

THE

PUBLISHED IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS

UNION POST

NEWS YOU CAN USE

OCTOBER 2010

- ▶ **NORTH SHOCK CUTS IN SPENDING REVIEW**
- ▶ **SOUTH FOURTH 'HAIR SHIRT' BUDGET LOOMS**

UNDER ATTACK



More cuts: Lenihan



Axe man: Osborne

BUT WE'RE FIGHTING BACK...



Picture: © Kevin Cooper Photoline

RISE LIKE LIONS! Eamonn McCann concludes October 23 rally against the cuts in Belfast with a rousing quote from radical poet Shelley

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

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

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



**CSR PROTEST
OCTOBER
23**

RISE LIKE

THOUSANDS of people braved heavy downpours to show their opposition to the cuts at a Congress-organised protest in the centre of Belfast on October 23.

Despite the wet weather, Congress stewards estimated 15,000 took part in the march and rally to Belfast City Hall.

Similar demos voicing opposition to Chancellor George Osborne's Comprehensive Spending Review were staged in Scotland, Wales and the English regions.

Congress assistant general secretary Peter Bunting told the crowd Osborne had "the brass neck" to claim that "those with the broadest shoulders should bear the burden" before going on to place that burden on "the poor, the ill, young people, women and ordinary working families".

He asked was it fair for "a cabinet of millionaires" to cut £18bn from benefit claimants or for the banks who caused the crisis to pay "a measly two-and-a-half billion" while pocketing £7bn in bonuses.

Mr Bunting said: "The elite who created this crisis see workers, public services and the most vulnerable as the bank of last resort when they need to be bailed out.

"They think that taxes are for the little people." To applause from the crowd, he suggested

that half of them "should be in prison for wrecking the economy and the other half should be in prison for tax dodging".

Pointing out that the UK was "most unequal country in Europe", he claimed that imposing a 2% wealth tax on the richest 10% would raise £78bn in a single year.

Mr Bunting added: "If those with the broadest shoulders really paid their share, we could wipe out this deficit in one year – not four."

'NOT MEDICINE... POISON'

Turning to Stormont Finance Minister Sammy Wilson, he claimed the DUP politician "wanted us to sit down, shut up and take our medicine" which he described as a "prescription of austerity and privatisation".

But Mr Bunting added: "This is not medicine, but poison."

He also reminded Mr Wilson that elections were "coming soon".

"It is time that Sammy and his ilk earned their seats not by their tradition, or even their political parties, but by how they acted in this crisis."

Congress vice chair Pamela Dooley described the cuts outlined in the Comprehensive Spending Review as "an obscene attack on the poor... and on women and children in particular".

The cuts would, she predicted, take Northern



Mike Kirby: 'Tory free zones' hit



McGlone: 'Put manners on Sammy'



Pamela Dooley Eamonn McCann



Bunting: 'Brass neck Osborne'

All pictures: © Kevin Cooper Photoline

LIONS AGAINST CUTS

Ireland "to the brink of social and economic disaster". Ms Dooley said: "We are clearly experiencing an onslaught on fundamental rights... without doubt we are experiencing wholesale state discrimination against women."

But she vowed that "no woman and no worker will be allowed to face these challenges alone", adding that the trade union message was clear – "there is a better, fairer way".

Returning to a theme touched on by Peter Bunting, Ms Dooley said: "The clock is ticking on Stormont."

"They must decide whether or not to strike a budget. Negotiations with Westminster need to be reopened – we want to hear no excuses, we want to see action."

Congress vice president Eugene McGlone talked about Sammy Wilson "bleating on" about "living in the real world".

He suggested instead that the Finance Minister should try living on the minimum wage or on welfare benefits "to get a flavour of what it means" before "telling us we live in cloud cuckoo land".

Mr McGlone added – to cries of "Out! Out! Out!" from the crowd – "Perhaps the electorate next May will put manners on him".

He told the crowd the public did not want

politicians' "sympathetic looks or crocodile tears", rather they wanted them to "at least stand up for us, their constituents, and oppose the obscene visitation of this attack on the most vulnerable people".

Mr McGlone reminded those gathered outside the City Hall that 30,000 jobs had already been lost in the private sector in Northern Ireland over the last two years and that number would be swelled if the cuts are implemented by at least another 20,000 public servants and a further 16,000 private sector workers.

'STILL IN BUSINESS'

He said: "And let's also remember that the people who caused it are still in business."

"The richest 1,000 people in the UK saw their personal wealth grow by £77bn last year. How much pain are they taking? Our public services and welfare benefits are being cannibalised to bail out the banks. It's our livelihoods and with our livelihoods, our futures and our children's futures that are being sacrificed."

Mike Kirby of the Scottish TUC was next to speak. He slammed the Tory Lib-Dem cuts agenda as an excuse to dismantle the Welfare State which had taken "a social consensus of 50 years to build" and predicted that the Comprehensive

Spending Review was "a taste of things to come".

"They are only the bite-size nibbles before you sit down for the main meal."

He warned that for every public sector job that goes, another in the private sector would be lost. Mr Kirby claimed most of these jobs would go in Scotland, North East England and Northern Ireland because these regions were "Tory free zones", adding, "They don't care about us".

"The Tories and their Lib-Dem stooges will cut and roll back the Welfare State and their strategy is to make these changes irreversible."

Eamonn McCann, of Derry Trades Council, also spoke at the rally.

He told the crowd that the rally "was not the end of something but the beginning of something" and insisted that "together we can transform society".

"We have to say that we will defend every job and fight every cut." Describing the working class as the "great sleeping giant of Northern Ireland politics", he added that he wanted to send a message to Stormont.

Quoting the poet Shelley he said: "Rise like lions after slumber! In unvanquishable number! Shake to earth your chains like dew/Which in sleep had fallen on you/We are mighty, they are few!"

TRADE UNION TV COVERAGE OF MARCH AND RALLY <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cww8ksDVJNM>

ICTU: Irish government blew Celtic Tiger boom

CONGRESS economic advisor Paul Sweeney has flagged up the key indicators that show the Irish government's deflationary economic policies are "patently failing".

He told delegates at a TASC/FEPS conference on October 22 these were: rising unemployment, rising emigration, rising bond rates, falling participation, falling tax revenue, falling economic growth, plummeting consumer and business confidence, business closures and despair.

Mr Sweeney warned a boom in exports would not offset the hammering of domestic demand – which made up 70% of GDP.

He said: "The government blew the Celtic Tiger boom with free-market fundamentalism of tax-cutting and de-regulation. It is again in the grip of failed conservative economic policies."

Mr Sweeney blasted the government for sidelining the jobs crisis and focusing only on fiscal and banking considerations yet at the same time managing to make a mess out of both of these.

The same administration that caved in to domestic bankers with bail-outs and guarantees two years ago was now bowing before international bondholders.

COLLAPSE

He pointed out that the collapse in Ireland's GNP was the worst in the world, having fallen by one-fifth since it stood at €161bn in 2007.

Mr Sweeney warned it would likely be after 2020 before Ireland again enjoyed 2007 levels of national income.

In setting a course out of the current economic morass, he suggested:

- Government admits current four-year plan of deficit reduction to 3% of GDP cannot be achieved,
- Instead make any adjustment with "judicious cuts" teamed with "focused tax rises" at "passive income, wealth and profits",
- Not cutting investment but boosting and expanding it, and
- "Burn" Anglo and INBS bondholders by 90%, saving €20bn to €24bn in the process.

This would share out the burden of the bank rescue on the super-rich, save billions in the process as well as "making Ireland more attractive to lenders".

Budget 2011

Public launch of the Congress Pre-Budget Submission will take place on Wednesday, November 3 at 11am in the O'Casey Room at the Gresham Hotel, Dublin.



Mandate members protest outside store

Pictures: Paula Geraghty

'Engage LRC' call on Laura Ashley bosses

MANDATE has called on management at Laura Ashley to reconsider its refusal to avail of the services of the Labour Relations Commission.

Staff employed at its flagship store in Dublin are on strike over the company's offer of statutory redundancy only as it prepares to shut its Grafton Street premises.

Mandate's industrial officer Dave Moran said the 22 staff were only informed their jobs were at risk on September 24.

He added: "Clearly the staff were shocked and surprised by the very short notice given to them in relation to the closure of the store."

"In addition, they were very upset to realise that the company was only willing to offer statutory redundancy payments and that all employees who wish to remain in

employment at one of Laura Ashley's six remaining retail units would be obliged to once more undergo an interview."

Describing the action as "unilateral and ungenerous", he noted that the development came on the

back of the firm's bumper pre-tax profits of £10.5n for the 26 weeks to end July with total turnover growing by 5.7% to £135.1m.



Boots workers vote for restructuring proposals

MANDATE members in Boots have voted overwhelmingly in favour of restructuring proposals.

The October 11 result came after what one source called a series of "tough but honest" negotiations lasting nearly a year between the union and management under the auspices of the Labour Relations Commission.

Under the deal, titled the New National Procedural Agreement, the firm recognises Mandate as having sole negotiating rights on

behalf of its 900 members (out of a total workforce of 1,700).

The agreement sets out an industrial relations framework to manage disputes with union representation guaranteed throughout any process.

It is augmented by a 'Creating a Work Life Balance' initiative which – according to one union source – "aims to enable staff at Boots to make work fit around their lives as opposed to other way around".

The source continued: "The

initiatives – which will be implemented on a store by store basis – include a recognition of job sharing and parental leave standards but also more innovative schemes like term-time working and careers breaks.

"The company has also given undertakings to consult with staff on any changes and will hopefully set both sides on a path of mutual respect and success."

Unions hit out at BMC job losses

UNIONS at Belfast Metropolitan College have called management proposals to cut 100 staff posts "deliberately misleading".

They claimed that after receiving further information, the actual number of jobs lost would be closer to 200 posts – nearly 20% of staff at the college.

Monica Goligher from UCU said: "The manner in which these job losses have been handled shows a clear contempt for staff."

"Unions intend to resist these attempts to decimate jobs and educational provision within the Belfast Metropolitan College"

Larry Fitzsimons, from NASSUWT, warned the proposals would "negatively impact on students and will reduce services to the people of Belfast and beyond".

Time ripe for change

IT'S time to turn despair and frustration into positive and decisive action for real change.

This will be the message put forward by a range of unions, community groups and civil society organisations at "a unique and historic" gathering at the RDS in Dublin on October 30.

A source said: "The aim of Claiming Our Future is to foster a unity across civil society and to power a progressive movement that will reshape Ireland's recovery and claim our social values."

As The Union Post went to press, it was confirmed that the event is now totally booked out but proceedings will be streamed live at www.claimingourfuture.ie

Doors open at the Industries Hall at 9.30am.



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www.mandate.ie

Mandate Head Office O'Lehane House, 9 Cavendish Row, Dublin 1
Tel: 01 874 6321 Fax: 01 872 9581 Email: mandate@mandate.ie

BROWNE REVIEW

Working people will be frozen out of the third level

UNITE has backed Northern Ireland's hard-pressed students following the publication earlier this month of the inquiry into university funding by former BP chief Lord Browne.

The main recommendation contained in the review was the removal of the current cap of £3,290 on tuition fees.

Unite claims this will freeze out of third level education many students from lower or middle income families.

Regional secretary Jimmy Kelly said: "Lord Browne's report means that you can forget about higher education if you are from a family with only moderate means, if you are averse to walking away from university at the end of your course with an absolute mountain of debt or if your chosen vocation is not particularly well paid."

He said it was now possible to figure out the coalition government's approach to education and that it had a "startling resemblance" to third level provision in "the first half of the 20th century".

Mr Kelly added: "Elite universities charging the earth to educate the cosseted youth of the upper classes, a middle rank of students struggling to keep their heads above water in the company of the so-called elite and a lower rank of colleges dealing with more vocational courses for the working classes."

He also insisted that Con-Lib policy would "impoverish the poor and safeguard the rich".

"What it will do to students is clear enough. It will take any strain of meritocracy that might have worked its way into the system over the last century and eliminate it. But what it will do to the country is, in many ways, even more dramatic.

"What price technological advance and research and development in the sciences if the pool of students is defined by their parents' income or their recklessness in taking on huge debts in a field in which remuneration is wildly variable?"

"What courses will universities provide if they are driven into a market environment?"

"The answer is clear. It will be those courses that attract well-off families. It will result in the working class being driven out of professions"

Mr Kelly added: "More and more, the Tories and their Lib-Dem partners are reconstructing a world which most hoped had been relegated to history."



Jimmy Kelly

AUSTERITY DRIVE

CONGRESS general secretary David Begg has warned the Irish government's current target of achieving a budget deficit of 3% by 2014 risks "doing permanent damage to our economy and to the fabric of our society".

In a speech to the Institute of Taxation on October 19, he pointed out that fiscal retrenchment could not be achieved "through austerity alone" and instead insisted that growth was "the key" to extricating the economy from its current difficulties.

He said: "The truth is that government is delusional about the effects of the fiscal crisis on growth. But markets can assess the reality. That is why after three brutal budgets the cost of borrowing has risen rather than fallen."

Mr Begg claimed the government was in thrall to "classical economics" based on "models and precepts which assume certain things which do not occur in the real world".

The current government was putting in place an economic policy based on fiscal contraction followed in the late 1980s.

The problem, however, was that market conditions now are wholly different from those that existed 25 years ago.

He said: "At that time Ireland had the benefit of two currency devaluations and the implementation in 1986 of the Single European Act which provided us with a magnet for American foreign direct investment.

"Moreover, we were not then experiencing a synchronised global downturn. I do not think we can again expect growth from fiscal contraction."

'NEO-CLASSICAL GUFF'

Mr Begg also described as "neo-classical guff" the view that the "certainty generated by austerity" would give people "the confidence to spend money and reduce savings".

He added: "I certainly don't know anybody who thinks like this but I do know a lot of people who are saving all they can in case they lose their jobs in six months time."

Mr Begg questioned the view that improved exports could compensate for a deflationary

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

CSR REACTION

Just what planet is SoS Paterson on?

CONGRESS has called on Northern Ireland Secretary of State Owen Paterson to come clean on the cuts.

It follows a meeting on October 13 when Paterson is reported to have "confirmed" to a trade union delegation that the remaining £9.1bn of the £18bn in the capital investment programme – promised as part of the peace process – would be honoured.

However, the leading Tory has now been blasted for peddling "the worst type of spin" after chancellor George Osborne's October 20 announcement that capital spending will be slashed by 40%.

According to Congress sources, Mr Paterson's response that "other sources of capital funding are available" was either code for selling off government assets at bargain prices, or betrayed an unjustifiable faith in the private sector to provide the funding.

Congress assistant general secretary Peter Bunting said: "I am not sure which planet Owen Paterson is living on.

"Last week, the Secretary of State looked us in the eyes and made a commitment on behalf of the coalition government that it would honour its obligations to the people of Northern Ireland.

"This week, he tells us that the cuts amount to less than two per cent. This is the worst type of spin and treats us all like fools, or visitors from another planet.

"Let me assure Mr Paterson that the people of Northern Ireland know when someone is trying to sell them a pup.

"They promise those with the 'broadest backs will bear the burden', and yet they are cutting over £18 billion from benefits while meekly asking for £2.5 billion from their donors in the banks and hedge funds.

"They heap praise on the armed forces and slash their budgets.

"They promise 'a bonfire of the quangos' yet slash those which regulate big business.

"They preach about the evils of tax cheating yet cut the personnel in HM Revenue & Customs.

"They have wiped out what remains of the construction industry in Northern Ireland and will double unemployment here, and have impoverished our disproportionate number of benefits claimants. This, according to the Secretary of State, 'is a remarkable result'.

"The only thing which would be remarkable after this farce, is if anyone from Northern Ireland can look Owen Paterson in the eye, and trust what he says."



Owen Paterson

IS ROAD TO RUIN

strategy on domestic demand.

He said: "At a time when every country is trying to pull itself out of recession by increasing exports it seems improbable that we can greatly increase our market share."

Mr Begg also rubbished claims that "the bond vigilantes will get us" if Ireland does not get its borrowing below 3% by 2014, adding "we assume a disposition on the part of the bond markets that they have never stated".

Admitting that Ireland could not continue "indefinitely" with such a large gap between income and expenditure, he also pointed out that it was "equally irresponsible" to call for sacrifices the population could not endure.

He added: "To my mind there is a better, fairer way of doing this and growth is the key to it.

"Growth can both do the heavy lifting of adjustment and diminish the scale of the problem by increasing the size of the economy."

Because growth needed time and investment "to get a foothold", that was why the

adjustment could not be accomplished in four years and should instead be stretched to seven years.

Conjuring up images of a "lost decade" such as that experienced by Japan in the 1990s, he described the government's current policy as "not only economically dangerous" but "politically unwise".

He warned: "The distributional unfairness inherent in this policy may induce a societal reaction which could undermine our long-run stability and prosperity."

Instead Mr Begg said the government in considering the next Budget should look at:

- A more balanced approach between tax and expenditure cuts,
- Taxing income from all sources in the same way,
- Higher earners bearing the greatest burden of adjustment,
- Widening the tax base so that those with wealth and assets make a fair contribution, and
- Tackling tax avoidance.



www.ictu.ie/press/2010/10/19/government-must-extend-period-of-adjustment-to-2017/

TAX REFORM



Picture: Derek Speirs

Are you listening ministers? Community Platform members bring their proposals to gates of the Dail

Simple as 1,2,3,4...

COMMUNITY Platform has launched a drive challenging the Irish government's cuts agenda and calling instead for progressive taxation as a way out of the economic crisis.

The group – a network of 29 national organisations working to address poverty and social exclusion – set out a four-step programme to recovery at a launch in Dublin last month.

Proposals outlined in the strategy document '4 Steps 2 Recovery' are:

1. Tax breaks - reduction in tax breaks to the EU average over a three-year period, saving an estimated €1.5bn each year.

2. Tax wealth - One third of the country's financial and property assets are owned by the top 1% of households. Much of this wealth remains untaxed. The Community Platform proposed a wealth tax for high-earners with assets worth more than €1m.

3. Tax levies - Income from capital, rents and investments should be treated like PAYE income and be subjected to PRSI and income levies. The income limit for PRSI payments should also be removed.

4. Tax exiles - In 2007, it was estimated there were 6,000 individuals claiming non-resident tax status

in Ireland. This list includes some of Ireland's wealthiest people. High-earning Irish citizens can limit their tax liabilities to just €200,000 a year through claiming non-residency status. This massive tax avoidance can be removed by making citizenship rather than residence the basis for taxation and thus target high earners using tax havens.

Speaking at the September 13 launch, Anne Costello, of the Community Platform, said fresh thinking was needed to get Ireland back on the road to recovery and claimed the group's tax reform proposals would raise about €3bn if implemented.

She added: "Our proposals will introduce a sustainable and progressive tax system.

"For decades significant amounts of wealth in Ireland have gone untaxed. The wealthiest in our society have been able to reduce their tax contribution significantly.

"The picture is clear – we have an inadequate, unjust taxation system that must be fixed.

"A progressive tax system will protect spending on vital services, retain jobs and support consumer demand. It will avoid the potential disaster that draining another €3bn out of the economy will have on businesses, communities and the self-employed throughout the country."

<http://communityplatform.ie/4steps2recovery.html>

IMPACT hits out at VEC closures as 'excessive'

IMPACT has claimed no consultation took place before Education and Skill Minister Mary Coughlan announced the closure of 17 Vocational Education Committees earlier this month.

The union, which represents just over 1,400 VEC staff, said it would be now be seeking clarification that closures would be implemented in line with the Croke Park Agreement.

It is set out in the agreement that as far as possible services should be protected as budgets decline.

The deal also contains safeguards over compulsory redundancies and staff redeployment.

IMPACT national secretary Matt Staunton said: "The extent of the reduction is surprising, given that the McCarthy Report called for a reduction in the number of VECs to 22.

"The reduction to 16 appears excessive in this context, and flies in the face of expert opinion that there is a growing need to deliver further education and training services in a time of burgeoning unemployment."

The original target saving in the McCarthy Report was €3 million, although the VEC branch of IMPACT now estimates that the scale of the cut now is closer to €4.5 million.

Mr Staunton added: "The collateral damage will be far in excess of that amount when you consider the effect on communities, service users and staff."



INMO's Liam Doran and Sheila Dickson at press conference highlighting jobs crisis facing Ireland's newly-graduated nurses & midwives

NATIONAL DISGRACE: Irish trained nurses and midwives forced overseas to find work

THE Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation has described as "a terrible indictment" new data revealing that most of this year's 1,600 new nursing/midwifery graduates have already left the country or will leave in the next two months.

A majority of these are moving to Britain, having being recruited by the NHS, with many getting their air fare, first month's accommodation and a post-grad course of their choice paid for.

The INMO has warned that Ireland risks repeating the mistake of the 1990s when a previous generation of nurses were forced to go overseas to practise their profession.

This meant that beginning in 2001, Ireland had to recruit – at great cost to the exchequer – 12,000 non-Irish trained nurses to replace those Irish-trained nurses who had left.

INMO general secretary Liam Doran said: "The numbers of newly graduating nurses and midwives leaving this country is a terrible indictment of our ability to plan for the future, learn from our mistakes of the past and to ensure that we have a supply of Irish nurses and midwives to staff our health services in the years to come.

"The reality is that we have over 1,600 nurses/midwives, graduating with an honours degree, this year, none of whom are being offered permanent full-time posts in our public health service.

"A small minority may be offered short-term temporary posts across the country, but none of them will be in a position to secure permanent employment.

"Against this background, the UK's NHS is recruiting large numbers of our graduating nurses and midwives across England, Scotland and Wales."

There is a current shortage of nurses world-

wide with the UK, the US, Canada and Australia actively recruiting Irish nurses/midwives.

The INMO claims that Ireland must continue to educate and retain adequate numbers of nurses and midwives to meet healthcare requirements at home over the next 10 to 15 years.

Union president Sheila Dickson said: "It is just soul destroying to see such highly educated young people not being given an opportunity to work in Ireland.

"There is now a worldwide shortage of nurses and many of our emigrants will build new lives and settle abroad and will be lost to the Irish health service forever."

Mr Doran added: "We must, in these very dif-

The union points to the following stark facts:

- According to HSE figures, 1,900 nursing/midwifery jobs have been lost in the last two-and-a-half years;

- Up to 1,000 nurses/midwives are eligible to retire in 2011 and will not be replaced under current HR policies; and

- 20% of the current nursing/midwifery workforce is aged between 50 and 59 with the average retirement age at 57.9 years.

The INMO has slammed the health service's current policy of cutting back on frontline posts as "short-sighted" and has rubbished claims that Ireland has "too many nurses" compared to other OECD countries.

The union has already proposed a "cost neu-

DID YOU KNOW?

It costs the Irish taxpayer €90,000 to train a nurse or midwife to degree level. Graduates who remain at home face either minimal locum work or dole queue

ficult times, strike an equal balance between the legitimate expectations of nurses and midwives and their patients and the overall economic situation facing the health service.

"However, the current strategy is doomed to failure as it neglects today's patients, leaves us totally exposed with regard to planning for future needs and ignores the fact that other countries view our newly graduated nurses and midwives as priceless assets rather than a drain on resources."

There is little doubt the Irish health service is facing meltdown.

According to the union, despite repeated assurances from politicians and health service management, frontline posts have not been protected.

tral" solution to the problem that would keep new graduates in the country as well as fill the gaps left by retirees.

In 2007, the independently-chaired Commission on Nursing Hours advocated the introduction of a two-year graduate nursing programme.

This would have seen all nurses working a 35-hour week, retired nurses being replaced, a guarantee of two years' employment for graduates and an opportunity for them to consolidate their clinical skills.

The Commission also outlined a new, lower salary for the two-year duration of this graduate nursing programme (85% of the minimum of the current staff nurse scale).



Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation
Working Together



THE TRUTH From the Frontline

Log on to www.stophealthcuts.ie to share your story

The Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation is the professional trade union for nurses and midwives with more than 43,000 members – or 4 out of every 5 nurses and midwives.

Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation, The Whitworth Building, North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7
Tel: 01 664 0600 Fax: 01 661 0466 www.inmo.ie www.nurse2nurse.ie



Migrant rights coalition slams 'deportation' Bill

A COALITION of migrant rights groups demonstrated outside the Dail on October 6 as TDs inside debated new legislation that would allow for summary deportation of migrants without access to a fair hearing.

Currently, anyone facing deportation has 15 days to make a case for remaining in the state.

The new Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill 2010 will remove this basic provision.

The coalition is made up of Crosscare Migrant Project, Doras Luimní, Immigrant Council of Ireland, Irish Refugee Council, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, the Integration Centre and the Irish Immigrant Support Centre.

In a joint statement, the heads of the seven organisations said: "In Ireland we value fairness, transparency and due process. The Immigration Bill in its current form goes against these basic principles.

"By allowing summary deportation, the Bill denies minimum safeguards and tramples on



Michael D Higgins addressed Dail protest

an individual's civil and fundamental rights.

"We think the Irish public would be shocked to learn the unchecked powers that the Bill gives the minister and the Gardaí. We know from our past the danger of giving too much power to any one group or person.

"Ireland's historic practice of deporting people in times of crisis cannot be allowed to happen again. We will not stand idly by and watch this draconian measure become law."

Pictures: Lar Boland

Harney warned over €1bn health cuts

UNIONS have slammed Irish Health Minister Mary Harney after she said the health service faced a further cut of between €600m and €1bn in its funding next year.

Mrs Harney admitted there was "no easy way to take that kind of money out" of the health budget after revealing the scale of funding cuts in an address to an ESRI conference in Dublin on October 19.

The INMO warned patient care will be severely compromised and frontline services curtailed if the cuts go ahead.

Repeating a call made earlier this year for a crisis summit on health services to be convened, general secretary Liam Doran said: "Faced with the current economic realities stark difficult choices will have to be made but, in the context of a public health service, all decisions must put the patient first and ensure frontline staff providing direct care are given the required resources."

SIPTU's acting national health organiser Paul Bell also hit back at the comments.

He warned the scale of the cuts would hit vital services such as home helps, mental health provision and elective surgery of patients waiting on hip and knee replacements.

Mr Bell added: "Cuts on this scale will affect the viability of many hospitals and the situation we have seen threatening to emerge in HSE West could be replicated across the state."

Survey: NI public against 'tap tax'

CONGRESS has welcomed a BBC Spotlight survey that showed most people in Northern Ireland are unwilling to pay water charges.

John Corey, chairperson of the ICTU-organised Coalition Against Water Charges, said: "This confirms the people of Northern Ireland will not be bounced into paying separate water charges when they are already paying for this public service through their regional rates bills."

Last month, Department of Regional Development Minister Conor Murphy told the Northern Ireland Assembly that there would be no separate household water charges and no privatisation of NI Water.

Mr Corey also urged Assembly ministers to address the domestic rates cap which he claimed had benefited the better-off.

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Fol law should cover NAMA

NUJ Irish secretary Séamus Dooley has called for the National Asset Management Agency to be covered by the Freedom of Information Act.

Making his comments at a seminar in Dublin on October 19, he slammed what he termed “the culture of secrecy” at the heart of government and claimed the Fianna Fáil/PD coalition had “dismantled with enthusiasm” the original Act.

He added: “The Green Party has signed up to that culture with the exclusion from the remit of Fol legislation of NAMA.”

The legislation had made provision for withholding sensitive information but Mr Dooley insisted there could be “no excuse” for “the blanket exclusion” of NAMA, which he described as a state agency that impacted on the lives of every citizen “and will help shape the future of generations yet unborn”.

He added: “We in the NUI must recommit ourselves to the restoration of the original Act and must make Freedom of Information – and the enactment of legislation protecting whistleblowers – issues in the next General Election, whenever it occurs.”

Mr Dooley also called on media organisations to direct more investment into in-service training.

He said: “In the field of business journalism there are few if any opportunities for up-skilling.”

“How many trained accountants are there among the ranks of business journalists in Ireland?”

“How many editors have had the luxury of releasing staff to learn the expensive skills of analysing the increasingly complicated accounts that land on their desks?”

“What opportunity has there been for the development of the forensic skills, which are so necessary if journalists are not to become dependent upon the word of consultants well practiced in the art of spinning?”

Mr Dooley claimed that in the “good times” resources had been channeled by media organisations to initiatives – such as property supplements – designed to increase ad revenue and market share.

He added: “For the most part profits were directed away from editorial operations and the years of plenty were squandered.”

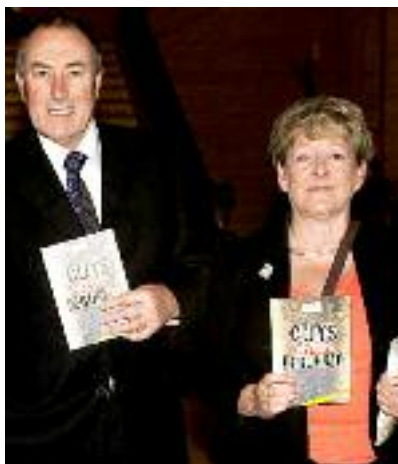
“Newspaper owners and commercial managers wished the property dream would go on forever. In that heady environment in which property porn was king, there was no place for informed analysis – and no place for a journalist or columnist who wished to challenge the prevailing consensus.”



DUP's Jim Wells speaks to Peter Bunting of Congress



Congress VP Eugene McGlone & UUP's Fred Cobain



UNISON regional secretary Patricia McKeown with SF's Mitchel McLaughlin

LOBBY AT STORMONT MLAs get message (we hope)

Trade unionists from across Northern Ireland took part in a lobby of Stormont MLAs on September 28. Local politicians were left in no doubt about the depth of feeling against the UK coalition government's cuts agenda.



Alban Maginnis of the SDLP with NIPSA chief Brian Campfield



Pictures: Kevin Cooper, Photoline

Unite hits out at '11th hour' court bid to prevent strike

A COURT injunction preventing workers at Omagh Meats from taking strike action has been described as "totally unacceptable" by Unite.

Parent company Foyle Meats was granted a High Court injunction after it lodged what the union described as an "eleventh hour" objection on October 20.

The stoppage by 150 workers at the Co Tyrone plant was due to begin on October 21.

Unite regional secretary Jimmy Kelly said: "It is totally unacceptable. Having gone through the correct legal procedures to call this action then to have the courts intervene to block it."

The dispute centres on the workers rejecting a 1.5% pay offer.

Mr Kelly added: "Unite asks why the company should wait until the eleventh hour to lodge an objection – 8pm on the night before the action is due to start – when it had 10 days to object?"

He claimed workers in the UK were burdened by "unnecessarily tight and disproportionate obligations" if they wanted to take "legal and legitimate" strike action.

"The existing law is wholly indefensible and any suggestion that it needs to be tightened is both risible and contemptuous."



CCC Ireland launched

THE Irish branch of the Clean Clothes Campaign was launched on October 7 – the international trade union movement's World Day for Decent Work – in Dublin.

Dedicated to improving working conditions and supporting workers in the garment and sportswear industry in the global south, the Irish branch has five stakeholders – ethical fashion group Re-Dress, ICTU Global Solidarity, retail workers' union Mandate, and development NGOs Trocaire and Comhlámh.

About 30 people attended the inaugural meeting at the Green House.

Marcella Kraay, of the Amsterdam-based International CCC, welcomed the Irish branch as the 15th national member organisation in Europe.

She told delegates of the four primary areas

the campaign focuses on:

- Citizen awareness drives,
- Workers' solidarity,
- Corporate responsibility, and
- Governmental responsibility.

She said: "When consumers demand that their clothes and sportswear is produced under decent work conditions, things can start to change. The CCC is also putting pressure on companies to adopt 'codes of conduct'."

"Firms have the responsibility and power to ensure that garment workers throughout their supply chains are treated fairly."

Ms Kraay added: "The CCC supports partner organisations in the global south as they lobby their governments for better laws and also calls on the EU and governments to promote respect for international labour standards."

Picture: Congress

Strength in numbers at mass DC demo



TENS of thousands of union members joined a massive October 2 demonstration at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC. Rallying under the slogan 'One Nation Working Together', it was an impressive show of strength by US progressives in the teeth of the widely reported right-wing resurgence in the States. Larry Cohen, chief of the communications union CWA, told the crowd: "Workers' rights have been all but crushed since Dr Martin Luther King spoke here 47 years ago... Workers should not need courage to have a union in America. It should not be a fight. It should be a right."

Pictures: CWA



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DAY OF ACTION
SEPTEMBER
29

BELFAST, DUBLIN and L'DERRY

Protests North & South



ICTU assistant general secretary Peter Bunting addresses crowd near Belfast City Hall. Among those listening, right, was Stormont health minister Michael McGimpsey



Patricia McKeown of UNISON was one of the speakers at Sept 29 demo





ICTU president Jack O'Connor called on the Irish government to end its 'doomsday campaign of terror' against the people

THOUSANDS of trade unionists across Ireland took to the streets in Dublin, Derry and Belfast as part of the September 29 day of action called by the ETUC.

In Dublin, Congress president Jack O'Connor urged the Irish government to stop what he called its "doomsday campaign of terror" against the people.

Addressing a crowd of 1,500 gathered outside the Dail, he said ministers should instead roll out "a credible plan for recovery" to offer "reassurance" to people worried about jobs, mortgages and pensions.

"Spending is critical to growth and people will not spend as long as they are terrified of what the future may hold."

Mr O'Connor added: "It is not too late for our government to embrace the lessons of the wasted years – but if they do not do so immediately they should do the next decent thing by calling a General Election and respect our right as a people to decide our own fate."

In Belfast, Congress assistant general secretary Peter Bunting told a large crowd gathered outside City Hall that many of the reasons given for cuts were bogus.

He said: "It is a myth that government debt has never been higher. It was more than three times higher after the Second World War and that generation built the NHS and Welfare State.

"It is not true that the UK's debt is one of the worst in the developed world – it is far higher in the USA, Canada, Japan and the major European economies.

"It is a cruel hoax that the deficit must be reduced so dramatically in such a short time.

"It is a massive distortion to claim that public servants are far better paid than private sector workers. They are paid the rate for the job.

"The fact is that private sector workers are underpaid and are paid 20% less than English and Scottish private sector workers."

Mr Bunting insisted a low wage private sector economy could not deliver "sustainable jobs" and warned Northern Ireland and its citizen "could not survive a race to the bottom".

He told the crowd: "It is a mad fantasy that the private sector will grow if cuts are forced upon the public sector. The truth is that the precise opposite will happen."

NIPSA general secretary Brian Campfield, who also spoke at the Belfast rally, slammed as "nonsense" the argument that public sector workers should now be targeted because their private sector equivalents have already "taken a



hit": "The people who peddle this line – our millionaire government, the CBI, the Institute of Directors, the tame pro-establishment economists who serve the banking interests – talk as if the public sector and the private sector inhabited two different planets.

"But we know that thousands of families in Northern Ireland have members working in both the private and the public sector.

'ENDS MEET'

"Many unemployed construction and factory workers who have been hit hard by the recession depend on family members who work in the public sector to make ends meet."

UNISON regional secretary Patricia McKeown rubbished PM David Cameron's view that "we're

all in this together".

She told the crowd: "He tells us we're all in this together. Well, we're not in it together – we're not in any project that will cut and destroy our public services and cut and destroy jobs.

"How dare any government tell us that it is our fault. We are not just saying no to cuts, no to privatisation, no to the end of the welfare state as we know and love it.

"We're going further and saying it doesn't have to happen at all."

Ms McKeown said it was time the "truth was told" that Britain was "not broke", adding: "The UK is still the fifth most wealthiest country in the world.

"And if the government were to take some seriously real action on behalf of the people, they would have all the money they need to

fund our public services, to benefit our private sector and to boost our economy."

Taryn Trainor, of Unite, told the crowd that public sector cuts would not improve the economy. She said: "Cuts will ruin it and take the private sector with it."

Ms Trainor added that because Northern Ireland was a "post conflict society", investment was needed "not cuts and unemployment".

'HANDS OFF'

She warned: "Hands off our jobs and hands off our pensions because working people aren't prepared to hand them over without a fight."

In Derry, hundreds packed into a sunny Guildhall Square to hear speakers from Derry Trades Council, a number of trade unions and community groups as well as church leaders.

Addressing the rally, NIPSA deputy general secretary Alison Millar said: "This government intend to make the young, the old and the middle aged, the waged and unwaged suffer for the fault of others – we cannot allow this to happen."



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**DAY OF ACTION
SEPTEMBER
29**

BRUSSELS

100,000 on the march

TENS of thousands of workers took to the streets on September 29 to protest against stringent austerity measures being implemented by governments across Europe.

Describing the massive day of action as "a resounding success for European workers", ETUC general secretary John Monks warned it served as "a clear signal" to the leaders of Europe.

Addressing them, he said: "You can no longer merely listen to the market, you can no longer

ignore the anger and concern of the workers." More than 100,000 workers marched on EU headquarters in Brussels where the European Commission is currently proposing punishing new penalties on member states that have run up high deficits.

Unions argue this will prompt governments to make spending cuts so severe that national economies will once again be plunged back into recession.

Pointing out that Europe already had 23 mil-

lion unemployed, Mr Monks dubbed it a "bizarre time... to be proposing a regime of punishment".

He added: "How is that going to make the situation better? It is going to make it worse."

Up to 10 million Spanish workers took part in a general strike – the first since 2002 – to coincide with the ETUC day of action.

Elsewhere, there were protests across Ireland, in Greece, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Portugal and Serbia.



ETUC chief John Monks addressing crowd. Left and below: many travelled from UK and Ireland to the Brussels demo



Pictures: ETUC/TUC

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on **028 90247940** or at jacqui.mcgonagle@ictuni.org

CWU chief warns of sell-off threat to Royal Mail

CWU regional secretary Lawrence Huston has claimed proposals contained in the Postal Services Bill point to a spiralling privatisation agenda to sell off the Royal Mail.

Describing proposals to give postal workers a 10% stake as "quite patronising" and "a side issue", he pointed out: "People currently own 100% of the industry as members of the public".

Mr Huston insisted the public did not want the Royal Mail to be privatised.

"Not one poll conducted over the last 20 years has come anywhere near saying yes to privatisation.

"Every single poll has shown that people want a reliable public service ... and that's what our postal service is and should remain – a public utility."

The CWU has consistently warned of the threat of privatisation as well as the importance of preserving the universal service provision.

Mr Huston added: "These plans really have confirmed our worst fears – there is no limit to how much the Royal Mail can be sold out.

"Privatisation plans that Labour set in motion are now in danger of becoming a reality under the Conservatives and the Lib-Dems.

"Businesses in rural areas across Northern Ireland are especially reliant on the services of the Royal Mail and any reduction to the universal service provision will seriously impact on rural areas and the economy.

"Of most importance to Northern Ireland is the need to ensure the continuation of the universal service provision which means that it costs the same to deliver a letter to any address in the UK.

"If the company is sold off, we simply will not have this, especially as Trade and Industry Secretary Vince Cable has already indicated he is prepared to reduce the six days a week service."

Survey highlights threat to workers

SHOPWORKERS union Usdaw has revealed that more than a million retail employees in the UK have been assaulted, threatened or abused in the last year.

According to a survey carried out by the union, 6% of shopworkers were subjected to violent attack, 37% were threatened with harm and 70% had suffered verbal abuse.

General secretary John Hannett described the figures as "shocking".

He said: "We need to improve peoples' attitude toward shopworkers.

"Too many people still think working in retail is not a proper job and that this somehow gives them the right to abuse shopworkers with impunity."



Report tees up our public services for privatisation

THE Phase I Report from the Public Service Pensions Independent Commission, led by ex-Labour Cabinet minister John Hutton, not only paves the way for further attacks on public service pensions but also tees up public services for privatisation.

Chapter 6 of the Interim Report, published on October 7, is entitled 'Supporting Productivity', it is however an attempt by Hutton to totally eradicate 'Fair Deal', the agreement on transferring functions from the public sector to the private sector.

Fair Deal ensured that the private sector transferee employer had to have in place a broadly comparable pension scheme to that of the public service scheme from which the employee was being transferred out of.

Hutton states: "Fair Deal also acts as a barrier to free movement of employees from the public to private sector."

The bulk of the report clearly signals the end to defined benefit final salary schemes for public servants.

Hutton complains that they are too costly, unfair to the taxpayer and private sector employee, inflexible and don't represent a fair sharing of risk between the employer and the employee.

He identifies a range of models from career average, hybrid schemes combining an element of defined benefit up to a certain salary level and then above that a defined contribution arrangement or a collective defined contribution scheme.

The case is also made by Hutton to increase the age at which the vast majority of public servants could claim their occupational pension.

It would seem that his Phase II Report, to be produced to inform the 2011 Budget, will at best recommend a minimum age of 65 if not 66 to link in with the Con-Lib Government's plans to increase to 66 the age at



VIEWPOINT
NIPSA assistant general secretary **Bumper Graham** assesses Lord Hutton's interim report on public service pensions

which the State old age pension will be paid.

This he sees as an initial step as he wishes to explore further linking the minimum age of retirement to any further improvements in longevity.

While Hutton dismisses the myth of 'gold-plated' public service pensions and acknowledges at various points in the report that over the past decade there has been very considerable disimprovements in private sector pension provision, other than for those in the boardrooms and senior management, he sees the answer in diluting the value of public service pensions.

BLATANT ATTACK

This is despite the fact that changes in recent years and the blatant attack on pensions by the government in moving indexation; from RPI to CPI has resulted in a 25% decrease in public service pension scheme liabilities.

In fact, public servants over the past four to five years have seen real level increases in their pension contributions of 56% compared to a 33% increase in scheme costs.

This means that schemes such as the NHS Superannuation scheme and the Northern Ireland Local Government Pension Scheme are currently returning a positive excess – ie: total contributions being in excess of the total pension payouts year on year and will do so for a number of years to come.

There is also the very real potential that the government will increase employee contribution levels in the immediate future as Hutton

states that this is the only way in which the government can make short-term savings.

The exception to this is that he makes a special case for the armed forces, who have a wholly non-contributory scheme, not surprising for a recent Secretary of State for Defence who supported the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Hutton report provides lot of detail and data and recognises that for the vast majority of public service pensioners that they receive a very small proportion of their previous pay levels and that the real value for most is less than £5,600 per annum.

In fact, the bulk of public service pensioners receive well below the levels that the Turner Pension Commission stated was necessary in order for pensioners to have an adequate level of income in retirement.

Every public servant has to be greatly concerned as to what Hutton will say in his final report, he has clearly paved the way for serious attacks on public service pensions.

In considering the comments provided during the consultation process, he has ignored the voices of 12 million public servants who are either active members or deferred members of public service schemes or public service pensioners.

Hutton prefers to do the dirty work of the Tories and those who abhor public service pensions such as the CBI and IOD.

On taking up his role for the new Con-Lib government to conduct a review of public service pensions, former-colleague John Prescott referred to Hutton (as well as Frank Field for doing work on social security) as a "collaborator".

Well, I believe there is clear justification for that comment in view of what is in the Hutton Phase I Report.

▶ A more detailed analysis is available on the NIPSA website www.nipsa.org.uk



Jack O'Connor



Eamon Devoey

IBEC's pay freeze call is 'recipe for conflict'

CONGRESS president Jack O'Connor has hit back at IBEC's claim that a pay freeze to 2013 would help protect jobs, calling it "both opportunistic and irresponsible".

The employers' group described expectations among workers of pay rises before 2013 as "unrealistic" and insisted wage restraint was needed to restore competitiveness.

But Mr O'Connor identified jobs – and not a blanket pay freeze – as "the right way to go".

He pointed out that though Irish exports were booming, domestic consumption – accounting for 60% of the economy – was still in decline.

A pay freeze, as advocated by IBEC, would only serve to further depress consumption.

Mr O'Connor said: "IBEC's call for a pay freeze to 2013 is completely counterproductive because, apart from anything else, it fuels the fear and apprehension which is preventing people from spending."

He added: "Unit labour costs in Ireland fell by 2.9% last year and are expected to fall by a further 5.1% this year."

"We are among those at the top of the league in the EU on labour productivity."

Eamon Devoey, secretary of the Congress' Private Sector Committee, also lashed the IBEC pay freeze, calling it "a recipe for conflict".

The TEEU chief made his comments following a meeting of the committee, which represents 400,000 workers in manufacturing and services, on September 30.

He said: "It is widely expected that the Budget will make further inroads into the domestic economy and target workers yet again to pay for the banks' bail-out."

"We should be generating jobs and demand in the economy not suppressing them further."

"Competitiveness has improved significantly in Irish manufacturing and services, as can be seen from CSO figures and the performance of our exports."

"But higher exports and productivity cannot lift the economy on their own."

Mr Devoey added that employers needed "to widen their focus beyond next week's pay roll".

"The last thing we need is for people to be told by IBEC or the government that further cuts are on the way."

"The people who created the present crisis have already succeeded in deflating the economy to the point where the cure may succeed in killing the patient. It is time we called a halt to this self-destructive exercise."



'No time to stand on the sidelines'



MORE than 7,000 people marched on the Tory party conference in Birmingham earlier this month in protest at the UK coalition government's cuts strategy.

The October 3 protest, organised by the Right to Work Campaign, was backed by the PCS, CWU, UCU, Aslef, BECTU, EQUITY, the NUJ as well as the National Union of Students.

Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn told the crowd: "This is the time to mobilise, organise and defend the Welfare State – to stand for a society based on the needs of everyone not the needs of a few."

Party colleague John McDonnell said he had this warning for the Tories: "If you come for us, we will come for you, with protests, strikes, occupations, civil disobedience and direct action. This is no time to stand on the sidelines."



Pictures: Right To Work Campaign



John Cridland

Law change proposals strike at basic rights

THE TUC has dubbed calls for tougher legal restrictions on the right to strike "a fundamental attack on basic rights at work".

It follows the publication last month of a CBI report into industrial relations laws.

The paper, 'Keeping The Wheels Turning', outlined a series of measures to "modernise" current UK legislation.

One proposal was that firms should be allowed to recruit agency staff to cover for striking workers. At present, companies can hire temporary staff but not go through an agency to do this.

It also called for the notice period for industrial action to increase from seven to 14 days following a ballot.

CBI deputy director general John Cridland said: "While workers have the legal right to withdraw their labour, employers have a responsibility to run their businesses."

Hitting back, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber pointed out that the UK already had "some of the toughest restrictions on the right to strike in the advanced world".

He said: "Already the courts regularly strike down democratic ballots that clearly show majority support for action."

"The CBI proposals are a fundamental attack on basic rights at work that are recognised in every human rights charter, and will be dismissed by any government with a commitment to civil liberties."

Mr Barber also lashed the employers' group for taking a "one-dimensional" view of industrial relations in which unions are always at fault.

He added: "Strikes are always a last resort. While strikes can inconvenience the public, fundamentally shifting the balance of power at work even further towards managers would be worse as it would encourage bad bosses and end up reducing standards across workplaces."

"No one welcomes the odd day's disruption, but it is a price worth paying for a fundamental right that helps deliver decent standards at work for millions each and every day."

NOT YOUR ATM



THE SHAMELESS fact that US bankers are still paying themselves massive bonuses despite being bailed out by public cash has touched a raw nerve with the American public.

And Working America, a community affiliate of the AFL-CIO, has given ordinary people a means of expressing their fury simply by uploading a picture with a message for greedy Wall Street moguls on notyouratm.com.

A spokesperson said: "Wall Street's biggest banks were happy to take billions in bailout money."

"Then the CEOs took millions in bonuses for themselves."

"Wall Street bankers are all too happy to treat Main Street as their ATM – they gambled with the American economy, cost Main Street millions of jobs and came back with their hands out."

EDUCATION

Schools must give priority to unwaged teachers

THE Irish National Teachers' Organisation has urged schools to prioritise teachers without work for substitution work.

According to the union, up to about two years ago almost 100 per cent of substitution was carried out by retired teachers as there was a shortage of qualified teachers.

But this year only eight per cent of teacher substitution was done by retired teachers reflecting the significant number of qualified teachers who are now out of work.

Last month, the union called on schools to prioritise unwaged teachers and called on Education Minister Mary Coughlan to set up panels of supply teachers on a regional basis so that available vacancies could be matched with teachers seeking work.

Speaking in Sligo on October 16, INTO president Jim Higgins slammed the Irish government's "lack of thinking about employment".

He said: "Instead of bringing a small bit of creative thinking to bear on how to increase the employment of the hundreds of unemployed teacher graduates this government disgracefully proposes to legislate for the employment of unqualified persons in place of teachers."

"This is an insult to teachers, to unemployed graduates, to their families who financed their education and to the taxpayer who also invested in their teacher training."

'Insult' to teachers

INTO general secretary Sheila Nunan has lashed provisions contained in the new Education Amendment Bill that will allow the employment of non-teachers as substitute teachers under certain circumstances.

Describing the move as a calculated insult, she claimed parents would be outraged that Education Minister Mary Coughlan was proposing to legislate for unqualified people taking classes in place of teachers.

Ms Nunan said: "There are now hundreds of unemployed, fully qualified teachers to be recruited for this work."

Pictures: Working America AFL-CIO



World view: Paul Howes

Future lies in global scale trade unionism

AUSTRALIAN Workers Union chief Paul Howes has claimed workers had to find innovative ways of working together to match the increasing global power of multinationals.

Addressing an international conference of trade unionists in Germany last month, he said: "There is no doubt in my mind the future is global unionism. Unions must respond to the global marketplace

"We live in a global market. Our employers last century may have been home-town bosses – then the more successful became state or national bosses.

"But now in the 21st century increasingly across all employment sectors we face global employers, global bosses. Therefore unions have to match this new reality with global unionism.

"When you consider the many global companies that we have in common with unions across the world in an era of global labour markets, we must find ways of assisting each other, by working together in campaigning or organising, bargaining and exchanges, so that workers' rights will be strengthened."



Amnesty International REPORT

Ko Aye Aung & Myo Min Zaw

On November 7, Burma will go to the polls for the first time in 20 years. The elections will be held against a backdrop of political repression. Fundamental rights of expression, association and assembly are severely curtailed and repressive laws and practices are used by Burma's government to criminalise peaceful political dissent.

Critics of the government face harassment, arbitrary arrest, torture, imprisonment and extrajudicial executions. There are currently more than 2,200 political prisoners being held in Burma.

Among them are two student union activists Myo Min Zaw and Ko Aye Aung, pictured above. Both were leading members of the banned All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU).

On September 12, 1998, they were arrested for distributing leaflets and organising student demonstrations in Rangoon, Burma's former capital and largest city.

They were sentenced to 52 years and 59 years respectively. Now aged 33 and 34, they have spent nearly their adult lives behind bars.

According to a Democratic Voice of Burma report, on February 9, 2010, Myo Min Zaw has been suffering from respiratory problems leading to nose bleeds.

It is not clear if he has received treatment for these problems. He is held in Putao prison in northern Burma, up to a week's travel away from his family in Rangoon.

Ko Aye Aung is being held in Kale prison in Sagaing division, over 900 km away from his family in Rangoon. Kale Prison is in an area where malaria and typhoid are common and prisoners are vulnerable to infection. In 2002, Ko Aye Aung took part in a hunger strike to protest the lack of medical treatment in prison. There has been no further information on Ko Aye Aung's situation since.

Amnesty International believes both Ko Aye Aung and Myo Min Zaw are prisoners of consciences and should be released immediately.

Log on to take action at www.amnesty.org.uk



Harsh cuts: John Monks

UK govt cuts 'too fast, too much'

ETUC chief John Monks has slammed the UK coalition government for cutting "too fast, too much".

Speaking at a Labour Relations Agency conference earlier this month in Belfast, he claimed that the austerity plans would risk killing off jobs and growth – especially in regions like Northern Ireland.

He said: "The government's austerity plans to repay debt are too harsh.

"They are paying back too much debt, too quickly.

"They risk killing off jobs and growth in regions of the UK like Northern Ireland which are heavily dependent on the public sector."

Mr Monks warned: "Other European governments share the same fetish for austerity and they are on course to plunge Europe back into recession.

"They should change their course, listen to the voice of the workers and go for growth and jobs.

"They should be like President Roosevelt and his New Deal, not President Hoover and the Great Depression."



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Picture: MRCI

50 years struggle to secure rights of domestic workers

DOMESTIC worker organisations and trade unions have been battling to get domestic work onto the International Labour Organisation agenda for the last 50 years.

In 2008, the battle finally paid off and at present the negotiation process is well under way.

But many challenges lie ahead in the coming year before domestic workers can claim victory and have their employment rights recognised and protected by legally-binding international standards.

Despite providing essential roles in society by enabling others to work outside the family home, the valuable work of childminders, cleaners and carers for the elderly is undervalued and under protected.

Getting domestic work recognised as work is one of the major struggles of domestic workers' movements globally.

In some countries, domestic work is completely excluded from the protection of labour laws.

Millions of women and girls around the world are domestic workers. They are

By AOIFE SMITH

recognised as some of the most abused and exploited workers.

Isolated behind closed doors, these 'invisible workers' can suffer abuse at the hands of their employers.

Wage exploitation, long working hours, forced labour, sexual, physical and psychological abuse and harassment are all common.

The domestic work sector needs specific legislation to protect this historically neglected group.

The Domestic Workers Action Group (DWAG), supported by the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland, has been campaigning for the rights and dignity of domestic workers in Ireland since 2004.

DWAG and ICTU are mobilising support for a strong ILO Convention.

DWAG is campaigning together with domestic worker organisations internationally to ensure that domestic workers' voices are being fairly represented in the process to ensure the final instrument protects the rights of all domestic workers, regardless of their

immigration status or whether they are employed by a diplomat – two contentious issues in current discussions.

The reality is migrant women make up a significant component of domestic workers globally. Any discussions will have to consider their situations.

DWAG believes that a person's immigration status should never be allowed to be used to deny a worker their rights – this is morally indefensible.

The campaigning will come to a head in Geneva in June 2011, when the standard will be discussed and finalised, hopefully taking the form of an international convention supplemented by a set of recommendations.

Our task now is to negotiate and convince the Irish government to commit to supporting a convention that is both effective and ratifiable.

This campaign for the rights and recognition of domestic workers needs to be made visible.

In the build-up to June we need to strengthen alliances, as lobbying the government into responding positively is a priority.

For more info visit www.domesticworkerrights.org or www.mrci.ie/Domestic-Workers or email aoife@mrci.ie

€3bn alternative budget launched

ALMOST €3 billion could be raised for the public purse by a range of measures, including overhauling pension tax breaks and introducing a small levy on company profits, Social Justice Ireland has claimed.

Other ideas contained in the organisation's "alternative Budget" include taxing text messages to create 100,000 part-time jobs for the long-term unemployed and a tax hike on gambling that would go towards

higher social welfare payments.

Director Fr Sean Healy said: "The government has made a complete mess of the banking crisis, to a point where it will cost us billions for years and years.

"It has over the last three budgets savaged poor people so as to protect the richest.

"It has vandalised the economy – that's some achievement over three budgets and I don't think it should

continue." Fr Healy claimed pension tax breaks – with a 20% rate on lower incomes and a 41% rate for higher earners – unfairly hit the less well-off.

This means four-fifths of the benefit goes to the richest fifth.

Introducing a standard rate would make a €1.4 billion saving for the State finances under the proposals.

A 2.5% levy on all corporate profits – over and above the existing

12.5% corporate tax rate – would raise another €632 million.

Social Justice Ireland proposed a 0.33 cent tax on text messages to raise €25 million and an overhaul of tax breaks saving €552 million.

The campaign group also proposes an increase in social welfare payments of €5 a week for single people, and €8.50 for couples, as well as student loans to cover third-level fees and living costs.



Sightsavers

Every wipe of his eyes takes Talla closer to blindness

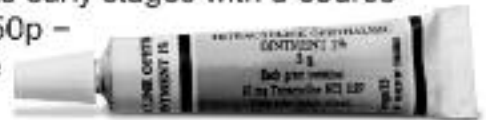


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Talla is just five. He has trachoma, a painful eye disease which can lead to a lifetime of blindness. Repeated infections cause the eyelashes to turn inwards and slowly and painfully every blink damages the eye and leads to blindness. Trachoma can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



If, like Sightsavers, you believe that nobody should go blind needlessly from trachoma, river blindness or cataract, please make a donation today to support our eye care work in some of the most deprived communities in the world.

Euro donations, please call 1850 50 20 20 or visit www.sightsavers.ie
Sterling donations, please call 0800 089 20 20 or visit www.sightsavers.org
Please quote ICTU. Thank you!

Registered charity numbers 207544 and 5030070