appears to consider only worst case scenarios.

Indeed, the ESRI is not alone in having pointed to the likelihood of the beginning of a global upturn, towards the end of 2010.

If that happens, then the Institute itself points out that the "heavy lifting will be done by other economies" as Ireland recovers.

In practical terms this means that servicing the debt will be far less of a problem and certainly less painful.

Thus, there is a very serious and fundamental judgment call to be made: do we inflict severe pain today, in the hope that it delivers the results that some commentators claim that it will?

Or do we resist the urge to cut to the bone, spread the adjustment over a longer period instead and avoid the sort of catastrophic economic freefall that seems certain to follow further deflation?

Given that there is a far greater degree of certainty attaching to the impact of further deflation in this economy – including the certain loss of jobs – then the only credible decision is to extend the timeframe and spread the burden.

The ESRI estimates that by the end of 2010 "gross general government debt would be equivalent to 76 per cent of GDP. Allowing for the build-up of exchequer cash deposits and monies held in the National Pension Reserve Fund (NPRF), the net debt figure would be 51 per cent, up 40 percentage points from 2007."

But while those figures might look alarming it is important to note that they are not out of line with many other countries.

For example, EU Commission data shows Ireland's gross Government debt rising to almost 80 per cent of GDP next year, compared to 82 per cent in the EU15, 101 per cent in Belgium, 92 per



THOUSANDS BALLOTTED IN INDUSTRIAL ACTION

FIGHTBACK ON THE FRONTLINE

UNIONS representing 100,000 frontline public service workers are to begin balloting members for industrial action in case the Government delivers on its threats to introduce further cuts in pay and services.

The executives of the six unions in the 24/7 Frontline Service Alliance decided to escalate their campaign at a joint meeting in Liberty Hall, Dublin on October 22.

They also decided to launch a publicity campaign to highlight the essential role frontline service workers play in Irish society.

This follows reports back from the four regional meetings held by the Alliance over the past month, attended by more than 5,000 nurses, gardai, firefighters, ambulance drivers, prison officers and other frontline workers.

PROTESTS

It comes after the Alliance met with Fine Gael leader Enda Kenny and Labour Party chief Eamon Gilmore on October 21.

The Alliance will be supporting Congress protests in Dublin and other centres throughout the Republic on November 6.

It will follow this with its own march to Leinster House on November 11 and a national canvass of TDs on the weekend of November 14 and 15.

If the Government disregards the need to maintain frontline services at present levels and acknowledge that members of the Alliance have already contributed their share to restoring the public finances – with cuts in take home pay of up to 12 per cent – industrial action will be undertaken before the end of November.

The nature and extent of that action will be decided as the campaign progresses over the coming weeks.

At the meetings with opposition party leaders

Garda Representative Association vice president Damien McCarthy pointed out that senior members of the force were already voting with their feet. Only 190 members had left in 2008 but the figure could be at least 700 this year.

Joe Dirwan, general secretary of the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors, said members were very concerned at the departure of the most experienced members of the force at a time of recession.

A third of adult males under 25 were unemployed and crime rates were rising rapidly, while 60 per cent of the force had less than 10 years service and 40 per cent had under five years service.

INO deputy general secretary David Hughes has pointed out 1,000 nurses would be needed to assist in the swine flu vaccine programme and the HSE had indicated that these would be redeployed from other services.

This, he insisted, would result in further cut-backs and bed closures in our hospitals.

SIPTU national nursing official Louise O'Reilly claimed two-thirds of her union's members were low to middle income PAYE workers in the private sector who relied on the frontline services of public sector members such as nurses and firefighters. Unlike the better off in our society they could not jump the queues.

Prison Officers Association general secretary John Clinton pointed out his organisation had negotiated a huge rationalisation programme with the Department of Justice in 2005 which had resulted in massive savings. His members' starting salary was now only €23,000 a year.

Mr Clinton contrasted the cuts aimed at frontline staff in the prisons with the total failure of the McCarthy Report to identify any savings in prison administration, even though numbers had

increased from 20 to 140 through the reorganisation programme.

Aisling Culhane, research and development advisor with the Psychiatric Nurses Association, said community service programmes were already being cut back or cancelled through lack of funding.

The Labour Party leader Eamon Gilmore told the Alliance delegation that the Labour Party had consistently defended the public service and that it was wrong for frontline service workers to be targeted for cuts.

But he added that the propaganda war was being won by powerful vested interests committed to ensuring the wealthy – and those who created the crisis – did not foot the bill.

EASY TARGET

Mr Gilmore agreed any changes in pay and conditions had to be brokered through negotiation and agreement.

Fine Gael leader Enda Kenny said that unfortunately the frontline services had always been seen as an easy target for cuts.

He accepted that, given the anti-social hours and difficult work they carried out, frontline workers regarded allowances, shift premiums and overtime payments as part of their core pay.

Mr Kenny insisted that whatever changes were introduced in the Budget had to be fair.

Fine Gael deputy leader Richard Bruton said nurses and gardai did not cause the economic crisis and insisted their work was valued by the party.

The party's spokesperson on Enterprise, Trade and Employment said he accepted allowances and overtime were part of core pay for frontline workers and unions had sound ideas on how public services could be reformed.

UNITE is to ballot its members on industrial action following a meeting of union officials in Dublin on October 22.

Members are to be asked to give their leaders the power to take whatever action is necessary to protect jobs, pensions and pay, up to and including strike action.

UNITE has more than 60,000 members, and its public sector membership extends across education, local authority, health and state agencies.

The ballot will be held over the next two weeks as part of UNITE's preparations for a national day of protest on November 6.

NURSES BALLOTTED OVER THREAT TO PAY p10

Marine Terminal dispute over

THE 15-week dispute at Marine Terminals Ltd in Dublin Port has ended following a decision by the company to accept a Labour Court recommendation on job retention and redundancies.

The Labour Court recommended an improved redundancy package of six weeks inclusive of statutory entitlements and recommended the parties engage directly with a view to resolving other matters including the number of jobs to be retained.

It recommended that redundancies should take place on a voluntary basis, initially. It also recommended the selection criteria

for any further redundancies should be agreed between the parties.

Issues relating to the terms and conditions of those who return to work and the specific numbers of jobs to be retained have yet to be finally agreed.

According to SIPTU regional secretary Christy McQuillan the parties will begin discussions immediately to give effect to the full recommendations of the Labour Court.

He said: "We welcome the company's acceptance of the Labour Court recommendation with a view to ending this long running dispute. We welcome the improved redun-

dancy offer and note the courts recommendation that the parties engage directly with a view to resolving other issues.

"It is also noted that the court has recommended the parties, should they fail to agree on any of these issues, enter a process of arbitration."

Christy McQuillan, on behalf the SIPTU members involved in the dispute, expressed his thanks for the help of local communities in East Wall, Irishtown and Ringsend, the International Transport Federation and other unions in helping to secure a resolution to the dispute.



MASSIVE YES FOR STRIKE ACTION

IMPACT members have voted overwhelmingly in favour of strikes if the Government moves to impose a second public service pay cut.

The union announced on October 21 that its public service members had backed industrial action by 86% to 14% on a 69% turnout in a national ballot.

This compares to a 65% vote for industrial action – just short of the two-thirds required under IMPACT's rules – on a 53% turnout in a similar ballot last March.

General secretary Peter McLoone said strikes now seemed inevitable because of the Government's refusal to consider alternatives to a second public service pay cut in eight months.

He added: "This ballot represents a massive shift in opinion among public servants since the imposition of the so-called pension levy last March.

"Every public servant has already suffered a 7.5% pay cut this year, yet the Government is clearly determined to come back again and again to slash their family incomes.

"Our members don't want strikes or the disruption they will bring, but the Government's refusal to consider alternatives means strikes now seem inevitable as public servants seek to defend what they have left.

Mr McLoone said IMPACT had offered to negotiate an alternative to pay cuts, in the form of a massive transformation of public services to do much more with less money.

But the Government had not even responded to this initiative.



Boots force cuts in pay and rake in €20m profit

MANDATE is to ballot more than 900 of its members at 57 Boots retail stores across the Republic on taking industrial action.

The move follows a series of meetings between Mandate representatives and Boots arising out of management proposals to introduce cost-saving measures.

Talks collapsed after it was revealed the company is still extremely profitable and posted profits of €20 million locally for the year to March 2008.

Boots has now threatened to terminate all previously negotiated agreements with Mandate.

The union claims the firm is now attempting to force pay cuts of up to 15.5% along with a reduction in terms and conditions of their employees despite still being a highly profitable company with current cash reserves in excess of €70 million.

Some of the key changes in terms and conditions include:

- 15.5% wage reduction at the top scale of pay from €14.20 to €12 per hour,
- 25% reduction in public holiday pay,
- 25% reduction in Sunday premiums, and
- Increased flexibility in weekend work for full time staff.

The union claims it has been left with no option but to ballot its members on the following issues:

- Management's threat to terminate all existing union/company collective agreements on November 17,

- Management's intention to unilaterally impose reduced pay rates and inferior terms and conditions of employment, and

- Boots' refusal to attend the Labour Court for a hearing with Mandate to deal with these issues.

Mandate assistant general secretary, Gerry Light claimed any cuts to workers' terms and conditions should be considered as a blatantly opportunistic attempt to use the recession to boost shareholder profits.

He said: "This is quite clearly an attempt to maximise profits at the expense of ordinary hard working individuals who have helped to make Boots the most successful pharmacy-led, health and beauty retail chain in Ireland.

"Boots has been operating very successfully in Ireland since 1996. Since then Mandate has negotiated several agreements with Boots all of which have helped to increase profits and productivity for the company.

"Due to Mandate's refusal to accept the legitimacy of Boots' cost-saving initiatives, management now want to tear up these agreements and press ahead with changes to terms and conditions which will impact negatively on the standards of living of our members."

The ballots for strike action in Boots and will be counted on Friday, November 6 – a date which happens to coincide with Congress's national day of protest.



Broderick: Legal moves
Picture: IBOA

IBOA in Ulster Bank legal bid

THE IBOA is preparing a legal move against Ulster Bank/First Active for breach of contract.

The action is being taken on behalf of 5,000 members in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Speaking at a conference in Athlone on October 22, general secretary Larry Broderick claimed a substantial "fighting fund" had been set up to run cases against Ulster Bank Group over its failure to honour existing staff contracts.

He told delegates: "Put simply, our contention is that by failing to honour these contractual payments, the bank has in effect made an illegal de-

duction from our members' wage packets.

"IBOA is very conscious of the need to avoid unnecessary hardship to the customers of Ulster Bank with whom our members have attempted to build a positive relationship. So in order to avoid industrial action at this time, we are now asking our legal advisers to prepare a legal action against Ulster Bank in both the Republic and Northern Ireland.

"It is regrettable the bank's refusal to negotiate under the agreed mediation process has forced us into having to contemplate taking this issue

through the courts. But unfortunately we have been left with no alternative."

He added: "It reflects very badly on a bank that aspires to treat its customers fairly that it has such difficulty in treating its own staff fairly."

The announcement follows Ulster Bank's declaration on October 19 that it does not intend to return to the mediation process.

The bank indicated that it intended to offer new contracts of employment to staff.

Mr Broderick added: "These new contracts are significantly inferior to the existing contracts."

DRUMM DEAL

INO hits out at 'double standards' over bonus

THE Irish Nurses Organisation has called on the HSE to honour wage commitments to staff after its decision to meet all contractual obligations to CEO Brendan Drumm on pay.

Hitting out at "double standards", the union insisted the health body treat its employees in like manner – and set out why:

- The INO pointed to increased productivity by frontline staff,

- In contrast to its approach on salary for its CEO, HSE sought in recent months to reduce pay and allowances for nurses, widwives and other frontline staff,

- The union also noted the failure of HSE to fill essential frontline posts. The INO claimed Prof Drumm's reported €70,000 bonus would pay for two newly-qualified staff nurses, and

- HSE's unilateral withdrawal of performance related payments to all other staff grades including Directors of Nursing was in contrast with the decision to forge ahead with Prof Drumm's package on pay.

INO general secretary Liam Doran said: "This decision of the HSE will only confirm, and consolidate, the on-going campaign to fight any further cuts to the pay and conditions of frontline staff in the health service and indeed throughout the public service. This is the most recent example of the blatant double standards which are now the norm in Irish society. This practice sees senior management protect their interests while imposing savage and damaging cuts on their staff.

"The INO will now be insisting that the HSE

adopt the same approach to our members and as it has to its CEO and withdraw the threat of further cuts to existing pay and conditions of employment.

"Justice and equity will have to apply in these situations and the HSE has now laid down a marker which they must consistently apply to all their staff or face the consequences."

Drumm: Bonus storm



Picture: HSE

IMPACT pays 'interest' to payout deal

IMPACT has also commented upon Prof Drumm's reported €70,000 bonus.

In a statement, the union said it "noted with interest" this payment covered work done in 2007 and claimed the HSE had introduced a recruitment embargo during September of that year.

IMPACT pointed out the health body had said this was in re-

sponse to "a financial overrun".

Yet this embargo subsequently had a severe impact on service provision causing "considerable hardship to service users and staff."

The statement continued: "IMPACT believes it is inappropriate this kind of approach to health service delivery should be awarded with a bonus worth

around 20% of what is a very generous salary.

"That the bonus should be awarded at a time when resources are supposed to be scarce, and in a year when employees of the HSE had their pay cut by 7.5% by the so-called 'pension levy', only adds to the sense of injustice IMPACT members feel."



Picture: INO

INO chief Liam Doran addressing INO members outside Cork University Hospital in 2007

Nurses balloted over threats to pay

MORE than 40,000 nurses and midwives in the Republic are being balloted on industrial action over threats to pay.

Announcing the decision on October 6, the Executive Council of the Irish Nurses Organisation claimed the mandate was being sought should the government or employers attempt to further reduce the pay and conditions of its

members. In a statement, the INO said nurses and midwives, along with other public service workers, had already suffered a significant cut in pay with the 7.5 per cent pension levy.

General secretary Liam Doran said: "This ballot is being commenced against the background of the Government repeatedly stating that further cuts

in the pay and conditions of public services are being actively considered. This fact, when taken with the McCarthy Report and the government's approach to the banks, where anything they require is immediately conceded, has left our Executive Council with no choice but to prepare for major industrial action to defend our members' very livelihoods."



Doctors link up to protest at jail threat looming over Dr Binayak Sen during Amnesty protest outside Queen's, Belfast

Queen's pardon call for Dr Sen

A "CHAIN gang" of shackled doctors paraded outside Queen's University in Belfast earlier this month to highlight the case of Indian paediatrician Dr Binayak Sen.

Amnesty International claims Dr Sen was initially imprisoned on "trumped up charges" in May 2007.

It is alleged he passed letters between imprisoned members of a banned leftist group, despite his visits being supervised and facilitated by prison authorities.

The human rights group insist his only crime was to highlight the negative impact of government policies on poor communities in central India.

Speaking at the October 15 event and referring to the university's festival, Amnesty's programme director Patrick Corrigan said: "Festival time is an opportunity to celebrate our freedoms. This year Amnesty is giving festival-goers a chance to bring justice to a man who desperately needs our help."

Dr Sen is currently on bail awaiting trial.



Pictures: Kevin Cooper photoline@supanet.com

A TRADE UNION PUB FOR TRADE UNIONISTS



Lunches served Mon - Sat 12pm - 3pm

Talking bowls served Fri & Sat 3.30pm - 6pm

Live music 6 nights per week

Monthly art exhibitions

The best choice of local &

worldwide beers in the city

No TVs or gaming machines



REAL BEER • REAL FOOD • REAL MUSIC • REAL PEOPLE

THE JOHN HEWITT 51 Donegall Street, Belfast BT1 2FH. 028 90233768

UNIONS FORGE LINKS TO BUILD A BETTER WORLD

MANDATE has hosted a major conference on the theme of building alliances with sister unions across the world to help create better working conditions for retail workers.

The UNI Global Commerce Conference heard delegates stress the need for unions to work together and provide a strong voice for employees of multinationals.

A total of 200 trade unionists from 36 countries and drawn from 51 unions attended the three-day event at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Santry, Dublin.

A highlight of the conference was the signing of a global union recognition agreement by the Inditex Group – which owns Zara and Pull & Bear – on October 2.

Welcoming the development, Mandate called for more global retailers to follow suit.

General secretary John Douglas said: "This global agreement with Inditex is a true breakthrough in this difficult economic time and also a breakthrough for the trade union movement in general.

"With more multinational retailers operating than ever before, unions need to make a joint effort to ensure workers are protected and are provided with a decent standard of living into the future.

"The time has come for a different set of values to underpin our economy and our society.

"This global conference in Dublin is about providing decent work for workers in Ireland and throughout the world.

"Employers, and in particular retailers, need to start thinking more along the lines of corporate social responsibility and provide their staff with a decent working environment."

UNI is helping to build some of these alliances at companies where it has global agreements with management.

The alliances are intended to ensure these deals are enforced.

UNI general secretary Philip Jennings told delegates: "Global agreements are just pieces of paper. What makes them real is our workers on the ground.

"While the signing of global agreements usually leads to better conditions and greater rights for workers at multinationals, we believe that an agreement is only as strong as UNI and the unions' ability to enforce it."



Smiles from home: Japanese delegation, above, and representatives from Turkey, below left. Presentations are made to the Mandate team, top, at the conference



Mandate general secretary John Douglas, Inditex deputy chairman Pablo Isla and UNI Global chief Philip Jennings at agreement signing

Pictures: Moya Nolan

'Brain overload' fears

A FINNISH researcher has claimed firms are disregarding the effects of "brain overloads" on over-stretched employees.

Prof Kiti Müller, who heads up the Brain and Work Research Centre at the Institute of Occupation Health in Helsinki, claimed that in the past it has been difficult to measure the problem.

But she believes experts will soon be able to gauge the impact demanding mental tasks have on workers, who may also be suffering from pre-existing problems such as stress, sleeping disorders and diabetes.

A source said: "Addressing these problems is critical. All work requires planning and thinking. Overloading the brain increases human error and a fatigued brain doesn't function well."

UNISON backs job drive

UNISON has backed the UK government's swine flu vaccination programme and urged health workers to get the jab.

Karen Jennings, UNISON's head of health, said: "We are recommending all health workers have the swine flu vaccination, in addition to the seasonal winter flu one."

She claimed the union would work with Department of Health to ensure staff get the right information so they can make informed choices.

Ms Jennings added: "There should be no shortcuts to safety when it comes to getting the vaccine up and running.

"Ultimately, having the injection is down to personal choice, but we are supportive of the move."

'Recession proof' primary sector



Nunan: Invest call

INTO general secretary Sheila Nunan has called for primary education to be "recession proofed" against the effects of the economic downturn.

Speaking at an event marking World Teachers Day in Dublin on October 5, she pressed the government to invest in the sector.

Pointing out that teachers at primary level in the Republic taught 20 per cent more children than in other EU countries, Ms Nunan said: "This year, over a thousand primary school teachers are unemployed as a direct result of cutbacks in education.

"These teachers must be used to reduce class sizes." She also flagged up the quality of teachers' work confirmed in a recent report by the World Economic Forum which ranked the quality of Irish primary education ninth out of 131 countries.

This was in contrast with investment in primary education which placed Ireland in 35th place.

Ms Nunan added: "Turning inadequate and uncompetitive investment in primary education into quality and a competitive advantage is due to the ability and dedication of Irish teachers."

TEACHERS union ASTI has warned of the devastating impact cuts will have on secondary level education in Ireland.

General secretary John White claimed the future prospects of young people were being harmed as a result.

He said: "The existing education cutbacks are devastating the system, with subjects dropped, higher and ordinary level pupils learning in the same class, and programmes for disadvantaged pupils being eliminated.

"The cutbacks will have negative consequences for the future life chances of many pupils."



HORROR LOOMS

A child textile worker at his loom in Pakistan. It has been claimed that as many as half of the children working in Pakistani sweatshops die before they are 12.

Picture: International Labour Organisation/ M Schapira

BUYERS BEWARE

Garment workers chief blasts fashion houses

A LEADING trade unionist has claimed high street fashion comes at a huge cost to Third World textile workers.

Speaking at the University of Pavia in Italy on September 25, Neil Kearney, who leads the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation, highlighted the many abuses in the industry.

Pointing out that long working hours, low pay and harsh treatment were the norm, he said: "Millions of workers in these sectors – the fashion industry" have become little more than slaves.

"Most are women and most are young, some very young.

"All are spinning and weaving, bleaching and dyeing, cutting and stitching, pressing and packing fashion items primarily for brands and retail-

ers in North America, Europe and Japan." Mr Kearney claimed "armies of children – some as young as four" were made to work for a meagre ration of food.

He added: "Many, in countries like India have been bought for a few euros from their parents or have been kidnapped and then trafficked into slavery far from home.

"They help in textile mills, they glue shoes, and they embroider garments. Sometimes the sweatshops they work in are so ill-lighted and dark they lose their eyesight.

"They are beaten when they cry for their mothers, when they make mistakes or when they fall asleep from exhaustion. In Pakistan it is estimated that half of such children are dead before the age of 12."

Mr Kearney called on people to ask

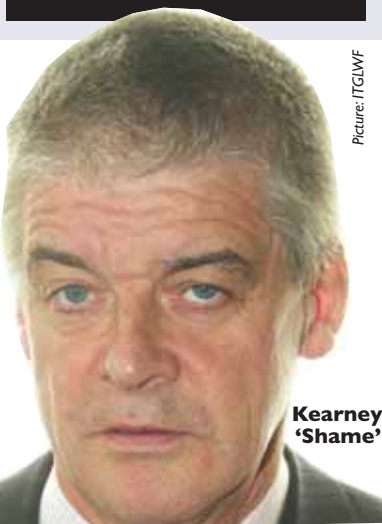
themselves if fashion was worth so much suffering.

He added: "We also have to ask whether those who place orders in such hell-holes should not be subject to prosecution and imprisonment here in Europe for aiding and abetting this cruel exploitation and destruction of young lives."

He outlined how conditions had actually worsened in the last decade with working hours increasing by 25pc and wage slashed by the same percentage.

"Shame on those fashion houses, fashion brands and fashion retailers who drive this slavery.

"And shame on those consumers who buy these products without questioning how they were made and how they can be sold so cheaply when so much labour is involved."



Kearney: 'Shame'

Picture: ITGLWF

UNITE backs tips rules

UNITE has backed new regulations to prevent some employers in the hospitality sector using tips and service charges to make pay up to minimum wage levels in the UK.

The union, which has campaigned since 2007 to close the loophole in rules governing the minimum wage, welcomed a new code of practice to regulate how tips are distributed to staff.

Maurice Cunningham, Unite regional industrial organiser in Belfast, said: "Unite is proud that the Government has heeded the concerns of waiting staff in their long-running campaign to close the loophole in the minimum wage regulations.

"Consumers were outraged when the union exposed that

some employers were using tips and service charges to uplift the pay of staff to the minimum wage of £5.73.

"The change in the regulations will be welcomed by workers in restaurants, pubs and hotels across the country."

Unite chief Derek Simpson called on the hospitality industry to be open about how they handle the tips and service charges left for staff.

He said: "The code will help consumers see where the money left for good service is going.

"Unite is looking to the sector to adhere to the best practice principles and ensure that customers have the information they need to make an informed choice before they leave a tip."

Call on in-flight fatigue

UNIONS representing airline pilots across Europe have demanded changes to EU laws on in-flight fatigue.

The second day of action organised by European Cockpit Association highlighted the impact long flight times, shift work, early starts and jet lag can have on the health of cabin crew.

The Irish Airline Pilots Association, which took part in the October 5 event, claimed the EU had failed to act on recent scientific evidence that flagged up the problem.

According to the Moebus Report presented to EU chiefs last year, a number of existing European Aviation Safety Agency rules conflict with what experts believe is neces-

sary to prevent fatigue.

Moebus researchers in particular looked at current rules that allow air crew to clock up a large number of duty hours over a relatively short period of time.

They said the maximum daily flight duty time of 13 to 14 hours "exceeds reasonable limits, especially under exacerbating circumstances and should be reduced".

Worryingly, a recent poll of 1,400 American flight crew found that 80 per cent admitted to having "nodded off" while in the air.

IALPA safety director Adrian Hinkson said: "The European Commission and the EASA have had the report for a year, yet nothing has been done."

TUI/IFUT: Pay report flawed

THE Teachers' Union of Ireland has joined Irish Federation of University Teachers to slam new research on education sector wages claiming it was "patently flawed".

The figures, compiled by the Economic and Social Research Institute, looked at public and private pay differentials between higher education staff.

But in a joint statement, the unions claimed researchers had not compared "like with like" and pointed that because of this the findings were "essentially redundant".

TUI general secretary Peter MacMeamin said: "To attempt to compare these completely different forms of employment is a pointless exercise that adds nothing but unhelpful clutter to any reasonable, intelligent public discourse."

IFUT chief Mike Jennings added: "It is unusual that the two unions that represent third-level combine to take a stance like this.

"It illustrates the level of what we see as a complete misunderstanding of the essential characteristics of a valid and internationally respected education system."

All new Liberty Hall p19

UTU and INTO forge alliance

THE Ulster Teachers' Union and Irish National Teachers' Organisation have forged a new alliance representing most teachers working in Northern Ireland.

The setting up of the joint board has been welcomed by the leaders of both unions.

Avril Hall-Callaghan, who heads the UTU, claimed the new relationship would allow both unions to "meet the challenges and support the education system here".

She said: "We felt the time was now right to formalise our relationship."

INTO northern secretary Frank Bunting added: "Teachers in Northern Ireland need local solutions to their problems. Importing English solutions has generally led to greater problems and inefficiency.

"The two unions representing the majority of Northern Ireland teachers in primary and post-primary sector, are pooling their resources to offer an even better service locally to Northern Ireland teachers."

TEACHING TOLERANCE

INTO Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual group hold 'historic' conference

INTO general secretary John Carr has called the first education conference held by the union's Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Teachers' Group "historic".

He also described as "a milestone" the launch of new union guidelines to confront homophobic attitudes at school.

Mr Carr reminded more than 100 delegates gathered at the Royal College of Physicians in Dublin on October 10 that many teachers "still witness, hear or are directly confronted by homophobia" in the classroom or staffroom.

He claimed this "hostility" was a historical legacy reinforced by "laws, religion, institutions and cultural conventions".

Though praising the good work done by the LGB Teachers' Group since it was set up in 2004, he said: "We must be realistic and say that that legacy will not be overturned overnight but each and every positive action will help roll back the discrimination.

"Our objective must be to ensure that every staffroom is an inclusive staffroom, every school is an inclusive school."

Group chairperson Sheila Crowley, who opened the event, said the name of the conference "Anseo" made a statement that lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers belong in staffrooms and classrooms throughout the country.

She added: "As a lesbian teacher with over 33 years teaching experience, I have listened to many children over the years calling out 'Anseo' in a proud voice as they identified with their own individual name being called out while I marked the daily roll book."

Ms Crowley said she was proud on behalf of all lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers to answer "Anseo" and told delegates: "We belong, we are 'Anseo' in the staffrooms in the schools on the island of Ireland."

Award-winning author Colm Tóibín also addressed the conference.

He told delegates that political correctness, despite the halo of dullness and humourless-

ness that surrounded it, had been a huge liberation for many.

Mr Toibin said: "All of us know that moment in the workplace when everyone starts to howl with laughter at a joke that you realise is about you, at your expense.

"It could be just a word, or a gesture, a throw-away line to give everyone a cheap laugh.

"Often the joker means no harm. 'And you're not married yourself? I hope you're not one of those?' And howls all around.

"The staffroom joker means no harm. If the joke is on you, however, it is a different matter."

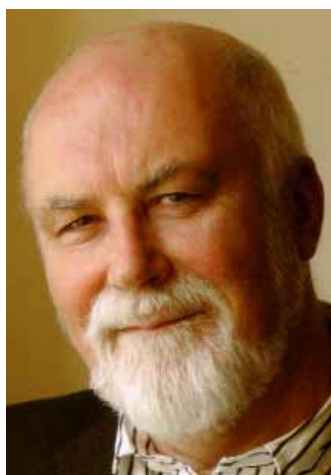
He said gay people growing up can find themselves looking in the mirror and seeing no self-image at all.

Mr Toibin added it was important to fill this emptiness "that we be recognised for who we are, that we recognise ourselves and each other".

He reminded delegates of the great difference the assertion of personal freedom in the area of sexual orientation can make in a person's life.

INTO guidelines

1. Be aware that a percentage of your colleagues or their family/friends are lesbian, gay or bisexual.
2. Challenge homophobic jokes and comments. It is important not to remain silent because doing so implies that you agree.
3. Make sure that staff social events involving partners are equally open to same sex partners.
4. Encourage the use of inclusive and gender neutral language e.g. partner.
5. If you are unsure of appropriate language ask an LGB person/group for guidance.



Sweeney: Harsh Budget

ESRI has public pay 'fixation'

THE Economic and Social Research Institute has been accused by unions of being a "cheerleader for Government policy" following its recent call for a cut in public service pay.

It comes after the release of quarterly figures by the research body on October 13 which prompted a furious response from unions.

IMPACT claimed ESRI had a continuing "fixation" on wages earned by public servants despite the imposition of a 7.5% pay cut - under the guise of a pension levy - earlier this year.

Rubbishing ESRI data, the union said that the claimed 26% premium in public sector pay was drawn from old data predating pay freezes and levy.

An IMPACT spokesperson said: "Despite its failure to present reliable figures on public sector pay, the ESRI has continued to call for an unspecified

cut in all public sector pay, as it remains the easiest target, politically, to make savings."

Congress economic advisor Paul Sweeney claimed cutting pay would be deflationary and would "make matters worse".

He also slammed ESRI for pushing for a fiscal adjustment over a short period of time.

Mr Sweeney said: "The budget will be harsh enough. But by extending the timeframe of the recovery period beyond 2013, the destruction of viable firms and jobs can be mitigated.

"The Government must not impose the brutal budget adjustment advocated by certain economists.

"In the crisis, we must work constructively together to protect jobs, the low paid, middle income and vulnerable workers and citizens. That the ESRI singles out only wage-earners for cuts is telling."



6. Respond positively when a colleague discloses their sexual orientation.
7. Be informed about current information concerning LGB issues in articles in In-Touch/Printout and display relevant INTO posters in the staffroom.
8. Review the adult anti-bullying policy to ensure that it contains an explicit reference to homophobic bullying.
9. Include in your positive staff relations policy a way of dealing with situations when 'gay', 'queer' etc are used as terms of abuse.
10. Talk about issues that affect LGB teachers alongside all other equality issues that are discussed in the staffroom. Break the silence.



Anseo! Sheila Crowley, INTO LGB Group chair, former Equality Authority chief Niall Crowley and Colm Toibin, above and top, at the conference

Pictures: Moya Nolan

BCC claim blasted

UNITE has slammed as "inflammatory" a claim teenagers would benefit from a cut in the UK's minimum wage.

The controversial claim came in a British Chambers of Commerce submission to the Low Pay Commission.

Irish regional secretary Jimmy Kelly said: "The sheer effrontery of bosses to try and claw back from the poorest paid workers in Britain during a recession is highly inflammatory.

"Trade unionists cannot stand idly by while the weakest workers are being plundered of what little amount they earn at present.

"De-motivating young workers as they step into the world of work by saying you are 'now even worth less' is a catalyst for disaster.

"There are enough social ills existing in Britain today without adding insult to injury and saying to our young you are to be treated as 'slaves'."

He added: "Bosses should be reminded that historically slaves revolt."

Meanwhile, Unite has welcomed the rise in the UK National Minimum Wage to £5.80 per hour.

Two in three of the 950,000 beneficiaries will be women, reinforcing the NMW's positive role in narrowing the gender pay gap.

Managing Workplace Conflict in Ireland is priced at €10.00
Human Resource Practices in Multinational Companies in Ireland - A Contemporary Analysis is priced at €10.00

Both books can be purchased directly from the: Government Publications Sales Office, Sun Alliance House, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2
 or by mail order from: Government Publications, Postal Trade Section, Unit 20 Lakeside Retail Park, Clarendon, Co Mayo.
(Tel: 01 6476834 or 1890 213 434; Fax: 094 9378964 or 01 6476843)

POLL CAMPAIGN TO END OAP POVERTY

'Mucus troopers' reveal 'presenteeism' danger

A NEW study has highlighted the health dangers posed by "presenteeism" in the UK workplace.

According to the Bothered Britain Report, commissioned by Simplyhealth, nearly 43 per cent of those questioned hadn't taken any days off in the last 12 months – up from 36 per cent in the previous year.

Simplyhealth believes fears over job security caused by the recession lie behind the shock rise.

Spokesperson Raman Sankaran said: "Today's competitive and pressured working environment means that some people find it difficult to speak up about an illness or take time off.

"However, employees should not be made to feel they have to put their health at risk to save their job.

"A healthy employee is a more productive employee, and it's important that companies do everything they can to help support employees to good health."

The TUC issued a warning earlier this year about a sharp increase in those dubbed "mucus troopers" turning up for work when obviously ill.

UNITE: Act now on rights for workers after Lisbon

UNITE has pressed for immediate government action on workers' rights that played such a central role during the two campaigns on the Lisbon Treaty.

Irish regional secretary Jimmy Kelly said: "The public has cast its vote and now we have to move on to the issues that framed the debate.

"The right to collective bargaining is central to any legislative framework around workers' rights.

"We raised the issue as a key part of the Lisbon debate and both Labour and Fine Gael, as well as Sinn Fein, publicly committed to bring forward legislation to bring Ireland up to the standard of every other EU democracy.

"It is now beholden on the current government to act immediately.

"The Treaty commits to a series of fundamental rights and this is one that can be introduced quickly, at no cost to the public finances and which would demonstrate that workers' rights are considered as important and not merely there to be paid lip service to when there is a vote to be won."

A GROUP of workers and pensioners has vowed to campaign for a fundamental change in the state pension in Northern Ireland.

It follows a successful Congress seminar on the theme of age poverty at UNISON's Belfast offices on September 24 and 25.

The event was addressed by several experts and campaigners from across Ireland and the UK.

Neil-Duncan Jordan, of the National Pensioners' Convention, spoke about his own group's work on behalf of older people in the UK, while the gains made by pensioners in the Republic were outlined by Sylvia Meehan.

She told the seminar about last November's mass demo against the withdrawal of medical cards in Dublin which saw more than 15,000 senior citizens assert their rights outside Dail Eireann.

Peter Bunting, ICTU's assistant general secretary, described how he was personally inspired by the example of veteran trade unionist Jack Jones who founded the NPC.

He said: "Jack Jones was a great leader of the trade union movement, a brave fighter against fascism and a far-sighted champion of pensioner power.

"Many credit Jack with the immortal line in the 1974 Labour Party manifesto which pledged to 'bring about a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people and their families'.

"The best defence against pensioner poverty is a universal state pension, set above the poverty

line, financed by a progressive taxation system – exactly what is available across western Europe."

Mr Bunting outlined how the pension system at present rewards the already well-off while punishing the poor.

He added: "Tax relief is heavily skewed towards the better-off. Treasury figures reveal that 60 per cent of tax relief goes to higher rate taxpayers, including 25 per cent - nearly £10 billion a year - going to the top one per cent of earners, on more than £150,000 a year.

"Meanwhile, nearly two-thirds of the private sector workforce get no employer backed pension. Their taxes pay for their bosses' luxurious old age.

"Directors are more likely to retire younger, as the vast majority of workers, public and private are expected to grit their teeth and plough on until they are 67, 68, 69, 70 years old."

Further detail was added by Margaret Galloway, chair of the NIC-ICTU Retired Workers' Committee.

She told the seminar: "It is a disgrace that the UK pension is one of the worst in Europe despite the UK being one of the wealthiest countries in the EU.

"The current pension is £95 per week. If the link with earnings had never been broken it would now be £190 per week.

"The Government's own figure for the current poverty level is £165 per week, how then can £95 be justified?"

The seminar was also addressed by Seamus Lynch of Age Concern/Help the Aged, Dan Sweeney of the Equality Commission, Bill Carson from the Age Sector Platform and Michael O'Halloran of the ICTU RWC in Republic of Ireland.

FOLLOWING the seminar, a campaign is now under way to make all candidates in the next UK general election sign up to the following pledges:

- A Manifesto for Pensioners in Northern Ireland for the next Westminster Election
- All men and women shall be entitled to dignity, security and fulfilment in retirement.
- A basic state pension set above the official poverty level (estimated at £165 per week in 2009), which is linked to the higher of earnings or prices, and paid alongside other existing concessions, to provide some financial security for all
- Increase the winter fuel grant in line with energy prices
- Provide improved access to social and long-term care to maintain dignity in advanced years.
- End discrimination where it adversely affects the opportunities, goods and services available to older people.

Irish friends gather to celebrate union legend Ken



Picture: UNITE

IRISH friends and colleagues have gathered to pay tribute to popular trade unionist and former MSF chief Ken Gill who died earlier this year.

Ken's wife Norma and son Joe were guests at the social event to honour his memory at the Unite offices in Belfast on October 16.

Union representatives from Shorts, ESB and other engineering firms were at the event along with officials from England and Scotland. UNITE regional secretary Jimmy

Kelly said: "We all know the role Ken played in developing the union movement in Ireland. Building on Ken's commitment is something we must continue to do to further strengthen the movement."

Retired senior shop steward Brian Anderson recalled when Ken arrived in Ireland he found a docile, reactionary movement. He said: "Ken once told me the greatest recruiter is activity and with that he built up the union structures and its membership."



TASC conference on alternatives to neoliberalism



Speakers: Fintan O'Toole, Terrence McDonough & Paul Sweeney

New path out of our broken economics

A CONFERENCE has been told Ireland must find an alternative path to the tried-and-failed neoliberal model that caused the economic crisis in the first place.

The October 10 event, titled Towards a Progressive Economics, was organised by thinktank TASC and heard from several experts and observers who strongly disagree with the free market consensus.

Congress economics advisor Paul Sweeney spoke on the U-turns in corporate governance caused by the crash.

He said: "It is argued by neoliberal economists, without blushing, that banks are too big to fail.

"Thus the taxpayer must bail them out, to avoid systematic damage to what is called the free market."

But if some firms can't be allowed to fail by government then the corollary was that a true free market no longer exists.

Mr Sweeney added: "The raw cut and thrust of capitalism, Darwinian survival of the fittest, of rewarding success and punishing failure, is dead. The rule of free market economics must be re-

Opening remarks:
TASC's Paula Clancy



written. Thus company law, limited liability, is now defunct. They cannot be defunct for some firms. So the laws of corporate governance for all firms in the new economic order must now be re-written."

Mr Sweeney also called for the imposition of stricter rules to provide protection for whistleblowers and on the necessity for higher levels of financial disclosure from companies.

Prof Terrence McDonough, of NUI Galway, told the audience at DCU's Business School mainstream economics was "broken" and detached from the real world.

FLAWED

He noted that many economists had used massaged mathematical models that were basically flawed.

Prof McDonough said: "A series of neoliberal policy mistakes have been rooted in the very structure of conventional economics. These policies are the very ones which have led to the current crisis.

"The reform of economics cannot be limited to torturing standard approaches until they yield different conclusions.

"Instead economics must be subjected to a root and branch reconstruction from the bottom up."

Queen's University Belfast academic Dr John Barry warned that the world was not just facing

a recession. He said: "We also face an energy crunch and equally worrying a dangerous degradation of natural capital and ecosystem services, the most prominent of which is the climate crisis."

Dr Barry insisted we need to change our economic model, adding: "We must stop treating the planet as though it's a business in liquidation.

"The reality is that Mother Nature does not do bailouts."

Irish Times writer Fintan O'Toole claimed politics and economics dealt with the same question – who gets what?

He said: "The allocation of finite resources to different sections of society can never be a mathematical or scientific issue. It is about choices, values and the mobilisation of power.

"When choices are skewed, values are distorted, and a minority can wield excessive power, bad politics and bad economics will be the result."

Turning to Ireland he attacked the "self-deception" of an elite that believed itself to be untouchable.

He added: "It follows that there can be no solution to that crisis that does involve a fundamental change in the culture, institutions and alignments of Irish politics."

Pictures: Tommy Clancy

THE TUC has warned the UK economy remains "very fragile" - with more than a million people out of work for six months or more - despite new figures that seem to show a slowdown in the jobless rate. The trade union body also commented on October's inflation figures which suggest that the British economy is entering a deflationary stage. A TUC source said those who talk of spending cuts were "playing with economic fire".

Cuts led to 705 beds lost

BUDGET cuts and delayed discharges have led to the loss of 705 beds, according to figures compiled by the INO.

The research also showed overcrowding in emergency departments last month had increased by 31% over the same month in 2007.

Union officials claim the deteriorating A&E situation is compounded by more than 900 beds being occupied by patients who could be more appropriately cared for at home or in a continuing care long-term bed.

The INO insisted the figures confirm cuts have had a major impact on frontline patient care. INO general secretary Liam

Doran said: "The extent of the bed closures, the impact of delayed discharges and the increasing level of A&E overcrowding when taken together, demonstrate the severity of the crisis already facing our health services.

"When you add to this the impact of the government embargo on staff recruitment, it is self-evident that it is frontline services, staff and patients, who are being hit by these cuts.

"It is a sad but stark truth that the health service has never been less prepared to face the onslaught of winter, not to mention the challenge faced by managing the swine flu pandemic."

ALMOST a million low-paid workers across the UK received a boost to their pay packets when the national minimum wage was increased to £5.80 an hour on October 1. According to TUC figures, nearly two-thirds of the 950,000 beneficiaries were women - further underlining the positive contribution the NMW has made to narrowing the gender pay gap. The increase means the tax take has also been boosted by more than £100 million.



Five of six NIPSA Disability Champions who received their certificates at the event Picture: NIPSA

Disability champs honoured at event

MORE than 60 trade unionists gathered from both sides of the border earlier this month to celebrate the key role played by Disability Champions in the Irish workplace.

The event - held at the Ramada Encore Hotel in Belfast on October 1 and 2 - saw the graduation of 14 champions and was presided over by UNISON regional secretary Patricia McKeown.

Disability Champions are trade union representatives with an interest in disability issues.

There are now around 100 across Ireland and some champions consider themselves disabled and some do not.

The common thread is a desire to see genuine equality for disabled people in the world of work.

The ceremony was also attended by representatives of course funders FAS, the Equality Commission and Consensus.

Opening the event, NIPSA general secretary John Corey, who also chairs the Northern Ireland Committee of ICTU, said: "Those of us who consider we don't have a disability, don't have a full appreciation of what it is like for a person to have and live with a disability."

Referring to the work of Prof Michael Oliver, Mr Corey added: "An individual model of disability underpinned how society and the medical world viewed disability and that in this model disability is presented as a tragedy and disabled people are per-

ceived as the victims of some tragic happening or circumstance.

"On the other hand Prof Oliver advocated the social model of disability. This challenged the widespread perception of disability that an individual's disability is the problem to be addressed."

He said: "The real problem for people with disability is the wider society. It is wider society's exclusion from everyday life of people with disability."

Mr Corey cited the following data:

- 56% of Northern Ireland households where there is a person with disability are in poverty compared with 29% of households without a person with disability.

- Also 32% of people with disability in Northern Ireland have a job compared with 79% of people without a disability.

In his concluding remarks, Mr Corey added: "The work of Disability Champions is therefore crucial and I want to pay particular tribute to the key role that they have taken on."

"The trade union movement should be in the forefront of removing all barriers for people with disability."

"To give people with disability the right to participate in employment equally with a person without disability and for all of us to recognise that a person with a disability is not a person with a problem. It is society who has the problem."

DEBUNK MARKET MYTHS

SIPTU general president Jack O'Connor has slammed attempts to remove "inconvenient truths" about the downturn.

He told delegates gathered at Tralee for the opening of the union's centenary conference on October 5 that apologists for the rich and powerful were trying to divide workers and make them pay for an economic crisis not of their making.

Mr O'Connor, who is also Congress president, slammed the "hit and run economics" driving the nation towards another crash.

He said the policy of shifting the tax burden from the wealthy and better off so that they could engage in speculation was "the outworking of a political and economic outlook mesmerised by the myth of 'the market'."

Mr O'Connor claimed "all the intellectual energy" from Government in the past year had been directed towards "finding ways of shoring up those who recklessly accumulated debts".

This, he added, was taking the country "to the precipice of disaster".

He reminded delegates the Government had buckled to pressure from the banks and awarded them "a €400bn gilt-edged credit guarantee" in the name of the Irish taxpayer.

Turning to attempts by some sections of the media to highlight so-called splits between public and private sector workers he said: "We refuse to succumb to the disingenuous representation of the issue in terms of a conflict between workers



in the private sector and those in the public sector and those dependent on welfare.

"We insist on inconveniently highlighting the omission of the wealthy from this equation, and we insist on pointing out the pernicious purpose of the strategy of dividing worker against worker while they escape scot-free."

Mr O'Connor characterised current Government fiscal policy as "a dramatic shift to the right" that would sabotage "remaining slim prospects of a fair way ahead".

He told delegates the union's National Executive Council had opted to renew the mandate for industrial action and strike action "to force either compliance with the agreement of September last year, or the negotiation of alternative terms".

Mr O'Connor said: "I want to make it absolutely clear that there will be no suspension of this campaign again unless and until terms worthy of consideration by union members emerge."

He added: "Moreover, we do not envisage a framework for sacrifice to facilitate a return to business as usual."

"There must be a clear and transparent sharing of the burden on the basis of ability to contribute, and that means those who have most must contribute most."

'Crisis management'

A LEADING dental health expert has claimed patients with special needs are having to wait for up to a year for treatment due to staff shortages.

Public Dental Surgeons Group's incoming president Dr Jane Rehehan dubbed the current staffing and provision of resources "abysmal" and warned the situation was worsening.

At present there are fewer than 200 dentists employed in the public service. Describing each working day as "an exercise in crisis management", she claimed this figure was less than half the number needed to operate even a basic service.

Dr Rehehan added: "Because of the scarcity of specialist anaesthetic services; we're looking at delays of over a year for many special needs patients seeking dental treatment."

She made her comments before the national committee of the PSDG section of the Irish Dental Association decided to ballot members on industrial action.

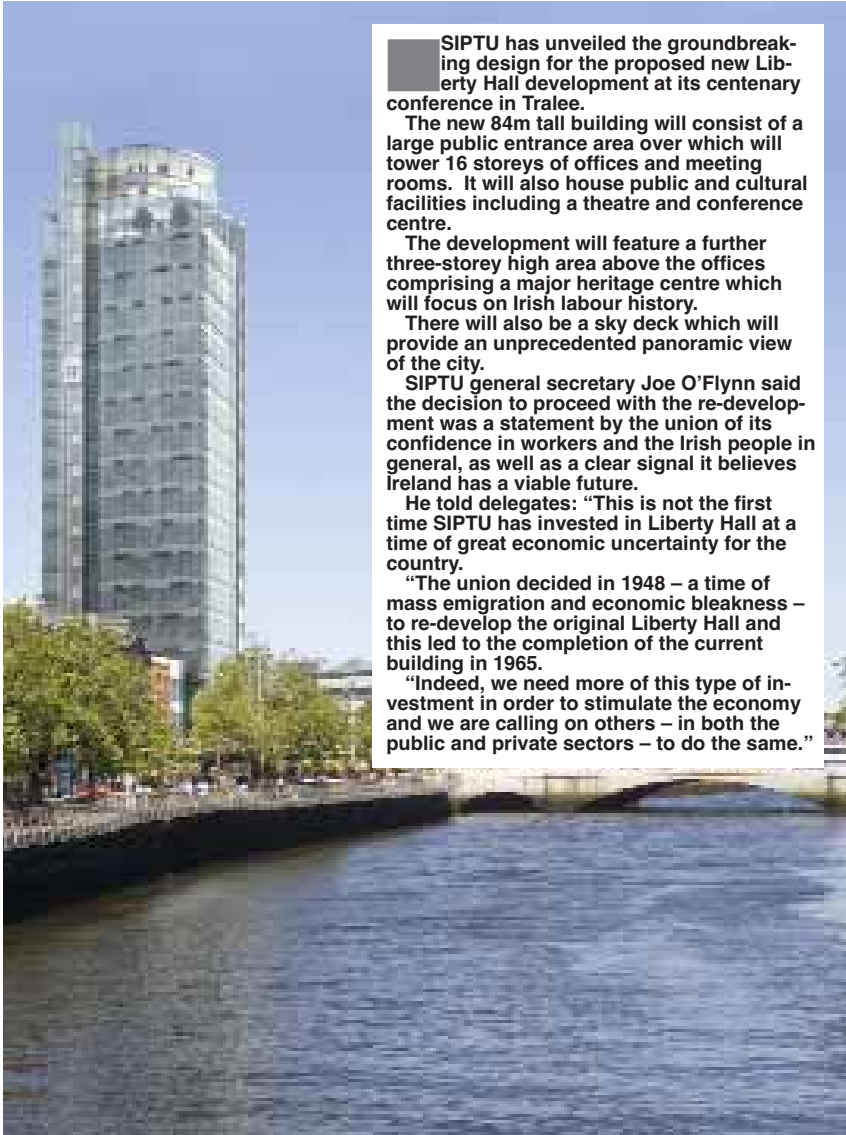
€5bn stimulus call

SIPTU has called for a €5bn stimulus package to create 75,000 construction jobs.

Speaking at the conference's final session, national construction organiser Eric Fleming called on Construction Industry Federation to join with the union in demanding an immediate injection of government funds to boost the ailing industry.

He also slammed the "criminal neglect" shown by Education Minister Batt O'Keeffe over the €112m shortfall in this year's school building programme, pointing out that this happened at a time when thousands of construction workers were "languishing at home without a livelihood."

He continued: "Unless there is an immediate injection of funds into construction there will soon be more than 100,000 unemployed in the sector. A stimulus package of €5bn would create up to 70,000 jobs and we urge the CIF to jointly lobby the Government with us for this badly needed support for the industry."



SIPTU has unveiled the groundbreaking design for the proposed new Liberty Hall development at its centenary conference in Tralee.

The new 84m tall building will consist of a large public entrance area over which will tower 16 storeys of offices and meeting rooms. It will also house public and cultural facilities including a theatre and conference centre.

The development will feature a further three-storey high area above the offices comprising a major heritage centre which will focus on Irish labour history.

There will also be a sky deck which will provide an unprecedented panoramic view of the city.

SIPTU general secretary Joe O'Flynn said the decision to proceed with the re-development was a statement by the union of its confidence in workers and the Irish people in general, as well as a clear signal it believes Ireland has a viable future.

He told delegates: "This is not the first time SIPTU has invested in Liberty Hall at a time of great economic uncertainty for the country.

"The union decided in 1948 – a time of mass emigration and economic bleakness – to re-develop the original Liberty Hall and this led to the completion of the current building in 1965.

"Indeed, we need more of this type of investment in order to stimulate the economy and we are calling on others – in both the public and private sectors – to do the same."

Quay development: Views of how the new Liberty Hall will look

Images: SIPTU



It's time to build new republic

LABOUR Party leader Eamon Gilmore told conference delegates the time had come to build "a new republic" governed on "real republican principles".

He said the connection between big business and politics had to be broken, adding that there must be "no special favours for special friends... ending the practice where you sit on my board and I'm on your audit committee".

Mr Gilmore also reiterated a commitment that Labour in government would legislate for collective bargaining rights.

He said: "The ratification of the Lisbon Treaty means that there will be enshrined in the Treaty of Europe the right to join a trade union and to engage in collective bargaining. That needs to be reflected too in Irish law."

Slamming attempts to sow division, he claimed it was time "to pull together and help each other get out of the economic crisis".

He added: "It's the oldest trick in the book – to divide working people against each other. Whether it's on the basis of race or religion or ethnicity, blue collar or white collar, in an economic crisis some of the powerful will seek to set worker against worker."

"Now is the time, for working people, of all sectors, to come together, to unite: to resist the dividers. To assert, as Connolly would have, that there is more that unites working people than divides us. And now in these troubled times there is a political dimension to workers' unity."

Mr Gilmore told the conference the vision of a new republic had to be built on economic recovery but judged by "the quality of our children's lives - not by the label on their jeans, but by their respect for each other and their contribution to the world".

Bitter truths about power

IRISH Times columnist Fintan O'Toole told SIPTU delegates that trade union were fundamentally about two things – not "wages and conditions" but "power and dignity".

He said workers formed unions because they had learned "bitter truths" about power.

"It is a hideous reality that where employers have complete control over workers, there is almost no limit to what they will do with it."

Mr O'Toole pointed out that this was not because most business people were evil but because of the basic laws of economics.

He added: "In any business where the cost of labour is a decisive factor, the most ruthless exploiter will have an advantage over the humane and decent employer."

"Sooner or later, the good have to follow the bad, or else be forced out of business."

He said that when trade unionists spoke of the "race to the bottom" there were not talking about an abstract threat but a "basic fact of economic life".

Rubbishing the idea that unions were "at best a throwback and at worst a conspiracy of interest groups" as "dangerously complacent", he pointed to the obvious conclusion that exploitation hadn't gone away.

Mr O'Toole added: "We saw in boom-time Ireland how quickly the vicious instinct to take ruthless advantage of workers comes to the surface."



Doherty: Democratic deficit

Fight is on for our jobs

NUJ president James Doherty described journalism as “a noble job” and “a profession that matters”, during his speech at the biennial delegate conference.

He contrasted the hard work and decency of ordinary journalists with the “greed and profiteering of big business”.

But he insisted the union was fighting back with lobbies of elected bodies and town councils as well as highlighting issues among the general public.

Mr Doherty said: “We make it clear that the 30 to 40 per cent returns expected by owners and shareholders are unacceptable when Tesco’s only expect six per cent.”

In the face of this margins onslaught, he claimed it was necessary for journalists “to fight back for their lives and their livelihoods”.

He attacked the democratic deficit caused by cutbacks by media bosses and claimed journalism was “crucial to the health of a functioning democracy”.

Mr Doherty also paid tribute to Belfast journalist Suzanne Breen and said it was a real honour to meet with a woman who “faced serious jail time or faced death” on a key principle.

He added that Ms Breen had had stood up “for more than just journalism” and that the NUJ had been with her “all the way”.



Congress president David Begg blasted ‘stockbroker economists’

Pictures: Maxwell

Neoliberal agenda must be challenged

CONGRESS president David Begg has slammed media pundits who think cuts are the only way out of the financial crisis.

In a speech to NUJ delegates at the union’s biennial conference in Dublin, he challenged what he called the neoliberal “meta-narrative” that pushed this agenda.

Mr Begg said: “The fall of Lehman Brothers marked the end of the age of greed and an end to neoliberalism, yet all the received opinion on offer is for a more extreme version of the model that is broken.”

Blasting “stockbroker economists” whose opinions were always in the press, he pointed out that alternative analyses were on offer from the likes of SIPTU’s Manus O’Riordan and Paul Sweeney of Congress.

He added: “They can give a view, but are never asked to give a view.”

Quoting journalist Max Hastings, Mr Begg said newspaper magnates thought that society should be about achieving “a safe place for rich people to live in”.

He told delegates Rupert Murdoch owned 247 titles and every one supported the Iraq War which was “an extraordinary coincidence”.

Turning to the economic crisis, he said it was vital to ensure there is a deal “that doesn’t crucify everybody” and combat the lie that “the villain of the piece is a young clerical official earning €20,000 to €40,000 a year”. Mr Begg claimed if public sector pay was cut,



wages would also then be slashed across the economy.

He said: “That is the plan – to get us out of the recession by having a competitive devaluation of wages in the public sector with a knock on in the private sector.”

Mr Begg told delegates that if salaries were reduced, the minimum wage would have to be cut, and then social welfare would have to be paired back.

And he predicted that far from strengthening Irish exports, such a policy would collapse domestic demand.

He added: “We will be stuck with a deflationary environment – a downward spiral which we won’t be able to get out of for 10 years.”

Left angry, sad, confused, fearful by INN move



THE Father of Chapel at Independent Network News has admitted he and his colleagues have been left “angry, sad, confused and fearful” by the decision to close the service.

In a moving speech at the NUJ’s biennial delegate conference on October 10, Adam Ledwith, left, thanked union officials for help given to the 17 journalists battling to save their jobs.

The Dublin-based news agency, servicing the independent commercial radio sector, is set to close on October 30.

Staff have been offered only the minimum payment allowed

under Ireland’s redundancy laws. The chapel has demanded INN withdraw the redundancy threat and take part in talks under the auspices of the Labour Relations Commission. Mr Ledwith told delegates gathered at the Marino Institute he had reported on redundancy situations as a journalist, but had “now become part of the story”.

He said the chapel had sought “meaningful engagement” but had been frustrated by the company’s response.

Claiming their struggle was about “standards and dignity at work”, Mr Ledwith said this was

especially galling because of the dedication and high standards shown by journalists at the news agency.

He added: “There is literally no one else in the market who do what we do, and they [the board] didn’t even try to save it.”

The FoC also paid tribute to his chapel colleagues at INN.

He said: “If it does come to pass, there will be new days ahead for us – we can look back on the good times and brilliant memories.”

Following the speech, Mr Ledwith was given a standing ovation.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Congress in come clean call on NI's dole figures

CONGRESS has called on the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to "come clean" on unemployment rates in Northern Ireland.

Assistant general secretary Peter Bunting claimed DETI press releases had frequently highlighted how unemployment was "the second lowest" in all of the UK's regions.

He said: "The message seems to be that the situation is bad, but not as bad as in the Republic of Ireland or in other regions of the UK."

However, Mr Bunting pointed out that statistics taken from the monthly Labour Force Survey also needed "equal billing" with upbeat pronouncements from the DETI.

These statistics showed:

- Unemployment was increasing faster in Northern Ireland than almost all UK regions,
- The North has one of the highest rates of youth unemployment, and
- 49,000 people classified as "economically inactive" would take a job but are not included in the unemployment total.

Calling on Enterprise Minister Arlene Foster to be "more upfront" with details of the downturn, he said: "Spinning the statistics may make some policy makers feel better, but the facts are that unemployment is at crisis levels, particularly in the manufacturing, construction and retail sectors.

"Entry-level jobs in the private sector are very few and far between, and the public sector is being sized up for significant cutbacks this winter, with far worse to follow after the general election next spring.

"The trade union movement is not saying that there are quick fixes for the unemployment situation in Northern Ireland.

"We are saying, however, that unless and until we can face the real extent of unemployment, then we cannot be serious about finding workable solutions which will deliver jobs and prosperity."

Warning on OAP 'limbo'

RAISING the UK state pension age to 70 would put older people in workless limbo, the TUC has claimed.

Responding to the Institute of Directors' report on retirement published on October 12, which called for the state pension age to be raised to 70, general secretary Brendan Barber said: "The better off you are, the longer you live and the more years you get to claim a state pension.

"A big rise in the state pension age would mean the less well-off lose a much bigger proportion of their pension than longer-living affluent pensioners, who are much less dependent on the state pension in any case.

"With employers fighting hard to keep a retirement age of 65, such a proposal would condemn many older people to a limbo where they are too old to work and too young for a state pension."

Barber: Lose out



IMPACT'S AD DRIVE HITS KEY MESSAGE

IMPACT has revealed the results of a new survey into how the public views proposed cuts to public services.

The findings, outlined at the launch of a major advertising campaign by the union earlier this month, showed 52% fear they will be personally hit by the cuts. This rises to 60% among those aged 35 to 54.

Almost half said they had already been affected by cuts in health and education services.

Although 58% thought spending cuts were necessary to reform public services, 52% disagreed with the proposition public servants should suffer further cuts to their wages.

General secretary Peter McLoone claimed the new research showed a large number of people wanted reform but without further cuts in pay or vital services.

He said: "IMPACT is putting forward that alternative, which can deliver substantial savings in public spending without damaging cuts to vital services – and without the imposition of a second public service pay cut."

The poll was conducted between September 21 and 23, a time when ESRI figures comparing public and private sector pay were being widely debated in the media.

IMPACT's €450,000 campaign under the slogan 'Public Services: Transformation Not Cuts'

argues for a transformation in public service delivery to preserve the quality and range of public services while budgets decline.

This would include identifying and cutting waste, changes in work practices, and vastly increased productivity and mobility to ensure that services are maintained as resources decline and staff numbers fall.

AGENDA

IMPACT claims this can be delivered quickly – "without delays or protracted negotiations" – if further pay cuts, compulsory redundancies and pension cuts are removed from the Government's agenda.

Mr McLoone said public servants had been unfairly blamed for an economic and budgetary crisis they did not create.

He added: "Despite a massive attack on public servants and their pay – from politicians, economists, business organisations and most of the media – public opinion is evenly split on the question of public service pay.

"This clearly suggests politicians are mistaken if they believe they can win votes easily by pillorying and punishing the people who deliver public services."

www.7STEPStoTRANSFORM.ie



Peter McLoone: Putting forward an alternative to Government's cuts agenda

Pictures: Conor Healy Photography



magsjournalspress/pr



BRAZIER MEDIA
TRADE UNION NEWS SPECIALISTS

braziermedia@btinternet.com Bob Miller 07894305173 Joe Mitchell 07703055302