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THE UNION POST

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MAY 2009

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THE STAMP OF LEADERSHIP...
50 Jim Larkin first day covers to give away **p16**

CONGRESS BLUEPRINT

BILLION EURO PLAN FOR JOBS

CONGRESS has unveiled proposals for a billion euro package to tackle the Republic's unemployment crisis.

Warning that time is short, unions have insisted the government must act with the same urgency it showed in bailing out the banks.

The innovative plan sets out to keep people in employment ensuring that redundancy is a last resort.

It calls for state support for short-time working, a series of initiatives on training and the setting up of a Social Innovation Fund to meet a wide range of social needs.

Assistant general secretary Sally Anne Kinahan said: "Government has delayed far too long. The jobs crisis is of the same magnitude and same di-

mensions as the banking crisis – it requires the same urgency, focus and attention."

Warning against a piecemeal approach, she insisted all the machinery of the state must be harnessed to protect jobs and income as well as to create new training opportunities and new jobs.

Congress chief David Begg added: "Jobs have to be the absolute priority. We cannot allow a situation to develop where we allow jobs to go because all arms of the state are fixated on the banking crisis.

"I am convinced that more could and should be done on SR Technics, for example.

"If we don't get our priorities right we'll end up sacrificing jobs and peoples' futures just to save the banks."

- State support short-term working ✓
- Social employment programme ✓
- Social welfare reform ✓
- Training initiatives ✓
- Job rotation ✓
- Apprentice training ✓



Swift action needed to deal with lengthening dole queues

'WE'RE FACING A LOST FUTURE, A LOST GENERATION' **p27**



**EQUALITY
EQUALITY
EQUALITY**
equality

**Niall Crowley on
equality backlash 10**



**Transport House
inspires artist 12**



**Respect... just a
little bit, please 15**



**ANALYSIS: A tale
of two budgets 24**



**Action now on
pensions crisis 30**

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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

SAVING JOBS

FROM the earliest days of this crisis, Congress has tried to be positive and constructive.

Repeatedly, we have put forward proposals, plans and creative solutions designed to meet the challenge and ensure working people do not carry the burden for the misdeeds of others.

Some of our ideas have been so innovative – the National Recovery Bond, for example – that they have been unilaterally ‘adopted’ by others. Which we don’t mind, so long as they are utilised to the widest possible benefit and not to feather some already comfortable nests.

Other proposals – such as our €1 billion Job Creation & Protection Plan – have been widely endorsed across society, by employers, business groups and political parties.

But there is one common problem faced by all our initiatives – they have got little or no response from key Government departments and from Government itself.

And here lies the kernel of the problem. It appears that Government has become fixated with the Banking Crisis to the exclusion of all other issues. As a result, it fails to grasp the gravity and significance of that other major problem that confronts us – the Jobs Crisis.

How else to explain the distinct lack of urgency that characterised the Government response to the loss of well paid, high-skilled jobs in Waterford

and more recently in SR Technics? These are precisely the sort of jobs that a modern economy requires and should strive to keep.

I cannot be absolutely certain, but I am willing to wager that few other EU governments would have let such prized jobs disappear without a long, hard fight. The unions fought – but their tenacity was not matched or backed at official level.

Contrast that to reaction when the banking system is threatened, not by external forces, but by its own incompetence and greed. By a bonus culture that encouraged incestuous self-interest at the expense of wider society.

Instead of nationalising them and subjugating the needs of the banking system to those of wider society, the reverse has happened. It seems those who practised economic treachery and treason have been allowed to write their own rescue plan.

The banks oppose nationalisation and their sentiment finds a strong echo in Government. So instead we have the proposal to buy their bad loans – the NAMA plan – using taxpayers’ money. It could cost €20 billion, it could cost €40 billion, it could cost €90 billion. Nobody knows.

But what we do know is that the banks in their entirety could be purchased for a fraction of that price, perhaps €2 billion in total.

So instead of buying the house

IS KEY ISSUE

ICTUVIEW

David Begg
General Secretary



DUBLIN AND BELFAST MAY DAY RALLIES **PICTURE SPECIAL**

TURN TO PAGES 18,19,20 & 21



at a knockdown price – contents included – with certainty that it will regain value, we've opted to purchase its ramshackle furniture for 20, 30 or maybe 40 times the price. And we're not sure that overpriced, ramshackle

furniture will ever regain its value. But undeterred by reason, we'll borrow the money and send the bill to our children. Someone – other than a bank boss – please explain how that makes sense.

Not long after Congress unveiled our €1 billion Jobs Plan, a senior Government figure dismissively asked where we could find that sort of money in the midst of a banking crisis. That's the question we're asking too.

NEWSBRIEFS

RTE staff anger over €12,000 parking perk

RTE staff have reacted with fury after it was revealed senior executives pocket about €12,000 a year in allowances simply for driving their cars to work.

It follows the announcement of a 7.5 per cent cut in most journalists' pay from the start of this month.

Adding to the resentment among employees is the move without consultation by management to slash travel expenses by a quarter and subsistence allowances by 15 per cent.

The NUJ chapel at RTE passed a motion criticising the move, claiming it amounted to "bad faith" on the part of management and have demanded to be shown details of top executives' perks and pensions.

The union's Irish Executive Council chairman Damien Tiernan said the expenses issue had angered "an awful lot" of staff at the national broadcaster.

Survey: 44% victims of workplace bullies

A SURVEY has revealed that 44 per cent of Irish workers have been subjected to workplace bullying at some time during their careers.

The results, from a study carried out by employment law specialists Peninsula Ireland, found that more than 70 per cent of employees were uncomfortable reporting abuses to bosses.

Peninsula Ireland chief Alan Price claimed many employers were aware that workers were "suffering in silence" but could not take action without victims coming forward.

He said: "Employees are mindful of reporting incidents as they don't want to be seen as troublemakers."

"However, they need to be reporting incidents of bullying immediately so that it can be stamped out."

Mr Price called on bosses to take a firm stand on the issue.

He added: "Employers should look for these types of tell-tale signs and act upon any findings. Taking a tough stance on bullying will discourage it from occurring in the workplace and leave employees to feel guarded against any abuse."

Health workers to launch compo claim

SIPTU and the Irish Nurses Organisation are backing a compensation claim 40 health service workers are taking before the Labour Court.

It is understood the claimants' case involves the loss of night-time allowances and on-call payments arising out of the transfer of A&E services from Nenagh and Ennis to the Mid-Western Regional Hospital.

INO regional industrial relations officer Mary Fogarty said: "The Labour Court will deal with this issue and we expect to be going to the court in the near future along with SIPTU."

KEEP EQUALITY AT TOP OF AGENDA P10

Billion euro blueprint for crisis on jobs

CONGRESS has called for the immediate setting up of a new €1 billion job creation and protection plan that would see all the machinery of the state harnessed to the goal of tackling the unemployment crisis.

With unemployment doubling in the last year, Congress assistant general secretary Sally Anne Kinahan claimed inaction was no longer an option.

She said: "Government has delayed far too long.

The jobs crisis is of the same magnitude and same dimensions as the banking crisis – it requires the same urgency, focus and attention.

"We are proposing a range of new, innovative and creative measures that will harness all the machinery of state to the same objectives – protecting jobs, creating new employment and training and protecting peoples' incomes.

"This crisis requires an 'all of government' approach as it impacts across all of society, not in discrete and disconnected areas."

Under the Congress plan, a fund of €1 billion – comprised of existing and new resources – would be used to ensure redundancy becomes a 'last resort' and people are guaranteed access to training. The plan is one of the initiatives tabled by Congress at the ongoing talks with government. To date, there has been little progress.

The plan would also see the creation of a Social Innovation Fund, which could bankroll a wide range of initiatives and schemes designed to meet

serious social needs – childcare, elder care, community development – and allow unemployed people put their skills to work.

The overriding goals are to keep people 'attached to the workforce', avoid sharp income drops and ensure workforce skills do not become degraded through sustained periods of unemployment.

The plan envisages changes to existing employment and redundancy law, tax law, and the social welfare code to remove barriers to work and training. It also envisages making the education system more directly attuned to the jobs crisis.

It would be driven by an oversight group at national level comprised of unions, business and government representatives. It would provide for a range of new measures and schemes, such as:

● **State support for short time working.** In Holland, an exceptional short-time working

scheme provides targeted support for employments in difficulty, with state support for payroll costs conditional on worker participation in training during the 'down' time.

● **Social employment programme.** This would be targeted at bridging gaps and deficits in our social and caring infrastructure.

● **Reforming social welfare.** The system must be refashioned to support alternatives to redundancy. Ending the requirement that workers be 'fully unemployed' means they are free to partake in training. Payments must be based on lost



Kinahan: Focus & attention

Barriers to an equal world

ICTU assistant general secretary Peter Bunting has pinpointed "cronyism", "class" and "tradition" as the principal barriers to full equality between the sexes.

He made his comments at the opening of a special seminar to mark International Women's Day weekend on March 6 to March 8.

Mr Bunting praised delegates for challenging all of the social partners – including the trade unions – on the under-representation of women in senior posts.

He told the Belfast meeting: "What separates women from the boys who win most of the prizes is not education, or ability or competence - what separates women from playing a full role in public life and boardrooms are a series of barriers, marked by cronyism and class and that least tangible and most inflexible of blockades to equality and mutual progress – tradition.

"While these are valid criticisms from the trade unions of the very top of public and private life, we also can be criticised with equal validity for our inability to overcome and rectify so-called traditions which inhibit the promotion of women within this movement."

A total of 148 delegates from across Ireland attended the event and guests were welcomed to Belfast by Kerry Fleck, of the CWU, on behalf of Belfast & District Trades Council.

The conference was also addressed by ICTU President Patricia McKeown who flagged up the continuing pay gap as it affects women workers around the world.

Delegates were treated to a wine reception sponsored by INO and Unite and enjoyed several pieces of drama performed by Belfast Voices.



earnings and not the number of days lost. Allow workers in receipt of FIS to retain the payment if their hours fall below 19.

● **Training guarantee for workers.** Employers should be legally required to provide and facilitate training, as happens in most other EU countries, either through paid leave or devoting a proportion of annual payroll to training.

● **Job rotation.** Allow people in work to participate in training, while people out of work benefit from staying within and in touch with the workforce

● **Apprentice training.** A crucial issue if we are not to suffer skills shortages in the future. If the current system continues it is likely no new apprentices will enter the system for several years to come.

Check out the plan online at

www.ictu.ie/download/pdf/congress_job_creation_protection_plan_may_09.pdf



Sheila Nunan: Challenges ahead

History made as woman is elected to head up INTO

THE Irish National Teachers Organisation has appointed its first female general secretary in the body's 141-year history.

Sheila Nunan from Newbridge, Co Kildare, will take over from current chief John Carr when he retires at the union's conference next Easter and will hold the post of general secretary designate for a year.

About 85 per cent of the INTO's 30,000 members in the Republic are women.

Born in Newbridge, Co Kildare, Ms Nunan now lives in Glencullen, Co Dublin. She is a former teacher and principal teacher in Tal-laght and in Bray, Co Wicklow, and has been a full-time official of the union for three years.

She was elected INTO president in 2005 and was formerly a member of the union's Executive.

Ms Nunan said she was deeply honoured and humbled to have been elected by her colleagues. She said there were very serious challenges in protecting teachers' living standards and in securing additional resources for schools.

But she added that she was committed to seeking the support of parents and the general public to ensure that primary education was protected from the economic downturn.

HE sector unions slam derisory offer

HIGHER education unions in the UK have slammed a pay offer of 0.3 per cent made on April 26 as "derisory".

In a joint statement, EIS, GMB, UCU, UNISON and Unite flatly rejected the offer which follows what the unions called an earlier "ultimatum" of linking pay and jobs.

The unions had pushed in negotiations for a national agreement on job security and avoiding redundancies..

UNISON higher education chief Jon Richards said: "The employers can't have it both ways: they say that they are holding down pay to save jobs, yet when we seek reassurances about job security they start running away. We are looking for action not just words." Talks will resume on May 19.

■ ICTU has welcomed the "adoption" of a union proposal on jobs in the semi-state sector by Fine Gael.

Congress economic adviser Paul Sweeney pointed out the party's call for a new state body to stimulate investment and planning mirrored a similar structure suggested by ICTU way back in the summer of 2005.

He said: "The aim of the original proposal was to free the sector from financial and political micro management and allow some very successful companies to realise a greater commercial potential for the benefit of the taxpayer."

Mr Sweeney said the idea had been restated in a recent submission to government, adding: "They may not have been paying attention but thankfully somebody was."

128 special needs classes to be cut

THE decision to close 128 special needs classes in primary schools has been attacked as "patent nonsense" by the INTO.

General secretary John Carr claimed special needs children were paying the price for the economic collapse. He said: "Seven billion euro can be found to bail out the banks yet seven million cannot be found for special needs children."

The government is to return the 534 children affected to regular classes. Mr Carr added: "It is patent nonsense to return them to classes in which they couldn't cope in the first place".

A Fine Gael Dail motion on May 6 to reverse the decision was voted down. One Green TD said it made him "vomit continuously" to have to back education cuts.



Children of Visteon workers lead the April 17 rally, while John McGuire, **Union** senior shop steward at the plant, addresses the crowd outside City Hall in Belfast

Thousands rally for

THOUSANDS attending a demonstration in Belfast city centre heard speakers call for government action over the deteriorating jobs situation.

The April 17 Rally for Jobs and Workers' Rights, organised by the NIC-ICTU, came as Visteon workers continued their ultimately successful occupation of the Belfast car parts plant and followed the loss of nearly 2,000 jobs in manufacturing across the North.

Speaking before Visteon workers settled their dispute, ICTU assistant general secretary Peter Bunting told those gathered outside the city hall that workers at plant had received little thanks for being "models of efficiency and innovation" while their bosses "had fled with their pensions intact, their reputations protected and their share options guaranteed".

Describing it as "an act of corporate mugging," he said the futures of Visteon workers had been "shattered by corporate greed".

Calling on government ministers to act, he said the Stormont administration had two choices – either wait for "the genius of the free market to

weave its magic" or apply to the EU for funds to retrain workers threatened by redundancy.

Mr Bunting called on the Northern Ireland Executive to set up a workers protection fund in the face of a disastrous month with massive job losses at Bombardier and FG Wilson.

He said: "It would give people financial benefits which could cushion them over a period of time during which they can seek job opportunities."

Mr Bunting pointed out that the government lavished millions on securing advice from consultants, but he added that he was willing to give ministers "some advice for free". He told the crowd: "They can, and should, apply to the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund which funds the retraining of manufacturing workers threatened by redundancy. Workers in similar positions to our friends in Bombardier/Shorts from countries such

Series of savage job cuts hits North hard

ILLUSTRATING the scale and suddenness of the contraction in the economy, 400 architects – one-fifth of Northern Ireland's total – lost their jobs in a space of just months.

Construction accounted for 44pc of the rise in December 2008's claimants, with towns such as Magherafelt, Cookstown, Dungannon and Banbridge particularly hard hit.

As this sector employed large numbers of migrant workers who have since gone 'home' rather than 'sign on', construction job losses were worse than DETI figures demonstrated.

MFI, Woolworths, Zavvi, Calcast, Seagate and FG Wilson, Tyrone Brick laid off large numbers at the start of the year, and the situation worsened last month when, in just one week, 95 more workers were made redundant at the engineering firm FG Wilson, 87 jobs went at Nortel's Newtownabbey plant, 90 more positions were lost at Hughes Christensen on top of 45 culled in February and 210 people were laid off at Visteon.

And in another swingeing blow, Bombardier/Shorts announced the "unfortunate" cut of 975 jobs at their Belfast plant.



Thousands rallied to support hard-hit workers and their families



National agreements will be honoured say HSE

THE HSE has confirmed to IMPACT it is committed to return to the terms of all existing national agreements.

Health chiefs have also told the union it will instruct management at Sligo General Hospital to rescind a recent move to end the automatic right to sick entitlement which the union claimed was contrary to several national agreements and Labour Court recommendations.

Strike notices at Sligo General have been suspended as part of the deal.

IMPACT official Richy Carrothers said the union will not allow local managers to dismantle national agreements.

He added: "Our members are very conscious of the economic difficulties facing the country but unilateral decisions by local hospital managers that inflict greater hardship on workers are not a solution to the wider problems."

Rules tightened on work permits for non-nationals

IT will soon be more difficult for foreign nationals to seek work in Ireland after the government announced it was revising legislation on work permits.

The changes, which also include tougher conditions and higher fees for renewing the permits, come into effect from June 1.

First-time entrants to the labour market will be primarily affected under the new rules.

Permits will not be given for jobs under €30,000 a year and for a number of occupations including domestic workers and HGV drivers.

Spouses and dependants of future work permit holders will also have to apply for the documentation.

Figures released by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment show 30,000 people, who make up 1.5 per cent of the total work force, hold employment permits.

Labour beef over meat industry claims

LABOUR has warned job cuts at a meat processing plant in Cork may be part of an industry-wide initiative to draft in cheap foreign labour to replace Irish workers.

Sean Sherlock, the party's spokesman on agriculture and food, claimed sources within the industry had highlighted this as a developing trend.

Though admitting evidence was "anecdotal", he said there was a "definite displacement" of Irish workers in the sector.

Meanwhile, Middleton-based county councillor Michael Hegarty claimed the loss of the 160 jobs at Dawn Meats in the town would have a serious impact across east Cork.

He added that employees "had adjusted to everything management had asked for. Now they have got nothing for it".

IMPACT SLAMS RECRUIT BAN P36



jobs & rights

as Finland, Italy, Spain, and Lithuania have benefited from this programme. Why not us?

"Another initiative the devolved government must do is establish a Workers' Protection Fund, which will ensure those facing redundancy get their moral and financial entitlement ahead of the receivers.

"They can legislate for decent workers' rights and ensure that the wealth of our workforce is not wasted on the dole queue.

"They can pressure the banks which only exist because of the public purse to pledge that no redundant workers' home will be repossessed. If our politicians can use public money to rescue bankers and shareholders, why not the workers who have created the wealth for those parasites in the first place?

"They can pass legislation which can prevent the fly-by-night antics of the Visteon management. They can also make clear their opposition to companies whose first option is to cut wages, to cut conditions, and then to cut jobs."

Union representatives of Bombardier, Visteon

and Nortel also spoke at the lunchtime rally. The biggest cheer from the audience was for John McGuire, Unite senior shop steward at Visteon, who vowed his colleagues would continue with their occupation of the site at Finaghy until they got their jobs back "or at least until our promises from Ford are honoured".

He also thanked the local communities around the factory who have supported the workers with food and good will.

Andrea Hamilton told the gathering Nortel had not used the selection procedure agreed with the unions when they announced 87 redundancies and claimed employees - some linked to the firm for 35 years - had been given scant notice.

David Thompson, speaking on behalf of Bombardier workers, said it was no comfort that most of those made redundant were agency staff.

He added: "They, too, have to feed their families and have bills to pay."

ICTU president Patricia McKeown and Unite's Jimmy Kelly also spoke and pledged their support for the campaign to save Northern Ireland jobs.



ICTU president Patricia McKeown, assistant general secretary Peter Bunting and Unite chief Jimmy Kelly spoke at the protest

Congress to meet with govt officials on plan for recovery

FOLLOWING a meeting with Taoiseach Brian Cowen, Congress negotiators are to meet separately with senior Government officials on the key issues of jobs, pensions and repossessions to determine if agreement on a national recovery plan is possible.

The meetings are to take place ahead of the scheduled May 20 meeting of the Congress Executive Council, which is expected to take a decision on the prospects for agreeing any new deal.

Congress held a two-hour meeting with the

Taoiseach and key Government officials on May 14 and discussed key elements of the proposed Congress recovery plan, in particular the €1 billion Job Creation and Protection Plan, which has attracted widespread support. The plan proposes new, innovative initiatives to address the jobs crisis and demands that redundancy be the 'last resort' for employers.

Following the meeting, Congress General Secretary David Begg said that while there had been no specific commitments given, the meeting had "more

substance than previous engagements." Mr Begg continued: "On that basis we felt it best to test whether there has been substantive movement on the Government side. This is not a new process we are entering into – we will hold three separate meetings with relevant officials that will allow us to gauge whether there is sufficient movement and intent, on the part of Government.

"It is only fitting that the Executive Council is fully apprised of all developments and possibilities, before any decisions are taken."



Sing out

Folk legend Andy Irvine was in the line-up for a special concert to commemorate May Day, held recently in Dublin's Liberty Hall. The Congress-organised event also featured Tommy Sands, Wally Page and Dick Gaughan on the bill

Govt's priorities wrong on aviation

SIPTU Branch Organiser Pat Ward has accused the Irish government of "paralysis and lack of political will" when it comes to saving jobs in the aviation sector.

He added: "Their only priorities seem to be balancing the public finances and bailing out the banks. Meanwhile the jobs of highly skilled workers are being abandoned."

SR Technics has confirmed to union negotiators that the auxiliary power unit and landing gear equipment have been sold and that they are in discussions with interested parties on base maintenance and garage facilities at the plant.

Mr Ward said: "In many respects the problems we face flow from the drift of government policy over the past 12 years.

They slashed taxes and hoped that speculators

and 'fast buck' deals would generate enough revenue to keep the show on the road.

"Any government with an ounce of political will and morsel of business acumen would have ensured that SR Technics was not allowed to waltz away from its Dublin plant without having to address the €26 million pensions deficit, the €20 million leaseback arrangement with the Dublin Airport Authority or the asset stripping operation now taking place with regard to the sale of the auxiliary power unit and landing gear equipment.

"SR Technic's strategy from the start was to get out of Ireland on the cheap and do it in a way that ensured whatever was left could not form the basis for a new operation that could compete on equal terms in the international aviation main-

tenance sector. They know Dublin is well able to compete if it had been left with the means to do so and we are anxious to talk to bidders about cost savings that can be made.

"The government should have ensured that if there was to be a hard landing it would be at the expense of SR Technics and its wealthy backers such as Mubadala and Dubai Aerospace rather than the workers.

"Some employees have given over 40 years of their lives to the plant and won't even get the pensions they paid for.

"If this government was half as good at dishing out tough medicine to speculators and bankers as it is at doing it to ordinary working people we might see some hope at the end of the tunnel – assuming it is a tunnel and not a dead end."



Broughan: DAA move 'appalling prospect' for hard-pressed communities

Shock as DAA reveals job cuts programme

THE Labour Party has described Dublin Airport Authority's cost cutting plan involving the loss of between 300 and 400 jobs as "a major shock" that will be especially devastating to North Dublin already reeling from the shedding of 1,135 jobs at SR Technics.

Party transport spokesman Tommy Broughan said the airport was "a critical employer and economic dynamo" for the region and described the losses as an "appalling prospect for communities already under pressure".

He added: "Clearly the aviation sector is experiencing grave difficulties across the board given the current economic difficulties.

"There are indications that revenues from parking and shopping at Dublin Airport have dropped, and profits and passenger numbers will continue to slide through 2009 and 2010, but that does not mean that airport workers should have to bear the brunt."

The DAA, which operates Dublin, Cork and Shannon Airports, said it would be looking at voluntary redundancies as part of a cost-containment programme and claimed the action was being taken over a projected earnings shortfall of between €60 million and €70 million.

The redundancy programme would "apply right across the company" as no grades are excluded and it is understood management will also be seeking changes in work practices for remaining staff.

DAA claimed "immediate action" was necessary to slash operating costs by up to €55 million per year.

It is understood the company is also seeking to make substantial savings in its non-pay bills through re-negotiating all third-party costs.

Unions have underlined that they would be focusing on saving jobs and that pay cuts were not on the agenda.

Call on govt to protect Eircom

THE Communication Workers Union have called for the Irish government to intervene to protect the long-term future of Eircom.

It follows an agreement reached on May 12 between unions and the telecommunications giant over restructuring plans aimed at achieving savings of €130 million before mid-2011.

The deal will see the shedding of 1,200 jobs, and voluntary pay cuts of between 5 and 10 per cent.

It is thought that half of the jobs to go will involve contract staff but it still represents a 15 per cent reduction in overall staff numbers over the next two years.

There will also be a moratorium on performance-related bonuses and a cut in mileage expenses as well as an end to what was termed "other traditional arrangements".

CWU chief Steve Fitzpatrick said staff were "devastated" by the cuts but added "the key thing for us is that there will be no compulsory redundancies".

Eircom is a market leader with nearly 70 per cent of Irish fixed line customers and is also the state's bigger broadband provider.

Management claims it is introducing the cuts because of a "challenging" market environment which has seen a drop in revenues from mobile charges and traffic volumes.

It is understood talks to secure further savings will begin shortly but the CWU has pointed out that it is difficult to see where further savings can be made without severely undermining its operational activities.

The union argues the it is such a vital part of Ireland's national infrastructure there should be intervention from the government for the good of the economy.



FBU hails court ruling on pensions

THE Fire Brigades Union has hailed a UK Court of Appeal ruling as a "tremendous victory after a long and hard fight".

The case involved changes to guidance in the Firefighter Pension Scheme made in 2006 that enabled the sacking of disabled and badly-injured firefighters without a pension or redundancy payment.

In its ruling, the court backed three London firefighters who sought a judicial review after their entitlements were taken away.

The Court of Appeal described the government's case as "deeply unattractive" as it led to "no job, no pension" when there was no redeployment opportunities available.

FBU chief Matt Wrack said: "It is a victory for fairness and common sense."

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber has drawn the line at French-style "boss-napping" when it comes to pursuing an aggressive industrial relations policy.

He said: "The French have a certain way of doing things."

Mr Barber made his comments after it was reported that four senior executives working for US bulldozer maker Caterpillar were held for 24 hours at the Grenoble plant by workers angered by lay-offs.

They were only freed after President Nicolas Sarkozy intervened with a pledge to save the factory and Caterpillar agreed to pay the workers for the three days they had been on strike and continue talks on severance packages.

In a recent poll, it was revealed that about one-third of those surveyed backed the "bossnaps" while 65 per cent understood them.



VIEWPOINT

Former Equality Authority chief **NIALL CROWLEY** argues – that despite the recession, there should be no let-up in pushing equality as a moral imperative

Equality must not be sidelined by slump

THIS is a time of equality crisis. This is not a new crisis. It is one that persisted through the economic good times – a booming economy merely served to render it less visible. It is a crisis that is now deepening as we confront difficult economic times.

It is evident in high levels of discrimination. A Central Statistics Office survey published in 2005 found that 12.5 per cent of the population aged 18 and over reported having experienced discrimination in the preceding two years. Black people, people with disabilities, non-Irish nationals, lone parents and unemployed people were found to be at particular risk of discrimination.

A further disturbing finding was that only six per cent of those who experienced discrimination made any formal response, including taking legal action.

Income inequality deepened during the economic boom years. Revenue Commission figures capture the scale of this divide. They show that during 2008, 28.2 per cent of all earned income went to just 6.36 per cent of the population. Research has demonstrated a causal link between high levels of income inequality and a broad range of health and social problems in a society.

The Equality Tribunal has noted a rise in race ground discrimination claims in the workplace – 146 such cases were referred to the Equality Tribunal in 2006 whereas this rose to 359 in 2008.

But equality is absent from current political discourse – the best that can be managed is a focus on 'sharing the pain'. The statutory infrastructure established to promote equality has been dismantled – Combat Poverty Agency has been abolished, while the Equality Authority and the Irish Human Rights Commission have been rendered unviable. Community organisations advocating for the inter-

ests of groups experiencing inequality have seen funding cut, along with threats by funders to their advocacy work.

There is a significant challenge posed in responding to this deepening equality crisis. This is not easy given that we are experiencing a backlash against equality, where the very idea of equality has been trivialised. The promotion of equality is falsely deemed to have gone too far.

Any response to this must assert equality as a core societal value – as a litmus test of any strategies drawn up to tackle the recession.

There is a moral case for this. Equality should be a core societal value because it underpins the human dignity and worth of all individuals. Research has further shown that equality and diversity systems in organisations enhance productivity, innovation and employee retention.

Income inequality has been identified as a causal factor of low-life expectancy, poor educational attainment, high levels of violence and lower levels of social mobility in society. Living in a more equal society has been found to benefit everyone, not just those previously living in poverty.

This underpins the necessity to ensure equality is at the heart of an effective response to economic recession.

There will be no adequate resolution to the economic crisis without equal weight being given to the equality crisis. The trade union movement has usefully put forward 'social solidarity' as central to tackling the recession.

Social solidarity is a theme that logically includes a focus on equality objectives. It is important that the theme of social solidarity carries the full range of equality objectives: to secure equality of access to resources, to power and influence and to status and standing, to relationships of care and solidarity for groups experiencing inequality.

In this context an agenda for social solidarity

could usefully be concerned with securing greater income equality. It could usefully protect and enhance public sector service provision as a means of achieving greater equality – this would be a reformed public sector that was free from discrimination, that worked to clear equality objectives and that was adequately resourced to achieve those objectives. It could promote a strengthened voice and influence for groups experiencing inequality through a well resourced and empowered community sector.

This social solidarity agenda could include a focus on developing a new statutory infrastructure for equality. This would bring a broader perspective to bear on equality – bringing together issues that we have more traditionally labeled as poverty-related and those we have labeled as equality-related.

Renewed equality legislation for example could usefully protect a socio-economic status ground, a renewed equality institution could bring together the mandates of the Equality Authority and the Combat Poverty Agency, and new policy tools could be deployed to assess all new policies and programmes for their impact on equality for all groups, in relation to the distribution of resources, the recognition of diversity and the access to influencing decisions that impact on them. Trade unions have a key role to play in promoting equality as a core societal value in these difficult times.

It will be important for unions to build in an explicit and developed equality focus into their policy platforms. Trade unions have a wide range of concerns but only a limited amount of negotiating capital with which to bring these concerns forward. It would be valuable if a part of this negotiating capital could be ring-fenced for items that promote equality and advance the broad equality agenda.

● Niall Crowley is an independent equality and diversity expert. The former head of the Equality Authority, Mr Crowley resigned that post in protest at severe Government cuts to its budget. The cuts also saw two Congress nominees resign from the Authority's board.

“We're experiencing a backlash against equality, where the very idea of equality has been trivialised”

Slump hits immigrants

IMMIGRANTS from EU accession states have been hit hardest in the slump with a higher rate of unemployment than the native-born population.

Dr Alan Barrett, of the Economic and Social Research Institute, told a conference in Dublin the proportionate increase in the number of Irish nationals on the live register as of March was 77.2 per cent against a figure of 143 per cent for those born outside Ireland. That translates as an unemployment rate of 5.7 per cent for

foreign nationals compared with 4.3 per cent for those who are Irish-born.

He also added that there was evidence most foreign nationals are not planning to return home despite lack of work because labour market conditions in other countries are equally as poor. An analysis of employment in various sectors found only in hotels and restaurants did immigrants substantially outnumber native Irish workers.

■ BECTU general secretary Gerry Morrissey has slammed the current stalemate in the European Parliament which means there is no change in policy over the maximum working week.

The UK currently has an opt-out from the 48-hour week limit and the union denies government claims that this gives employees choice.

Mr Morrissey said: "In industries we look after, the reverse is true. Some of our members particularly in film-making and television production are forced to accept arrangements in excess of 60 hours a week. If they don't accept the terms, they don't get the work."

CPSU takes snipe at An Bord Snip Nua

THE Civil Public and Services Union has attacked the government's public expenditure review committee – dubbed An Bord Snip Nua – and warned its report will play “Russian roulette” with ordinary people's lives.

Addressing his union's annual conference in Galway last month, deputy general secretary Eoin Ronayne predicted the body, headed by economist Colm McCarthy, will contain “more repugnant and offensive attacks” on members.

He said: “Not content with screwing up the economy, the neo-liberal economists will now seek to screw up our public services.

“Just watch them make a mess of the public services on which so many of the most vulnerable citizens depend.

“Here we go again, egotistical economists playing Russian roulette with the lives of ordinary people. Shame on them.”

Mr Ronayne said the choice was either to allow those who had presided over “the most outrageous rip-off of all time morph into new entities advising the government from the economic collapse they engineered” or to press home a campaign “to drive them from respectable society”.



Suzanne Breen and NUJ Irish Secretary Seamus Dooley outside court in Belfast

‘Secret’ evidence in Breen case attacked

THE use of evidence given in secret to justify an application to force Belfast journalist Suzanne Breen to hand over confidential material to the PSNI has been strongly criticised by the National Union of Journalists.

The union is launching an international campaign in support of the Northern Ireland editor of the Dublin based Sunday Tribune following confirmation in the Recorder's Court that evidence given last Friday may never be made available to Ms Breen or her legal team.

Judge Tom Burgess stated that he was “minded” to grant the PSNI application but stressed his view could change once he heard Suzanne Breen's case.

However, NUJ Irish Secretary Séamus Dooley, who was present for the hearing, said Ms Breen and her legal team will have to prepare their response to the demand that she hand over notes, recording material, mobile phone and other material relating to the Real IRA “with their hands tied behind their back”.

Mr Dooley said: “The PSNI has made a sweeping application aimed at forcing Suzanne Breen and the Sunday Tribune to hand over confidential material.

“A journalist who hands over confidential material is compromised and is immediately put at risk.

“Suzanne Breen has no option but to refuse to hand over material. The basis for the PSNI application is evidence provided in private last Friday,

when even Ms Breen's legal team were barred from the court. How can Suzanne respond fully to this application since neither she or her legal team are aware of what precisely was said in court by the PSNI or her counsel on Friday last?

“It is bad enough that a journalist should be faced with the prospect of going to jail in order to protect confidential sources of information but to face such a threat based on evidence given in private is an affront to the principles of natural justice.

“The right to protect sources is vital to journalists. Recent revelations in the UK regarding the expenses regime at Westminster underline the importance of protecting whistle-blowers. Any legal threat to the protection of sources is a direct threat to whistle-blowers and is therefore not in the public interest.”

Following preliminary hearings later this month it is anticipated that the full application will be heard in the Recorder's Court in Belfast on Friday, May 29.

The NUJ is seeking the support of the International Federation of Journalists, Amnesty International, trade unions and other civic society organisations as well as media organisations for a major campaign in support of Suzanne Breen and the Sunday Tribune.

Messages of support may be sent to protect-sources@nuj.ie.

IRISH Transport Minister Noel Dempsey has endorsed a call for a no-strike clause to be extended to more essential services.

He said: “In this day and age, both management and unions should be able to resolve their difficulties through the normal industrial relations mechanisms of the state.”

Mr Dempsey made his comments in reply to Fine Gael counterpart Fergus O'Dowd, who suggested a no-strike clause should apply to “everyone involved in critical transport infrastructure, such as airports” and claimed strikes at such facilities were “economic sabotage”.

New retire early scheme for Irish public servants

PUBLIC service workers who are over 50 can now retire early under a new scheme announced last month by the Irish government.

Eligible employees can retire on a pension based on years of service but will receive only 10 per cent of their lump sum immediately with the balance being paid out when they reach the normal retirement age of 60 or 65.

The Department of Finance said the proposals cover employees in the Civil Service, local authorities, the health sector, non-commercial state bodies and certain other areas of the public service but do not extend to gardai or fire service personnel who already have early retirement schemes in place.

Under present rules, lump sum payments are tax-free.

The government has outlined that lump sum balance to be paid in future years would be subject to tax provisions in place at the time the initial application was approved.

INFORMATION aimed at tackling homophobia in schools was distributed at last month's teaching union conferences in the Republic. The material was compiled by the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network in

association with the ASTI and TUI. TUI deputy general secretary Annette Dolan said she hoped the guide would help support teachers in “developing the skills necessary to tackle this issue effectively”.



Perspectives: Artist Rajesh Rana with Unite regional secretary Jimmy Kelly

Transport House labour of love for artist Rajesh

TRANSPORT House, one of Belfast's most iconic buildings is set to come to the fore exactly half a century after it was built when local artist Rajesh Rana launches a new art exhibition entitled 'Labour of Love'.

Rajesh Rana chose the well-known 'International Style' building as his subject in this latest collection showing at The Engine Room Gallery, East Belfast.

The exhibition provides a set of new perspectives on Transport House. Located on the corner of High Street, and built in 1959 the building is emblematic of the city's association with the trade union movement.

Rajesh said: "I have always been interested in Transport House both architecturally and historically.

"It is a perfect representation of Belfast in the 1950s – forward looking, confident and with a solid industrial base. The union movement was at its high point and this Modern building with its Russian-style mosaic was a real statement.

"Over the past two years, my research into the building has led me on a fascinating journey from looking at the original architect's plans alongside today's plans for the building's future.



Speaking about Rajesh's latest collection Unite regional secretary Jimmy Kelly said: "Transport House is an extremely important landmark in Belfast's history and Unite is extremely pleased that Rajesh has captured the building's essence so well."

● A Labour of Love exhibition by Rajesh Rana will take place in The Engine Room Gallery, Newtownards Road, Belfast from May 7 to May 30. The gallery will be open Tuesday to Saturday from 10am to 4pm. www.rajeshranaart.com

Court rejects CIF pay cut bid

THE Labour Court has thrown out a Construction Industry Federation move to reduce the official pay rates for building workers by 10 per cent.

It follows the CIF's rejection last November of the national wage agreement brokered two months earlier.

At the time, director general Tom Parlon said: "The bottom line is the industry cannot afford the deal."

Pay scales are set out in a document agreed between employers and unions which is then lodged with the court.

The CIF argued that this Registered Employment Agreement was an "anachronistic and inflexible restriction" on the way it did business.

The body's representatives claimed that falling interest rates and deflation had forced down the cost of living meaning that the increases were unwarranted.

Trade unions, however, sought the rises under the national wage agreement, 3.5 per cent in the first phase, to be applied to the official rates.

ICTU's construction industry committee denied this rise would impact on competitiveness and suggested improving access to credit was a surer way to protect the future of the industry.

In its ruling, the Labour Court pointed out that during the boom years REAs had "tended to operate as a floor rather than a ceiling".

It continued: "This is borne out by the CSO quarterly statistics on average earnings and hours worked which reveal that in early 2008, the hourly rate for skilled workers in the construction industry stood at €21.28 per hour for an average 43.3-hour week, compared with the REA craft rate which was €18.60 per hour.

"The figure supplied to the court for the whole of 2008, when rates had begun to drop, was €20.91 per hour. This was still 12.4 per cent above the REA rate."

The court suggested the market would force pay rates to bottom out at or near the official REA rates and felt that a further reduction was unjustified nor would it create or maintain employment in the industry.



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Union legend Jack Jones dies, aged 96

FORMER TGWU general secretary Jack Jones, who died last month aged 96, is pictured at the unveiling last year in Belfast of a statue honouring volunteers from North and South who fought in the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War.

Trade unionism was in his blood – Jack was named James Larkin Jones by his father – a close friend of the legendary Liverpool-Irish founder of the ITGWU.

And he was later to shed blood for the cause of internationalism having been wounded at the Battle of the Ebro in 1937.

On hearing of his passing, Unite joint general secretary Tony Woodley said: “Today, with profound emotion, Unite dips its banner in memory of the greatest amongst us.

“Tomorrow, as Jack Jones would have wished, we shall put our shoulders to the wheel once more, working as he did for justice for workers, for internationalism, peace and socialism.”



Below is an edited version of a statement issued by SIPTU head of research Manus O’Riordan in his role as executive member for Ireland of the International Brigade Memorial Trust.

THE death has taken place in London on April 21 of 96-year-old Jack Jones, President of the International Brigade Memorial Trust in Britain and Ireland. As General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union from 1969 to 1978, Jack had also been the most outstanding British trade union leader of the post-war era.

On behalf of the Irish families and friends of International Brigaders, I particularly mourn Jack’s passing, not only as our IBMT President but also as a life-long friend of all members of my own family.

For Jack had been a comrade-in-arms of my late father Michael O’Riordan in the Spanish Anti-Fascist War, where they were both wounded in the 1938 battle of the Ebro.

In October 2005 Jack presided over the annual general meeting of the IBMT in Dublin’s Liberty Hall, and led a delegation of a British and International Brigade veterans to Áras an Uachtaráin, where they were received by the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese.

His last public event was on February 10 of

this year, at the London funeral of Irish International Brigader Bob Doyle.

During a packed final year of activity, Jack and Bob had also been reunited this past October with surviving fellow-International Brigaders from all over the world at ceremonies held in Barcelona to commemorate the 70th anniversary of their leaving Spain.

I am delighted that Jack was able to make a final visit to Dublin this January as a guest of SIPTU on the occasion of our union’s centenary celebrations.

It was particularly appropriate that Jack attended the ceremony marking the anniversary on January 30 of the death of his fellow Liverpool-donian, Big Jim Larkin, who had founded the Irish Transport and General Workers Union in January 1909. Larkin had not only previously worked alongside Jack’s father on the Liverpool docks, but had been a personal friend as

well. In fact, when Jack was born on March 29, 1913, his father christened him James Larkin Jones!

But the commemoration that was to mean most to Jack himself, as well as to his two sons Jack Jnr and Mick, had taken place last June in the South Kilkenny village of Inistioge, in honour of that son of Inistioge and close personal friend of Jack’s, the International Brigader George Brown who had been killed in the 1937 battle of Brunete

George’s widow Evelyn Taylor, a courageous anti-Fascist activist in her own right, would marry Jack in 1938 and share six more decades of love, comradeship and struggle with him, until her own death in 1998.

To the very end, Jack James Larkin Jones lived life to the full in the world wide service of mankind. We salute his memory and mourn his loss.

TUI ‘lift age ban’ call

THE Teachers Union of Ireland has called for its members to be allowed to work past their normal retirement age of 65 - if they want.

Under current rules, teachers and lecturers can only work part-time beyond 65.

The recommendation was contained in a TUI Equality Council policy document put before the union’s annual congress in Cork

last month. An independent survey commissioned by the TUI showed that 56 per cent of teachers and lecturers thought the age restriction should be removed.

Deputy general secretary Annette Dolan claimed the survey which quizzed 334 respondents was a comprehensive snapshot of opinion.

She added that there was no evidence to suggest productivity declines with age.

A SERIES of corporate surveillance scandals have rocked Germany over the last few weeks. Deutsche Bahn has admitted monitoring tens of thousands of staff emails to check for criticism of company policies.

CEO Harmut Mehdorn, who stepped down following the revelations, said he had not been aware of the spying operation but expressed regret over what happened.

Meanwhile, aircraft manufacturer Airbus has admitted carrying out surveillance on its German employees in an anti-corruption probe between 2005 and 2007. No wrongdoing was found.



Sandra Brown of Mandate shows her colours at the Dublin launch

DESERVING OF RESPECT

RETAIL workers union Mandate has launched a major drive across the Republic to highlight how a large percentage of its members have to deal with an increasing level of verbal abuse from shoppers.

Research carried out by the union found that more than 70pc of retail workers had experienced such incidents in the past year.

Mandate used the pre-Christmas shopping season to kickstart its nationwide campaign - titled Respect Retail Workers - in central Dublin.

So far this year, it has held several regional launches in Waterford, Mallow, Letterkenny, Sligo and Castlebar and it is hoped to roll out the drive across the rest of the country in the coming months.

Mandate's shock study showed that:

- More than 70pc of retail workers experienced verbal abuse in the last 12 months,
- A further 30pc received threats from a customer during the same period, and
- And almost 10pc of shop workers were assaulted by a customer during the course of their employment.

Mandate's national co-ordinator for campaigns Brian Forbes said: "What we hope to achieve with this campaign is that consumers recognise the pressures retail workers are under and continue to afford them the dignity and respect they deserve.

"This campaign has a number of objectives including raising awareness of this issue and trying to influence change from the minority of people who tend to abuse retail workers.

"We would also like retail employers to be more aware of the stresses their workers are put under due to the behaviour of this minority of customers and take actions to protect their employees."

Mandate general secretary John Douglas said: "Everybody is aware that there have been cut-backs in the retail sector including the loss of jobs and a reduction in hours.

"This will result in a more pressurised atmosphere for retail workers causing more stress and it's important that consumers are aware of this.

"We should remember that people working in the retail sector are also experiencing their own personal and financial pressures so they don't need the added stress of verbal or physical abuse while at work."



Handing out leaflets in Dublin, while Mandate chief John Douglas, above, canvasses support from a passing reindeer

ESRI jobless figures are wake-up call for the govt

SIPTU economist Marie Sherlock has claimed jobless figures contained in the latest ESRI Quarterly Economic Commentary flag up the pressing need for major government action.

According to the new figures, the unemployment rate nudged higher with an extra 15,800 people signing on the live register in the Republic last month.

The total number signing on has now almost doubled over the past year to 388,600.

The Central Statistics Office estimates that the unemployment rate now stands at 11.4 per cent but it is feared there is worse to come.

ESRI expects the unemployment rate to average 16.8 per cent next year while other analysts have given predictions of between 13 per cent and 15.3 per cent by the end of 2010.

In a gloomy assessment, ESRI report co-author Alan Barrett described the findings as "a truly dramatic development... by historic and international standards."

Ms Sherlock said: "These forecasts show up the government's numbers announced in the Supplementary Budget as being optimistic.

"The figures for the Live Register figures do nothing to dispel fears that the numbers signing on will march past the 500,000 mark before year end.

"This must act as a wake up call to the Government.

"The budget initiatives are welcome, but are too few in number, too limited in reach and ultimately will fail to register any significant impact on the problem.

"Measures to sustain struggling businesses and maintain existing jobs, long sought by the trade union movement, must be rapidly acted upon and the archaic social welfare provisions that fail to facilitate and encourage companies wishing to train workers on days off during a reduced working week must be substantially overhauled.

"Unfortunately, the crisis is far too serious to wait around for small scale pilot schemes to be rolled out."

Meanwhile, Labour Party enterprise spokesman Willie Penrose has blasted the government for "whistling past the graveyard" when it comes to dealing with the jobs crisis.

He called for the back to education and back to work enterprise allowances to be reformed to give unemployed people the opportunity to use them within three or four months of losing their jobs.



Sherlock: Action call

STAMP OF LEADERSHIP

A POSTAGE stamp marking the founding of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union and its central role in the story of the Irish labour movement has been issued by An Post.

The 55c stamp features a photograph of ITGWU founder James Larkin against a background of the Starry Plough, the flag of Irish labour.

The stamp, designed by John Conway, commemorates the launch of the trade union in 1909.

The ITGWU was formed as a breakaway from the Liverpool-based National Union of Dock Workers (NUDL). It quickly outstripped the NUDL and was at the heart of such events as the 1913 Lockout, the 1916 Rising and the growth of trade unionism in Ireland.

In 1990 the ITGWU merged with the Federated Workers' Union of Ireland to form SIPTU, the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union.

After its formal launch and registration on January 4th, 1909, membership spread rapidly and by 1911 the new union moved into its new headquarters, the re-named Liberty Hall.



James Connolly served as acting general secretary of the Union following Larkin's departure for the USA in 1914.

Welcoming the new stamp at its unveiling at the GPO, SIPTU general secretary Joe O'Flynn said that when the ITGWU was formally registered on January 4 1909, it came as a whirlwind, transforming trade union organisation into a new militant voice for workers where an injury to one was a



An Post's special commemorative stamp, above. Jim Larkin, left, hailed by SIPTU chief Joe O'Flynn, far left, as a militant voice for workers

workers' interests. Above all, the new union in 1909 brought hope where there was despair. The seeds planted by Jim Larkin, James Connolly and dockers from Belfast, Cork, Dublin, Dundalk and Waterford have flowered perennially, among workers from all industries and sectors of the economy and will continue to do so."

■ **The stamp may be viewed or purchased from main Post Offices and online at www.irishstamps.ie**

concern for all. He added: "The ITGWU was formed by four basic tenets – belief in the tactics of collective action, a social philosophy, Irish unions for workers in Ireland and strong political action in

SPECIAL **FREE** READERS' OFFER

50 first day covers of Jim Larkin stamp to be given away

To mark the launch of the ITGWU centenary stamp, An Post has teamed up with The Union Post to offer readers the chance to win one of 50 special First Day Covers of the new stamp. To be in with a chance to win one of these sought-after collector's items, simply email us at braziermedia@btinternet.com with your full name and postal address details by June 10.

Please remember to mark your email **'JIM LARKIN OFFER'**

More construction gloom

BUSINESS activity fell in the construction sector again in March, new figures have revealed.

The Ulster Bank construction purchasing managers index showed a reading of 28.1 compared to 36.6 during the same period last year, representing the third fastest contraction since records began in mid-2002.

Any reading under 50 indicates a fall in activity on the previous month.

The index which brings together a series of indicators revealed the pace of job losses continued to accelerate with more than half of respondents shedding

positions during the month. Rates charged by sub-contractors and input prices also registered record lows.

Irish construction firms reduced their quantity of purchasing at the second fastest rate ever.

Overall the gloomy results showed a continued weakening of confidence among clients and a general pessimistic outlook for the next year.

Ulster Bank chief Pat McArdle said: "The overall picture is one of an industry that is at a low ebb. That said, several other European countries are now in a similar situation."

Ireland bottom 3 in global wage hikes

A STUDY has revealed Irish workers will pocket the third lowest pay rises in the world this year – a measly 0.8 per cent.

Only employees in Latvia at 0.67 per cent and Singapore at 0.22 per cent will fare worse, according to a new report by consultancy firm The Hay Group.

Workers north of the border and in the UK will get pay hikes of 1.5 per cent, while those in US will receive slightly more at 1.78 per cent.

The study also found 38 per cent of firms were freezing salaries altogether.

Pay cuts Job losses on the increase
 Downturn Slump Cuts to services
 Future uncertain for many
Recession
 Job threats
 Pensions collapse
 Credit crunch
Crisis
 Downturn Recession
 Shares plummet
 Tax increases
 Shortfall
 Market crash
 Cutbacks
 Job threats
 Job threats
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 Job threats

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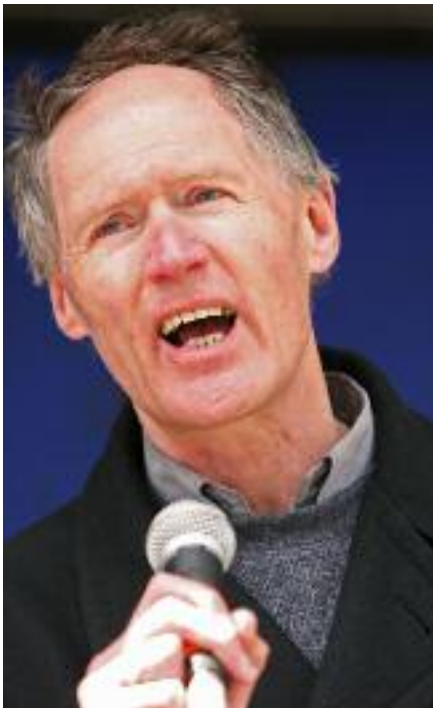
VISTEON workers were in the vanguard as thousands paraded through a sun-drenched Belfast city centre for the annual May Day march. They were joined at the head of the parade by comrades from SIPTU, this year celebrating the centenary of the foundation of their union - then known as the ITGWU. SIPTU chief Jack O'Connor gave the keynote address.

PICTURE SPECIAL

By Kevin Cooper & Paula Geraghty



SOLIDARITY



Platform: DCTU president Des Derwin

MARCHING under the theme 'Defend and Extend Trade Union Rights', hundreds of workers and their families took to the streets of Dublin on May 9 in what was admittedly a modest turnout on years past. But at least the sun shone. One of the strongest contingents came from the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

PICTURE SPECIAL
By Paula Geraghty



Making his point: DCTU's Sam Nolan at the rally



Speech: ASTI's John White



Action: IPSC's Freda Hughes

AND SUNSHINE **DUBLIN**





VIEWPOINT

TUI general secretary **PETER MacMENAMIN** argues that appropriate, targeted investment in Irish education has never been more important as it is today

Stimulating recovery through education

OUR education system has been plundered as never before over the last year, and those families who do not have the financial resources to navigate through this storm will inevitably suffer the most in the coming years.

The victims will be less employable, suffer longer periods of unemployment and will become a long-term cost to the state in financial terms.

It has been shown by countless research projects that there is a direct correlation between lifetime earnings and educational level.

Their health will also suffer; in a recent review published by the Institute of Public Health in Ireland, a strong correlation has been shown between education levels and physical health.

The review drew on substantial evidence to show that those with lower levels of education are more likely to die at a younger age and are at an increased risk of poorer health throughout their life than those with higher levels of education.

Society is another victim. Obviously a society is the poorer for an inadequate and underfunded education system; but lack of education results in increased crime, civil unrest and a breakdown in social values.

If our policy makers are not swayed by education arguments, they should examine the long term cost of those left behind by a stripped down education system.

There is a massive subsequent cost relating to educational disadvantage.

A citizen dependent on State support as opposed to being employed on an average wage will cost the Exchequer at least €20,000 per annum in social welfare payments and loss of taxation income.

Every June, around 10,000 students who commenced first year of second level drop out before completing their Leaving Certificate.

Assuming that even half of these become State dependent rather than employed, the cost to the Exchequer is enormous over each 'working' lifetime – at least €800,000 per drop-out over 40 years.

The workforce also suffers from inadequate education provision. Recently, the National Competitiveness Council stressed the necessity of maintaining levels of investment in education in order to provide a well-educated workforce so that there is scope for investment in employment with higher level skills.

This country cannot be competitive and will not



bring full employment if its education system results in a poorly educated and under-skilled workforce.

This has an effect on the economy, on the ability to attract high level investment and on the ability to develop into the future.

Recently, in an extraordinary and probably unprecedented intervention, the Acting United States Ambassador to Ireland called upon the Irish Government to refrain from further cuts in education for just this reason.

We re-iterate this call.

We acknowledge that these are grim economic times, but securing relatively modest savings to the Exchequer by devastating the life chances

of a whole generation of young people is a recipe for educational, economic and social disaster.

A teacher laid off has been estimated by the TUI Principals and Deputy Principals Association (PDA) to save the state under €5,000 per annum once unemployment benefit is paid and tax lost.

There is no doubt that teachers laid off will lead to increased drop out of students and to a future and long lasting direct cost to society – even if only measured in monetary terms.

The low skilled, manual labour jobs that might have been available to early school leavers become less and less an option with every passing day and each television news story of lay-offs.

In order to secure the economic future of the country by maintaining and developing a skilled and educated workforce, we need to reverse the worst of the education cutbacks to ensure that we maximise the number of students who stay to complete second level and have a chance of continuing to

third level. To this end, full funding should be restored to innovative programmes such as the Leaving Certificate Applied and Vocational courses and The Junior Certificate Schools Programme.

However, education should not cease at 17 or 18 years of age. In relation to the huge numbers of newly unemployed people, it is vital that there are adequate places in Further and Higher Education colleges to allow those coming onto the Live Register to move up at least one step on the qualifications ladder.

Further and Higher Education can have vital roles in providing courses for those unfortunate enough to lose their jobs or to be placed on short time work and the ability of both sectors to be able to provide courses needed to re-skill and up-skill workers or unemployed workers.

There was a provision of almost 7,000 places between Vocational Education Committees (VECs) and Institutes of Technology in the recent 'second' budget including a small lifting of the Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) cap by some 1,500 as well as an easing of the criteria to obtain the Back to Education Allowance.

This is welcome but is a tiny drop in the ocean in comparison with what is needed.

It is, however, the only positive education news in recent times and represents a very small first step in the right direction.

The circumstances into which a child is born too often continue to determine whether they suffer the ravages on our education system or get a privileged education and subsequent lifestyle.

TUI's view is a basic one; every child should be entitled to a quality education system that embraces them regardless of their personal academic ability or family's economic circumstance.

We will continue to campaign vigorously on this ideal.

“ Every child should be entitled to a quality education regardless of ability or economic circumstance ”

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ANALYSIS

University of Ulster head of economics **MIKE SMYTH** takes a contrasting look at UK and Irish balance sheets following the two budgets and finds that...

As recessions go this is as bad as it gets



Finance Minister Brian Lenihan and UK Chancellor Alistair Darling, right, have taken different approaches to dealing with the recession

HOW best to sum up the current state of the economies of Britain and Ireland? Perhaps it might be appropriate to misquote Harold Macmillan and say "we've never had it so bad" but would this be true?

For a great number of our younger citizens who have no memory of the ghastly 1970s with their oil shocks and hyperinflation nor of the even worse early 1980s recession which literally wiped out great swathes of industry in Britain and Ireland, the current recession is about as bad as it gets.

For those of us who are a little longer in the tooth, memories of unemployment at over 25pc, inflation at 17pc and mortgage interest rates at 15pc help to put the current downturn into a more appropriate perspective.

This is not to gainsay the economic malaise facing both the Irish and British governments. Things are pretty dire and the responses of the two governments to date have not exactly earned unanimous approval of the two electorates, particularly in terms of the recent budget packages.

There are some similarities between the British and Irish budgets. Both economies are mired in recession. The recession in the Republic and in the UK were primarily domestic in nature but the onset of the

global credit crunch has poured diesel on an already blazing bonfire.

Domestic policy-making in both the Republic and in Britain has become pretty unpopular and arguably, pretty impotent in the face of a truly global collapse of banking, credit, world trade and confidence.

The much-maligned G20 efforts at a co-ordinated response by the leading economies represents our best shot at dragging ourselves out of the mire.

The budget deficits in Ireland and Britain are set to balloon to wartime levels, at well over 12pc of GDP for the medium term.

Most economists reckon that around half of these deficits are cyclical in nature and will fade away when normal growth resumes.

That still leaves huge structural deficits to fix in both London and Dublin and these will be tackled primarily through a combination of higher taxes and spending cuts, in the case of the

Republic, and spending "restraint" in the UK. Both economies have been here before.

In 1976 the UK became technically insolvent and needed an emergency £4.5 billion loan from the IMF – equivalent to about £30 billion in today's money.

The UK also negotiated a £10 billion loan facility (£60 billion in 2009 prices) from the IMF. There was a huge public outcry about this at the time – national shame, resentment against the



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Chancellor Denis Healey and against the Labour Prime Minister Jim Callaghan.

It all culminated in the notorious "winter of discontent" in 1978/79 when unions rebelled against severe public expenditure cuts and wage restraint imposed by an unpopular government.

Who can remember the so-called Tallaght strategy in the early 1980s?

Faced with a debt down-grade, spiralling foreign debt, high inflation, high emigration, a minority Fianna Fail government pushed through a swingeing package of spending cuts and tax increases.

This was the era that saw the birth of D.I.R.T. The old joke at that time was that the motto of the Department of Finance was "If it moves, tax it".

And you know what? In my view, those times were infinitely worse than what we have to cope

with now. While the similarities in the predicaments facing both governments are there for all to see, there are profound differences also.

Tax increases and spending cuts are now underway in the Republic whereas in the UK, there are proposed increases in the top rate of tax (after the General Election) and spending cuts are to be avoided by that old Labour trick of faster economic growth.

A clear case of jam tomorrow.

The sterling exchange rate has fallen by around 25pc over the past 12 months whereas the Republic is wedded to an increasingly overvalued euro. Result?

Huge loss of Irish competitiveness, most clearly manifested in the almost biblical exodus of shoppers to Northern Ireland. Apart from the income

levy, public sector workers in the Republic have had their pension contributions raised and there have been nominal wage cuts right across the private sector.

In the UK no such attack on living standards has been undertaken nor will it be until after the 2010 election, if even then.

"The Celtic Tiger meets the Perfect Storm" could be the tabloid headline that best sums up the main difference between Britain and Ireland.

The Irish economy has been confronted with a litany of simultaneous disasters.

On the domestic front there has been a bursting of the housing bubble, a collapse in the construction sector with a concomitant collapse in tax revenues, the credit crunch and the handicap of a massively overvalued exchange rate. It could not get any worse, could it?

Actors' union appalled by 'expenses only' offer

ACTORS' union Irish Equity has described as "appalling" the move to pay expenses only for those working as on-stage extras in a new production of *The Shawshank Redemption*.

Lane Productions co-founder Pat Moylan claimed it wasn't necessary for those who "bulk" out the production to be trained thespians.

The show, which runs at the Gaiety, Dublin, between May 14 and June 20, is looking for volunteers to complement the 17 paid actors appearing in the production. Ms Moylan, who is

Arts Council chairwoman, said: "It would be very difficult if we went to an agency to get out-of-work actors for these roles, whereas for some people who are not in this business it might be one of the most exciting things they ever do."

Equity group organiser Des Courtney said he did not know of any other group in society "that would have to sit down and listen to a discussion about whether their skills, for which they have trained for three or four years to acquire, should be paid for or not".

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BRAZIER MEDIA
TRADE UNION NEWS SPECIALISTS

braziermedia@btinternet.com Bob Miller 07894305173 Joe Mitchell 07703055302



Visteon workers secure deal that delivers



Visteon to the fore: ICTU's Peter Bunting addresses the crowds outside Belfast City Hall at the April 17 rally for jobs and workers rights

WORKERS occupying the Visteon car components plant in Belfast will stay put until money from a settlement brokered with management is in their bank accounts.

It follows a vote on May 3 to accept a redundancy package which sees a considerable lift in payouts to those with long service at the former Ford factory.

And those with shorter service can also expect to leave with 10 times what was originally on the table

Some of the longer-serving staff will get settlements of up to £50,000.

Visteon employees at plants in Enfield and Basildon also voted to accept the deal.

One worker at the Enfield plant summed the general mood of elation among most employees when she declared: "We've beaten Ford and we've beaten Visteon."

Ford executives had claimed the Visteon work-



ers were not their concern, but copies of employment contracts and an agreement between the US car giant and Unite when the company sold up in 2000 showed that workers' terms and conditions were "protected for life".

Unite regional secretary Jimmy Kelly claimed the vote - passed by 147 to 34 in Belfast - sent out a clear message to workers to "get organised".

He said: "The deal was 10 times what Unite members were being offered originally. We have

proven that when workers take action and fight back they will get treated with respect. We are in a period when workers' rights are under attack. The clear message is to get organised.

"Join the union because collectively we have the strength to deliver the respect that workers are entitled to. As individuals employers will be able to pick off workers and their rights one by one."

Mr Kelly also praised the "determination" of the Visteon workers and the support given to them by the trade union movement North and South as well as the wider community.

Gerry Campbell, a former union rep at the plant, said: "The cross-community and cross-party support we have had since the start of the protest has been phenomenal.

"I think this has really woken up the working class people who now know they don't necessarily have to be crushed by a multinational.

"People are upbeat. They have fought the good fight and will continue to fight over pensions."

Cuts at recruitment firm

TOP international recruitment firm Hays has made drastic cuts its own workforce in the UK and Ireland reflecting the falling demand for its services.

Sources said hiring in the private sector in both jurisdictions had virtually seized up.

A Hays spokeswoman said employees are paid largely

on commission and as this has fallen with reduced demand, workers had left the business.

She added: "We cannot make a prediction on whether we will cut any more jobs." Fees from permanent recruitment were down 46 per cent while those from temporary placements dropped by 14 per cent.

Record Redundancy rise

A RECORD rise in the monthly tally of redundancies was recorded in March in Northern Ireland.

Figures compiled by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment showed 7,802 became eligible for the statutory redundancy scheme - 238 per cent higher than in March last year. Up to the start of April,

about 20,800 fell into this category - in stark contrast to the 7,900 employees made redundant in the first three months of 2008.

The services sector has suffered the greatest impact, with 8,441 redundancies in the transport, communications, financial services and other service sectors of the economy.

Facing a lost decade a lost generation...

IN a wide-ranging May Day address SIPTU chief Jack O'Connor has spoken of his hopes for the future in the face of the collapse of "tooth and claw" capitalism.

He was speaking at a seminar organised by the Galway Council of Trade Unions on April 30.

Mr O'Connor told delegates that the Anglo-American model of capitalism that saw "greed as the central imperative of human progress" contradicted the simple lessons of human experience.

"It is precisely the capacity of human beings to envisage a better world and to find ways of controlling and managing that greed more successfully than any other species that allowed us to subordinate it to the common good and allows society to progress."

He cautioned that it did not necessarily follow that this blueprint for organising society would be replaced by a "more benign paradigm".

Contrasting those who subscribed to "some concept of social solidarity" with those who continued to promote unregulated free marketism, he added: "It remains to be seen, which side prevails."

But he pointed to the emergence of Barack Obama's leadership in the States and other political developments as "grounds for being hopeful".

Turning to the economic crisis in Ireland, Mr O'Connor said he did not want to deal in "the currency of blame", but added that it was generally accepted by all commentators that the global problem had been compounded by domestic policy failures which "have rendered our own situation far, far worse".

"The facts are that public policy here elected in favour of speculation over sustainable capitalism at the end of the 1990s and has remained wedded to that model.

"I do not believe this was about being in hock to developers and speculators, rather it was about generating a get-rich-quick bonanza and unfortunately speculators and developers were seen as the best vehicle for achieving this."

He claimed this strategy was highlighted in the "nearer to Boston than Berlin" speech by then Tanaiste Mary Harney.

Mr O'Connor added: "It is rather ironic that the Bostonians are now being led out of the neo-liberal desert to a paradigm much closer to the more sustainable and socially responsible capitalism that they endeavoured to practice in Berlin."

He said this approach led to a situation whereby Irish banks accumulated a foreign debt equivalent to 60 per cent of GDP by mid-2008 to fuel speculative investment in property that "tragically inflated" the economy and left it "out of kilter" with the rest of the world.

This has meant there is now a need to achieve "the most dramatic adjustment" in the history of the state requiring a "supreme national effort".

Mr O'Connor claimed a collective bid to broker a new paradigm was required to mobilise the entire country to meet the challenging times ahead.

That was why trade unions had argued for a social dividend in talks in contrast to the need to "prostrate ourselves... at the feet of international money lenders".

He said the unions had advanced in their 10 Point Plan

for a Social Solidarity Pact the idea of a universal, mandatory, second pillar, pay related occupational pension system as well as putting in place measures to ensure the maximum number of people remain in employment.

Mr O'Connor said the inability to convince the government of the need to adopt this approach was because of the "continuing dominance" of the "outmoded world view that caused the problem in the first place".

Turning to the setting up of National Assets Management Agency, he claimed the government was "mortgaging the futures of more than a generation of our people" by acquiring the toxic assets so recklessly accumulated by the Irish banking system, "when they could acquire the banks in their entirety – good assets as well as bad – for a fraction of the cost".

The government was doing this "lest international finance capital turns up its nose" at Ireland.

He added: "It seems we on the left understand the moguls of finance capital better than the government. They are interested in one thing and one thing only. What return will they get on their money and how sure are they of collecting it?"

"In that regard, which is the better bet, investing in a country with the record of our bankers that is mortgaged to the hilt, or investing in a country where the Government has acted decisively to solve the problem in accordance with the advice of the IMF?"

Mr O'Connor claimed the current strategy of "blanket wage cuts" offered nothing against the backdrop of global trading downturn. Predicting that wage cuts would have a negligible effect on prices, he added: "Indeed the strategy of orchestrated deflation is likely to do more harm than good in an economy where domestic consumption accounts for 50 per cent of GDP."

"The reason pay cutting is viewed as preferable to taxation is because it is concomitant with the policy of putting the lion's share of the burden on ordinary working people, while taxation measures apply to the wealthy as well."

On the question of assisting workers who have paid into pension schemes all their lives only to find they will receive nothing, he claimed government feared this would expose the state to "an unquantifiable level of risk".

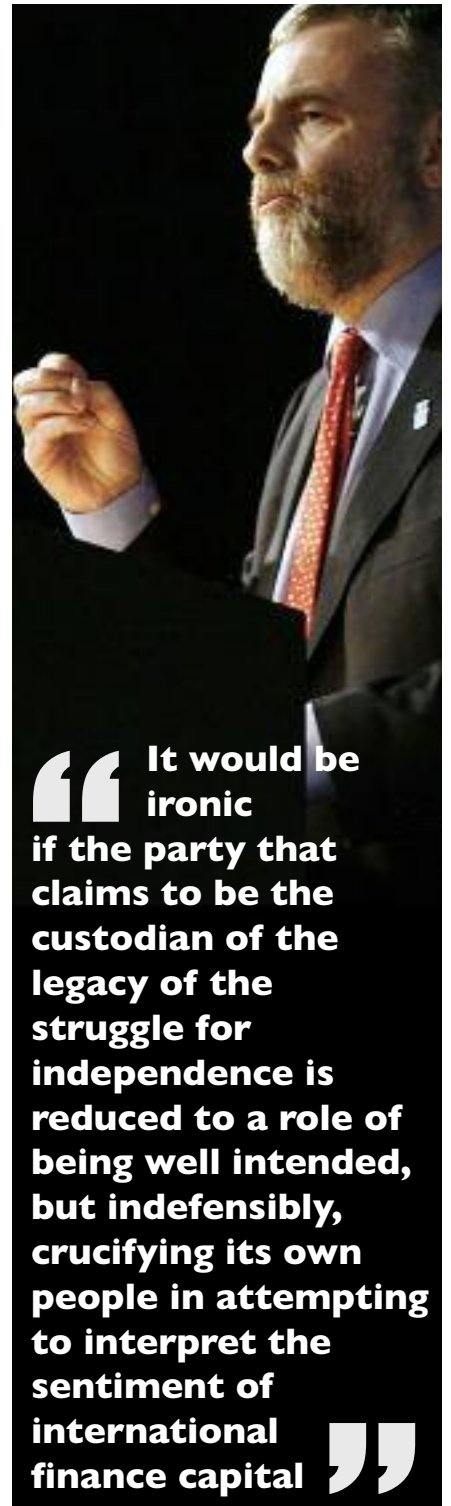
Mr O'Connor pointed out that this was from a government that had locked the entire population into "unlimited credit guarantee" to the banks "on the basis that they were of systemic importance to the economy".

Ministers were equally wary of union proposals on offering those made redundant a two-year guarantee against repossession lest "it would impair the loan books of the banks".

He said he feared we were facing "a lost decade, if not a lost generation" unless the government showed the courage to embrace the Social Dividend approach

"Indeed it would be ironic if the party that claims to be the custodian of the legacy of the struggle for independence finds itself reduced to a role of being well intended, but nonetheless indefensibly, crucifying its own people in attempting to interpret the sentiment of international finance capital."

“
Pay cutting rather
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”



“ It would be ironic if the party that claims to be the custodian of the legacy of the struggle for independence is reduced to a role of being well intended, but indefensibly, crucifying its own people in attempting to interpret the sentiment of international finance capital ”

Unions hit out at 'sick' offer to local govt workers

UNIONS have expressed disappointment after the UK's Local Government Association offered a 0.5 per cent pay rise to employees in the sector

LGA pay panel chair Sir Steve Bullock admitted "tough decisions on pay" had been made as a result of "tough economic times", a low inflation rate as well as the squeeze on public sector spending and council services.

Last year's deal for employees in England, Wales and Northern Ireland was increased from 2.45 per cent to 2.75 per cent after it was challenged by the unions.

Unison's local government chief Heather Wakefield said she was "disappointed and surprised" at the offer and claimed most local authorities had budgeted for rise of between 1.5 per cent and 2 per cent.

She added: "Times are tough, but this offer will make it even harder for local government workers already struggling to make ends meet."

Unite's Peter Allenson claimed employers were "trying to take advantage of the economic circumstances" while Brian Strutton, of the GMB, dubbed the offer "pretty sick".

He added: "They are pleading poverty yet those at the top are awarding themselves ever larger salaries."



10,000 in stand for peace

A CROWD estimated at 10,000 stood shoulder to shoulder outside Belfast City Hall in protest against the dissident republican killers of British Army sappers Mark Quinsey and Patrick Azimkar and Constable Stephen Carroll.

The March 11 rallies held in Belfast, Derry and Newry were organised by NIC-ICTU within hours of the shootings.

There were short addresses from NIC-ICTU chair John Corey and ICTU president Patricia McKeown and a lament was played by a lone piper,

before some moments of shared silence was observed. John Corey said: "All workers across the communities that make up Northern Ireland must unite to ensure that the peace process will not be derailed by those with an agenda of sectarianism, division and mutual fear."

"They must be faced down with a massive display of the unity of the people of Northern Ireland. We are determined not to be assigned into tight sectarian boxes."

A NORTHERN Ireland postie has received a top gong for courage at a gala ceremony in London.

Carrickfergus man Alex Shortt, who works at the mailing centre in Mallusk, got the First Class People award for giving assistance to an elderly motorist trapped in an overturned car.

Alex came across the accident as he drove to work and set about tending to the injured man until the emergency services arrived.

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Osborne: Inflexible

Osborne pay remarks 'disgraceful'

UNISON has slammed Tory frontbencher George Osborne's "disgraceful" comments on public sector pay.

The Tory Shadow Chancellor called for the revision of three-year pay deals in the sector to reflect "the prevailing economic conditions".

He told BBC Radio's Today programme: "I think we need to look at these three-year pay deals the government came up with because they may be very inflexible at a time when the economic conditions are changing very quickly."

"It sends a very powerful signal throughout the public sector that the age of excess is over and we need an age of restraint and responsibility." Rubbishing Mr Osborne's remarks, UNISON health chief Karen Jennings said: "Nurses, paramedics,

occupational therapists, midwives, hospital cleaners and cooks – the whole family of health workers – will be outraged at his suggestion that they have enjoyed an 'age of excess'.

"Health workers do not need to be told by the Tories that 'we need an age of restraint and responsibility' - it goes with the job."

"Health workers accepted a three year pay deal in good faith. We are all paying more for everyday essentials such as food, fuel, gas and electricity."

"Why don't the Tories turn their fire power on their City friends who have got the country into difficulties that we are all paying for – including public sector workers. It's time the Tories told them the party is over."

Aon pensions move 'just the start' warning

A PENSIONS expert has described insurance giant Aon's decision to cut the contribution it makes to its own pension fund as "the thin end of the wedge".

Dr Ros Altman, a governor of the London School of Economics, claimed other companies were likely to follow suit as Aon advises many of them on their own pension schemes.

She said: "Given it is a pension company that is leading the way here, if they say 'it is fine, let's go ahead' then other companies will follow.

"This is the thin end of the wedge. It is yet another step on the road of employers pulling out of pension provision."

Dr Altman said the inevitable consequence was that we will have to work longer "whether we like it or not".

She added: "At the moment we are focusing on disappearing pensions, soon we will be looking at disappearing retirement."

It is claimed the move signals a loss of faith in pensions and could lead to millions more pensioners living in poverty.

Laith Khalaf, an finance expert at Hargreaves Lansdown, said: "Aon's announcement is particularly worrying seeing as they have acted as a bellwether of company pensions policy in the past: shutting their final salary scheme to new entrants in 1999, closing to existing members in 2007, and now worryingly cutting back on contributions to their defined contribution pensions."

Aon, which ended its final salary scheme some years ago, wants to reduce the base amount it pays into the pension schemes of its 5,000 UK staff and to add a variable top-up rate based on an employee's age and contribution.

This means workers will have to increase the



Keeping watch: Unite's Derek Simpson

amount they pay in to their pension to maintain contributions at their current level.

Defending the measure, Aon – which said it understood that "times are hard for employees" – claimed it was taking longer-term measures to deal with tough economic conditions, rather than resort to cuts in salaries or working hours.

A spokesman added: "This approach recognises that employees want to retain their pay to allow them to make choices."

But Unite has slammed the move as a backdoor attack on pay.

The union said it would not tolerate attempts to use the slump as an excuse to attack workers' pensions.

Joint general secretary Derek Simpson said: "Aon's announcement has put us on standby and we will be keeping a careful eye on employers who may now try to use the credit crunch as a cover to permanently cut pension contributions.

"We will not stand idly by and allow the herd instinct to take effect."

We'll put Irish govt in dock on lapse over pensions

UNITE has vowed to put the Irish government in the dock over its failure to protect the pensions of workers whose companies have collapsed.

The move comes in the wake of an outcry over the grim future faced by axed employees at Waterford Wedgewood, which went into receivership in January, and comes amid similar concerns voiced at SR Technics and Bord na Mona.

It was revealed the firm's Irish workforce can expect between 25 per cent to 30 per cent of their expected defined benefits from the state, while colleagues in the UK will recoup between 80 per cent to 90 per cent of their benefits under a Pension Protection Fund.

The PPF protects British workers if company schemes go bust but no similar safeguard exists in the Republic.

Unite claims the Irish government failed to comply with EU law, particularly its Insolvency Directive, by not putting in place protection for staff and is calling on other unions "to seek justice for all workers similarly abandoned".

A spokesman said: "In the UK there is the PPF but in Ireland there is no protection."

Meanwhile, Fianna Fail TD Brendan Kenneally said he hoped the pensions crisis could be resolved "one way or another".

LOOMING CRISIS ON PENSIONS 30

RESEARCH undertaken by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland has found that 49 per cent of the unemployed smoke – almost double the percentage of smokers in the general population (27pc).

Among those working in craft and trade occupations, 45 per cent of females and 39 per cent of males smoked.

Inquiry call at Irish health payout

THE Conservatives have called for a parliamentary inquiry into alleged overpayments made by the British government to the Irish government over the last five years.

The funds were to cover the healthcare costs of 50,000 OAPs who retired to Ireland after years of paying national insurance contributions to the British exchequer.

Under a 1971 deal, the British agreed to contribute towards these pensioners' healthcare costs in Ireland. But Irish Health

Minister Mary Harney revealed to a Dail committee in March that the UK government had overpaid by a substantial amount.

She told TDs: "The error was not on our side. The UK authorities paid us €450m [in 2007].

"They then reckoned they had paid us €150m more than they should have.

"To claw the money back Britain reduced the payment to €100m in 2008 and was planning to pay €250m this year."

Conservative shadow health secretary Andrew Lansley said

that €2bn had been paid over the last five years and claimed that as much as €750m could have been overpaid by mistake.

He added: "NHS funds are always precious and it's completely unacceptable for the government to be carelessly diverting £180m a year out of our NHS."

Mr Lansley also said the UK government also had to take responsibility the confusion was what he called "the already overstretched Irish health system".



VIEWPOINT

Congress Industrial Officer **FERGUS WHELAN** argues new government measures on pensions don't go far enough to deal with the looming crisis

Initiative on pensions doesn't go far enough

THERE are three major elements to the new pensions' package recently announced by the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Hanafin.

Firstly, a Pension Insolvency Payment Scheme (PIPS) is to be established. Secondly, there will be changes in the 'wind-up priorities' governing pension schemes and, thirdly, the changes allow for increased flexibility in restructuring benefits paid out, by amending the relevant legislation.

The measures were included in the Social Welfare & Pensions Bill hurried through the Oireachtas in the last week of April.

At the time, it was claimed that the changes were initiated on foot of talks with unions – they were not – and that they would help tackle the looming pensions' crisis.

Unfortunately, that claim also falls some way short of reality.

In fact the changes will have a very limited impact as they only apply where:

- A pension scheme actually winds up, and where the employer is insolvent and the pension scheme is also in deficit, and

- Pension schemes apply to the Pensions Board to reduce accrued benefit entitlements in order to reduce a funding shortfall.

The Pension Insolvency Payment Scheme will be operated by the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA). It will provide state annuities on a 'not-for-profit' basis to schemes that wind up with a deficit and where the employer is insolvent.

The saving on annuity costs – currently bought on the 'open market' – should mean that a higher

proportion of the benefits due to active and deferred members can be provided.

Indeed, government itself estimates that the savings on annuity costs could range from eight per cent up to 18 per cent. The PIPS is intended to be cost neutral to the Exchequer.

Sadly the PIPS as currently structured will only be applicable to a tiny number of schemes and so only they can avail of these benefits and major savings.

Most Defined Benefit pension schemes which have massive deficits are run by employers who are not insolvent. So, for example, Waterford Glass workers may benefit from this initiative, but SR Technics workers will not.

There is nothing to prevent this initiative being extended to all pension schemes.

As the annuity is to be provided on a cost neutral basis to the taxpayer there is no logical reason why the scheme should not have universal application.

Broadening the application of PIPS could make it easier for all schemes to meet the funding standard. There would also be economies of scale benefits and the government's foreign borrowing requirement could be reduced.

In 2005 Congress proposed the establishment of a 'state annuity' to tackle the pensions' problem. The problem here is that government seems to have adopted a minimal, bargain basement version.

Details of the Congress proposal are available at www.ictu.ie/publications/fulllist/irish-pensions-problems-solutions

Change to 'wind-up' priorities

The new measures also change the order of priorities that must apply in the event of a scheme winding up.

Currently, the entitlement of pensioners must be met in full before any benefits can be provided to active and deferred members.

This includes any entitlement that pensioners have to future increases, either in line with price inflation or at a fixed rate of indexation.

As a result of these changes pensioners will continue to rank first in the priority order, but only in respect of the current amount of their pension.

Benefits for active and deferred members (excluding future pension increases) will be provided before increases are secured for existing pensioners. This is a minor change for the better.

Union officials negotiating benefit reductions and increased contributions in order to save ailing schemes may now have a better chance of getting members' agreement if it is felt that any future wind up would be fairer to all.

Restructuring benefits

The new legislation provides that if an employer is unable to continue funding the pension scheme in full, Section 50 may be used to make changes to pension benefits that have already accrued.

Up to this point, changes could only be made in respect of current employees. Now changes can be made in respect of former employees who remain entitled to benefits, along with future increases that have been promised to pensioners that are already in payment.

This at least is a welcome development, as it will provide greater flexibility for schemes that need to

“**Troubled schemes feel let down... we are on the verge of a pensions catastrophe**”



Murphy: Union giant

PSEU chief retires after 41 years

TRADE union stalwart Dan Murphy has retired after 41 years at the helm of the Public Service Executive Union.

He was appointed general secretary in June 1968, aged just 22, and within a year had brought the union into the ICTU.

Dan was elected to the ICTU Executive Council in 1972, and has – apart from one year which he describes as “internal exile” in the mid-1980s – served as a member since.

He also became ICTU vice-president in 1979 and stepped up as president in 1980.

Dan is widely credited with shaping the trade union response to the economic crisis of the 1980s and became a

firm backer of social partnership. Within that process his capacity for assembling minute details of agreements was described as ‘legendary’.

SIPTU chief Jack O'Connor called him a “giant of the Irish trade union movement having brought it from wilderness to the heart of social, economic and political life”.

ICTU general secretary David Begg added that he left office “with an enviable reputation both within the movement and outside it”.

Tom Geraghy, Dan's successor as general secretary, described him as the “outstanding Irish trade unionist of his generation”.

Pensioners have been in credit crunch since the 80s

TENS of thousands of OAPs took part in a UK-wide day of action last month to highlight the need for pensions to be substantially increased.

Hundreds of Northern Irish pensioners rallied outside Belfast City Hall for the April 6 protest - one of 50 demonstrations organised by the National Pensioners' Convention across the UK.

The NPC have described the current weekly allowance of £95.25 for a single person an "insult" and "inadequate" and called for it to rise to £165.

Members of the ICTU Retired Workers' Committee were involved in organising the protest, which was addressed by NIC-ICTU chair John Corey, Nigel Dodds MP, Dorothy Hanna of the NPC and Bill Carson, who chairs the Age Sector Platform.

Mr Dodds called for the pension to be set "at a one-off level" to lift people out of poverty.

He said: "I know they [the government] will tell us that money is scarce in the current circumstances, but I think they have to recognise that with the National Insurance money, it was set up in order to provide for pensions. And that money should not be hijacked for other use."

Bill Carson hit out at those who think older people already received a "decent pension".

He said: "There is a credit crunch, but we have been in a credit crunch with pensions since the mid-80s."

"We created the basic wealth that allowed this current generation to enjoy the high standard of living they have. We are saying as an investor, we want a return on our investment."

He added: "There are 100,000 people at least in Northern Ireland who rely solely on the state pension."

"Life must be very hard for them and now have to go with a begging bowl to ask for means-tested income. That is demeaning and confusing."



restructure pension entitlements in order to secure their future viability. Welcome as these measures are they go nowhere near what is actually required. Nobody knows the full extent of the current difficulties and even trustees are unsure just

how much value their schemes have lost. Most troubled schemes had been hoping for some major initiative from government before deciding on a strategy for the future. They will feel let down. We are on the verge of a pensions' catastrophe.

Major public sector reform flagged



Cowen: Shake-up

TAOISEACH Brian Cowen has signalled his intention to forge ahead with a major reform of the public sector.

He told TDs the current crisis had flagged up the need for a shake-up in the way services were organised.

Speaking in a Dail debate on the Budget, he said: "We are not in a position to continue to pay for the public service to operate in an unchanged manner with an unchanged division of labour across an unchanged labour force."

Mr Cowen claimed the public service did not have "the full flexibilities associated with a

modern, high-productivity, technologically-enabled service economy".

He attacked what he called "a failure of organisational capacity" on the part of both management and trade unions and said a gradual approach to reform was "no longer affordable or sustainable".

However, Mr Cowen emphasised any changes should not be based on a "top-down approach" which ignored the opinions of staff.

He added: "Still less need it be based on conflict between the government and public service unions."

Barber: Cut redundancy qualifying time period

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber has called on the UK government to cut the qualifying period for workers to receive statutory redundancy pay from two years to 12 months.

Claiming such a move would benefit more than 20 million workers across the UK, he said: "There can be no assumption that the people who are losing their jobs will find it easy to get new ones, and they will need all the help they can get with redundancy pay, retraining and personal advice."

Currently, employees aged 16 or over are entitled to SRP after a two-year qualifying period working for the same employer, so the youngest age at which an employee can benefit from redundancy pay is 18.

“They need all the help they can on pay & advice”

TUC analysis of official statistics reveals that if this qualifying period was halved to one year then 20,543,000 employees would gain extra redundancy entitlement.

Of these more than three million employees would be entitled to SRP for the first time - nearly one in eight of the workforce.

Also more than 17 million employees would increase their existing entitlement to SRP.

Those areas with the highest percentage of employees who stand to gain under the TUC proposals are Northern Ireland (87.2 per cent), Wales (84.2 per cent) and the East of England (83.3 per cent).

Under current rules, SRP packages are calculated on the basis of half a week's pay for each full year of service for workers aged under 22; a week for workers aged 22 to 41; and one-and-a-half weeks for those over 41.

Payouts are also limited to a maximum of 20 years of service, or £10,500 for workers aged above 41.

TUC backs tribunal register of shame

THE TUC has welcomed the setting up of a register that names and shames bosses or employers who fail to pay employment tribunal awards.

While backing the move, announced on April 1, general secretary Brendan Barber called on the UK government to put in place additional measures to ensure those entitled to tribunal awards actually receive payment.

He said: "Too many people are still hit by the double whammy of employers acting illegally and then refusing to pay when they are caught."

Union fury at Virgin Media bonuses

THE Communication Workers Union has slammed Virgin Media for rewarding senior executives massive bonuses after the company shed 2,200 jobs.

The cable operator - which recently hiked up its tariffs to customers - revealed the move in a submission to the US Securities and Exchange Commission.

Virgin Media claimed the cuts were

"critical" to enable it to compete effectively.

CWU's Grace Mitchell claimed bosses should be taking a lead at a time of uncertainty and "forgoing their bonuses".

Virgin Media said: "In order for any bonus to be payable, the company must first achieve a qualifying financial performance target."



Flexible working can be as beneficial to bosses as to workers TUC have claimed

Flexible working is good for everyone

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber has described new provisions over flexible working contained in the Employment Act 2008 as "extremely welcome news".

The legislation includes the extension of the right to request flexible working to parents of children up to the age of 16 and clarifies key aspects of UK employment law, including the enforcement of the national minimum wage.

The right to request flexible working was first introduced in 2003 for parents of children aged up to six and disabled children aged up to 18.

It was extended to carers of adults in 2007.

Six million parents and carers are already entitled to request flexible working from their employers, and the new provisions mean another 4.5 million employees gain that right.

The new legislation also means an increase in the weekly rate of statutory sick pay from £75.40 to £79.15.

A new Health in Pregnancy Grant, involving a one-off payment of £190 for every expectant mother who is at least 25 weeks pregnant, is also included in the legislation.

And, as of April 1, the minimum legal entitlement to paid holiday was increased from 4.8 to 5.6 weeks per year, an increase of 24 to 28 days for a full-time worker on a five day week, with pro-rata increases for part-timers.

Mr Barber said the flexible working extension was equally good news for employers.

He added: "Companies whose workers enjoy the benefits of flexible working are likely to feel less stressed and less anxious about balancing their lives at

home and work, which means they are more committed and productive while at work.

"I hope all employers who receive flexibility requests consider them seriously and do all they can to make flexible working a reality."

“Workers are likely to feel less stressed and less anxious about balancing their lives”

Unite drive on prostate cancer

UNITE has called on the UK government to do more to raise awareness of prostate cancer and to increase funding on research.

Rob Miguel, the union's health and safety advisor, said: "Prostate cancer is the most common male cancer in the UK, with over 27,000 men diagnosed each year and 10,000 deaths.

"Despite these statistics thousands of men over 45 do not know enough about it, and are not going to their doctors and clinics for regular examination which can save and extend lives."

A recent survey, conducted by Tickbox.net, found that only half of men questioned would visit the doctor if they suffered symptoms affecting an intimate part of their body.

Mr Miguel said: "Unite intends to lobby the government to secure regular consultation with GPs for men over 50 and for increased investment for research."

He added: "If you have any health concerns contact your doctor sooner rather than later."

For more information email: **Rob.Miguel@unitetheunion.com**

Copter crash victim was 'one in a million'

TRIBUTES have been paid to the Northern Irish oil rig worker killed along with 14 colleagues and two crewmen in last month's helicopter crash in the North Sea.

Brian Barkley, from Kilaughts, outside Ballymoney, was described by his devastated family as "one in a million".

In a statement released through Grampian Police, the Barkleys said the tragedy had left them with "the biggest of holes" in their hearts.

They added: "He would always go out of his way to help people in any way he could and on more than one occasion took in a few 'stray' friends.

"Everyone he dealt with could see his kind heart and we all knew we were blessed and all the richer for having known him."

Brian Barkley, who was 30 and engaged to be married, had gone to Scotland to work eight years ago.

Mr Barkley was employed by KCA DEUTAG Drilling in Aberdeen as a 'roustabout' working on the oil rig drill floor.

BMW issue warning over junior docs' work hours

THE British Medical Association has claimed the NHS is not prepared for the introduction of a 48-hour working week for junior doctors.

The new provisions are contained in the European Working Time Directive which comes into effect in August.

According to the BMA, nearly a third of junior doctors work many hours over the 48-hour guideline.

Junior Doctors Committee chairman Dr Andy Thornley said: "The NHS has had 11 years to prepare for the introduction of the 48-hour week for junior doctors.

"The latest figures are alarming; suggesting that one in three junior doctors is working hours that will be illegal in just four months' time.

"Unless the challenges of the European Working Time Directive are taken more seriously there will undoubtedly be disruption to patient services in August."

€100m - hidden cost of dropping out of school

THE TUI has warned the high drop-out rate of pupils leaving school before completing their Leaving Cert will cost the state more than €100 million each year.

According to the union, more than half of the 10,000 students who do leave end up claiming annual benefits of at least €20,000.

General secretary Peter MacMenamin said: "We have costed student drop-out to the state in financial terms and the results are quite shocking.

"It makes it crystal clear that education cutbacks, particularly those that affect the most disadvantaged in society, will have severe economic and social consequences."



Government bid to get the Irish bike to work!

THE Irish government is gearing up for a new initiative to get employees to cycle to work.

At present, only 69,000 workers use a push bike to get to and from their workplace in the Republic.

Ministers are hoping to increase this figure to at least 160,000 by 2020.

The National Cycling Policy Framework is to make provision for publicly-funded bike rental schemes in major towns as well as increasing the number of cycle lanes across the country – including €3million spent on developing routes in Dublin.

The document, published on April 21, also calls for safe cycle routes to schools as well

as classroom training for kids in how to bike safely. Figures show that Irish people have lost the cycling habit.

Nearly seven per cent of all work journeys were by cycle in 1987 – but this figures had dropped to just over two per cent by 2006.

Transport Minister Noel Dempsey said: "We are all familiar with the hassle of lengthening journey times and traffic congestion as well as the harmful effects of greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles.

"Equally we are aware of the health benefits of pursuing more active lifestyles. That's why a return to the bike can make very real sense."

We'll target pay gap

HARRIET Harman, deputy leader of the UK Labour Party, has promised "to shine the spotlight" into every workplace to expose pay discrimination against women.

She told shop workers' union USDAW's annual conference on equality at work that under new legislation the UK government will expect firms with more than 250 employees to report on any pay gaps. Ms Harman said: "It should not

just be down to the woman to complain – it should be down to the employer to explain and to answer to the employees, to the unions, to customers and public opinion."

Welcoming the move, USDAW general secretary John Hannett said: "It sends out a strong message to both businesses and employees; inequality is inexcusable in the workplace or elsewhere."



Harman: Spotlight

TIMELINE: APRIL

Rallies, budgets, talks and more job losses...

April 1 – Employers group IBEC claims last September's national wage agreement no longer reflects economic realities and calls for a more "employer-friendly" inability to pay clause.

April 1 – Eircom is to write to employees asking them to take a voluntary pay cut lasting until June 30, 2011 with a projected saving of €113 million. It follows senior managers and executives agreeing to a 10 per cent pay cut. One union official advised members to consider consigning the letters to the bin. Meanwhile, RTE chief Cathan Goan confirmed to 2,300 employees that the broadcaster would be seeking reductions in their pay of between five and 17.5 per cent. Management is also looking at savings in "personnel-related operating costs" thought to involve cuts in overtime.



Deadline: Jack O'Connor

April 1 – Communications firm Nortel announces 90 jobs are to go at its Newtownabbey plant.

April 1 – US veterinary products manufacturer Schering-Plough announces it is to close its factory in Bray, Co Wicklow, by mid-2011 with the loss of 240 jobs. SIPTU expresses confidence a decent redundancy package will be secured for the workforce.

April 2 – In a shock move, Canadian-owned aircraft manufacturer Bombardier sheds almost 1,000 jobs at its four plants in Belfast.

April 2 – SIPTU slams employers' group IBEC's call for social welfare cuts and claims it "adds insult to injury" to those workers who have lost their jobs.

April 3 – 210 jobs are to go at car components firm Visteon's Belfast factory after the company – formerly owned by Ford – went into administration. Reacting to the news, Stormont Employment Minister Reg Empey claims Northern Ireland has lost two per cent of its entire manufacturing base in four just days. First Minister Peter Robinson promises the Executive will do all it can to find new jobs for those facing unemployment.

April 3 – Delegates at the CPSU annual conference in Galway vote to take further industrial action unless the Irish government abandons its pensions levy. Delegates also called on ICTU to organise a one-day strike involving all 360,000 public service workers on the issue.

April 6 – While admitting "a certain degree of progress" over a draft plan put forward by government officials, David Begg said the proposals lacked "concrete specifics" on key issues such as the pension levy and wage agreement. Meanwhile, Mandate chief John Dou-

glas served notice of his opposition to any attempt to reframe the national wage agreement. He said: "We are pushing to have the integrity of that agreement held up. We are not open to renegotiation."

April 6 – Shadow Chancellor George Osborne signals that three-year pay deals may be scrapped under a future Tory administration. He claimed the deals were "very inflexible at a time when the economic conditions are changing very quickly".

April 6 – Stormont Enterprise Minister Arlene Foster claims her department had held meetings with Visteon managers in February and March, but that officials had not been informed of the move to close the West Belfast factory. She said: "The decision to place Visteon UK in administration was taken without any reference



ICTU's Patricia McKeown at Belfast jobs rally

to Invest NI or the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment."

April 7 – Talks at Government Buildings between social partners adjourn until after Easter. However, SIPTU's Jack O'Connor said: "Talks will only resume if the Budget does not blow the process out of the water."

April 7 – Irish Finance Minister Brian Lenihan unveils emergency Budget – a mix of tax rises and swingeing spending cuts. There will be a four per cent levy on gross income for those earning more than €75,000 rising to six per cent for those on more than €175,000. The total reduction in gross government spending will total €1.8 billion in 2009 with further cuts of €4.8 billion in 2010 and 2011. A National Asset Management Agency is to be set up to take over €80 billion to €90 billion of bad loans.

April 7 – SIPTU chief Jack O'Connor warns the Budget is "not a basis for social solidarity" and will make it very difficult to reach a deal on economic recovery with the government. ICTU general secretary David Begg calls Brian Lenihan's announcements "harsh and lacking in a serious and structured response to the jobs crisis". He adds: "Some €4.5 billion is to be injected into the banks this year, but all they could muster for helping the unemployed was €128 million." However, employers group IBEC calls the Budget "a credible response to the current difficulties in the public finances".

April 7 – SIPTU attacks the moratorium on recruitment by the HSE. The union's national nursing official Louise O'Reilly said: "It now appears the Department of Finance is running the Health Service. This cannot be good for patients or for staff."

April 8 – IMPACT warns the Budget is "clearly deflationary" and "lacks convincing measures to protect jobs and re-create employment".

April 9 – Sixty five jobs are to go at the Dawn Meats plant in Middleton, Co Cork, with an additional 70 agency jobs under threat.

April 9 – Finance Minister Brian Lenihan's "slight re-casting" of the pension levy was slammed by a number of unions. The CPSU claimed the adjustment "appears so minor as to be insignificant" while Impact said it was similarly unimpressed by the move. SIPTU chief Jack O'Connor said he could not see "how you can come from this budget to an agreement on a social solidarity pact".

April 9 – Impact general secretary Peter McLoone claims the budget "brings home starkly how everybody has to pay for the sins of those that were leading the financial institutions over the last number of years."

April 9 – Unite has claimed "light touch employment legislation in the UK" is being exploited by "light-fingered employers and administrators". National officer Peter Skyte was slamming the move by Nortel and its administrators Ernst & Young to sack one in 10 of its UK workforce without consultation or redundancy pay. About 90 of the 200 employees are to go at the Monkstown plant outside Belfast. He added the union would use "all available industrial, legal and political avenues" to challenge the move.

April 10 – Retail union Mandate accused Shaws Group of "using the recession" to reduce its employees' living standards after the company deferred pay rises under the national wage agreement.

April 10 – Mandate general secretary John Douglas attacks the Budget as a wasted opportunity and claims it failed to show any "real effort" to stimulate employment.

He also slams the "shocking extension" of the income levy to lower earners which he dubbed a "totally unacceptable and disproportionate attack on the poorest in our society". Meanwhile, Cori director Fr Sean Healy warns against the privatisation of large parts of the public service and claimed such a move would have "huge negative implications for fairness and for the vulnerable in Irish society".

April 11 – UK local government unions UNISON, Unite, GMB and NIPSA warn employers that a 0.5pc pay offer covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland is "mean and paltry" and translates at just 3p an hour for hundreds of thousands of workers.

April 11 – UNISON local government chief Heather Wakefield slams the proposal as "not realistic". She added: "How can they hope to recruit and retain enough social workers to make sure that children at risk are protected when they are offering a ridiculously low amount – what sort of carrot is this?"

April 12 – Alliance@IBM, a US-based advocacy group for IBM workers, claims the hi-tech firm is planning to axe thousands of jobs across Europe over the next few months. Lee Conrad said the company was seeking to shift most of its workforce to Eastern Europe, India, China and South America. He added: "We expect many job cuts in Ireland, Germany and the UK in the coming months."

April 14 – INTO general secretary John Carr tells the union's conference in Letterkenny that children were paying the price for a few capitalist criminals. Earlier teachers gave Education Minister Batt O'Keefe a frosty reception when he spoke to delegates. His speech was punctuated by derisive laughter and loud groans. When the minister finished speaking, the only applause came from the front row of invited guests.

April 14 – Teachers Union of Ireland general secretary Peter MacMenamin tells his union's annual conference in Cork that public service "will carry a fair share – but only our fair share" of the burden of sorting out the economy which he admitted was "in a dreadful state". However, he described the pension levy as "an iniquitous

“Budget is harsh and lacking structured response to the jobs crisis”
David Begg

tax" and insisted that any measures in redressing the problem must be "fair and equitable".

April 14 – The INTO claims 1,200 teachers who qualify this summer will not find jobs. General Secretary John Carr warned the unemployment crisis impacting on teaching was set to be worse than the 1980s.

April 15 – SIPTU organiser Darragh O'Connor welcomed the Irish government's commitment to provide one year's free childcare announced in the budget, describing it as "step in the right direction". He added that "we still have a long way to go before we have a childcare system that is comparable with our European neighbours".

April 15 – INTO general secretary John Carr claims teachers bitterly resent "having their pockets picked" to bail out "Ireland's casino capitalists". He told delegates at the union's annual conference that the land of saints and scholars was now sacrificing its scholars for its sinners.

April 15 – Education Minister Batt O'Keeffe faces another caning from teachers as he is heckled with shouts of "lies" and "shame" while addressing the TUI annual conference in Cork. Meanwhile, the INTO is to hold a special conference to decide on the next phase of resistance to the pension levy.

April 16 – Protesting Visteon workers picket Ford showrooms across Northern Ireland.

April 16 – Delegates at the TUI conference backed a proposal calling on ICTU to break off talks with the government. Instead there was a call for the building of a campaign against the cuts following a special congress to debate the issue. The union's president Don Ryan describes Education Minister Batt O'Keeffe's defence of the cutbacks in his address to teachers as an excuse worthy of "dog ate my homework variety".

April 17 – Defending the new social partnership talks, SIPTU's Jack O'Connor said that while he sympathised with the TUI stance, it was important to make "a determined effort to secure the best terms we can and see if an agreement can be concluded". He added: "We would have to know by May Day at the latest if it was possible to conclude an agreement or not."

April 17 – Thousands attend a Rally for Jobs and Workers' Rights at Belfast City Hall. The ICTU-organised lunchtime protest heard ICTU assistant general secretary Peter Bunting describe the treatment of Visteon workers as "an act of corporate mugging".

April 17 – A massive vote in favour of "a strategy of opposition up to and including strike action" is passed at the ASTI convention in Killarney. ASTI general secretary John White commented that he had never seen such "seething anger" among delegates.

April 17 – According to research carried out by the Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland, schools at secondary level will lose an average of 2.6 temporary and part-time teachers when the term starts in September. Speaking at the union's annual conference, general secretary John White said the loss of "recently qualified talented and motivated young second-level teachers" was a "squandering of a national resource".

April 20 – UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis claims the recession is not about statistics and percentages but about "people's lives". He vows to delegates at the union's health conference in Harrogate the union would "never, ever back down on the market". He also warns UK Chancellor Alistair Darling not to put forward "a golden carrot for the rich and a stick for the poor" in the forthcoming Budget.

April 20 – The new National Asset Management Agency set up to buy up €90 billion worth of bank property loans is described as the taxpayers' "nemesis" by SIPTU's Jack O'Connor. He told a commemoration of the Limerick Soviet it represented "nothing less than the socialisation of the enormous risks generated by developers, banks and speculators in their reckless pursuit of profit."

April 20 – AIB staff balloted on management proposals for a two-year pay freeze plan and increases in pension contributions overwhelmingly reject the move. IBOA general secretary Larry Broderick said the outcome of the ballot showed "deep sense of upset and anger" among staff members at the "opportunistic proposals".

April 21 – UK Chancellor Alistair Darling announces a 50p in the pound tax rate for those earning over £150,000 a year. Other measures include £750m strategic investment fund for major industrial projects with an emphasis on low carbon initiatives, a car scrapping scheme and the raising of statutory redundancy pay from £350 to £380. There is also an extension of the stamp duty holiday and assistance for homeowners threatened by repossession.



Robinson: Jobs promise

April 21 – SIPTU national industrial secretary Matt Merigan slams "right-wing rhetoric" of politicians such as Fine Gael's Leo Varadkar more concerned with scoring "cheap points" than addressing the real issues affecting the health sector. He said: "His [Varadkar's] recipe will result in fewer nurses, fewer care assistants and other grades, resulting in more people on trolleys in A&E and longer queues for basic elective procedures."

April 21 – RTE News reveals it has seen a confidential circular issued to senior HSE managers that contains a draft proposal to cut 1,000 staff jobs and redeploy 2,000 other employees. 500 positions are to go in admin and management. The HSE later claims it issued the document to managers and unions to gauge feedback.

April 21 – Workers occupying the Visteon car components plant in West Belfast vow to contest any attempt to have them removed. It comes as administrators KPMG launch legal bid to have them evicted from the plant.

April 21 – UK public sector union PCS has slammed plans contained in a Treasury report to cut government spending by £15 billion. General secretary Mark Serwotka said the paper had been written by Gerry Grimstone - who he called "Margaret Thatcher's privatisation guru" - and claimed it was "really a case of back to the future" with the ground being prepared to "sell off the family silver".

April 22 – SIPTU branch organiser Pat Ward calls for new powers to be given to the Pensions Board allowing it to make solvent companies facing winding down or selling up to address deficits in employees' pensions funds. He said: "We are now calling on the Government to introduce similar legislation [to that in the UK] here as a matter of urgency to ensure that companies owned

by multi-billionaires, such as SR Technics, cannot slink away from their moral obligations to ordinary hard working people who contributed their fair share to the fund in good faith for decades."

April 24 – More than 200 jobs will also be lost in Tralee, Co Kerry, over the next year as textile manufacturer Amann Industries moves production to low-cost plants in Asia. SIPTU branch officer Con Casey said the effect on North Kerry will be "catastrophic". He added: "This is a company where whole families have been employed and they will now find it next to impossible to find alternative employment."

April 24 – Speaking at the PSEU's annual conference, Impact leader Peter McLoone claims the Irish government and bosses "have imposed or threatened to impose"



Fury: TUI motion calls on ICTU to break off talks

changes that will impact on pensions, jobs and public service provision. He serves notice that unions will restrict attempts to exploit the recession "to force things through without engagement and agreement". Mr McLoone added: "There should be no doubt that unions will resist such moves, or that we will use any means at our disposal to do so".

April 24 – Tesco is warned it is facing widespread industrial action at its 110 stores across the Republic if it forges ahead with plans to reduce workers' entitlements. The company has informed staff pre-1996 workers will be made redundant if they do not accept the compulsory buyout of preferential terms and conditions and accept new contracts by April 30. Mandate has

blasted the move claiming it is especially galling following the recent announcement of massive worldwide profits of €3.59bn. Lorraine O'Brien claimed Tesco was "attempting to trade off staff entitlements against the bottom line for their shareholders".

April 24 – Stormont Finance Minister Nigel Dodds signals that controversial proposals to introduce household water charges will be deferred again. He said: "We have taken the view and maintained the position that it is impossible at a time of great economic hardship that you could impose these kinds of burdens on people."

April 26 – SIPTU claims the actual number of work-related deaths is around 20 times higher than the official number of 60. The union said this only accounted for on-the-job incidents and did not include fatalities through work-related illnesses which pushed the real figure up to 1,400.

“
**Be in no doubt
unions will resist
and we will use any
means at our
disposal to do so**
Peter McLoone
”

HSE sinister recruitment ban plan is slammed

A PLANNED HSE ban on all public health service recruitment has been branded a “most sinister development”.

IMPACT’s national secretary Kevin Callinan told the union’s Health and Welfare Division conference in Castlebar on May 7 the HSE even intended to tell managers they would be disciplined if they called in extra staff to cover emergency situations.

Delegates vowed to take industrial action to support any member victimised for refusing to co-operate with the cuts.

Mr Callinan claimed the blanket ban, which included temporary staff in emergency situations, would have a massive impact on services.

He added: “It is a recipe for chaos in the delivery of vital health services.”

Mr Callinan said many managers in hospitals and community care services were horrified at the HSE’s cavalier approach.

He added: “Services are viewed by these people with a military mindset as a commodity that has to be rationed. And, as the draft HSE circular makes clear to managers trying to run crucial services on the ground, no matter how desperate the need for emergency staff cover, they risk disciplinary action.”

“This is perhaps the most sinister development in the short – but rich – history of bureaucracy at the top of the HSE.

Mr Callinan said staff could be disciplined “not if they are negligent or do the wrong thing – but if they do the right thing”.

He claimed the union’s swift decision to tell its members not to co-operate with the draft circular had forced the HSE to put it on hold.

But it was not withdrawn and the threat to jobs and services remained.

Mr Callinan added: “This is not just a fight for the jobs and futures of our members. It is about the very wellbeing of the public health service.”

“It is a recipe for chaos for vital health services”



NIPSA vow on sacked traffic attendants

NIPSA has vowed to do “all in its power” to overturn the dismissal of 26 traffic wardens following an unofficial strike in Belfast last month.

The NCP workers were protesting about conditions including sick pay and rota changes.

NIPSA have criticised the move and claimed the traffic attendants “did not deserve” to be treated in a “totally unwarranted” way.

General secretary John Corey said: “Traffic attendants have served this community as public servants through the most difficult times.

“They do not deserve to be arbitrarily dismissed by this company using anti-trade union legislation.

NCP Services accepted the traffic attendants had valid grievances when they staged a work stoppage on April 3, 2009.

“NIPSA has done everything possible, including representations to the Department for Regional Development, to resolve all issues and restore normal traffic attendants’ services.

“Regrettably rather than address these genuine grievances and restore normal services urgently as we requested, the company has dismissed the staff. I believe the company’s actions are totally unwarranted. NIPSA will do all in its power to overturn these dismissals.”

AN IMPACT member has claimed the reason the HSE does not keep statistics on workplace violence is because it a problem health chiefs do not want to acknowledge. Phil McFadden told delegates at the union’s Health Division biennial conference: “I know of many members who have received very serious injuries due to violent assaults by clients. These members received no acknowledgment of the trauma, no support when they return to the workplace where the incident took place.”

ASTI general secretary John White has called the restoration of the Summer Works Scheme “a very small patch of blue in an almost totally grey sky for secondary level education”. He said it had to be seen against the backdrop of massive staff cuts and the moratorium on promotions. Mr White added: “Expenditure on Irish second level education in the most recent OECD analysis showed we were 27 out of 29 countries – even before the cuts in the recent two budgets”



Barber: Great success

Bosses got it badly wrong on NMW

THE TUC has claimed those who slammed the introduction of a national minimum wage 10 years ago have been proved wrong.

When the UK government brought in the NMW in April 1999, the business lobby warned it would be a disaster and predicted the loss of thousands of jobs.

However, the TUC has pointed out that before the current slump, employment had actually grown by about two million jobs over the same period.

The adult minimum wage was originally set at £3.60 per hour and currently stands at £5.73, representing an increase of almost 60 per cent in less than a decade. Over the same period the Retail Price Index

has risen by 33 per cent and average earnings 35 per cent, so the NMW has delivered a real increase in the spending power and living standards of the low paid.

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: “The minimum wage is one of this government’s greatest successes.

“It is an integral part of building a fairer Britain, and its success has shown that despite scare-mongering from business, the economy can easily cope with sensible labour market regulation.

“Indeed, our current economic woes seem to be caused by too little regulation rather than too much.”



Warning sounded over hearing loss

THE Health and Safety Authority has issued new guidance warning musicians and those working in the entertainment industry of the dangers of work-related hearing loss.

Anne Maria O'Connor, a senior inspector with the organisation, said: "This is something that must be on the agenda for all event organisers and employers in the industry. What can be a very pleasurable experience for people attending a single event can be a serious occupational hazard for workers due to repeated long-term exposure.

"Short-term exposure should not be detrimental to a person's hearing as long as it is within acceptable parameters. But what about someone who spends a significant proportion of their working lives exposed to loud music?

"Those who work in clubs and concert venues, for example, can face this problem on a daily basis, and they need to be conscious of the potential damage to their hearing."

The guidance, titled 'The Noise of Music - Sound Advice for the Music and Entertainment Sectors', is available free through www.hsa.ie.

ICTU get tough call on workers' safety

ICTU has called for employers who endanger workers' lives through negligent or reckless practices to face tougher penalties - including jail - for breaching health and safety laws.

The call was made at a conference in Dublin's Gresham Hotel to mark Workers' Memorial Day on April 27 - the international day of remembrance for all those killed or injured at work.

Congress official Esther Lynch said: "We are calling for stronger, dissuasive penalties so that boards and boards of directors are not tempted to cut corners on safety.

"There is a need to legislate for stronger penalties for employers who violate the law, including criminal penalties and jail time for employers who put workers in danger."

Workers Memorial Day is marked every year on April 28 and is recognised as a national day in the US, Canada, Belgium, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, Argentina, Brazil and other

countries in Latin America and Asia.

Ms Lynch also called on the Irish government to mark Workers' Memorial Day by ensuring funding on health and safety did not fall victim the financial crisis.

She added: "It would be fitting way to mark Workers' Memorial Day if the newly-appointed Minister for Labour Affairs, Dara Calleary TD, committed publicly to ringfencing existing health and safety resources and protecting them from any cutbacks, as a first step in building a new regime of safety, enforcement and compliance.

"As matters stand, Ireland has among the lowest EU spend on workers' health and safety, so there is no certainly no room for cutbacks. We need to improve our health and safety practices, including how we count and report work-related deaths and illnesses."

HEALTH

Govt should be ashamed of way they treat nurses

THE Irish government should "hang its head in shame" at the way nurses are treated, a convention of SIPTU nurses and midwives has been told.

Slamming the pension levy, national nursing official Louise O'Reilly said nurses and midwives did not deserve "to pay for the crimes of property speculators and bank executives".

She told delegates at the gathering last month in Sligo: "We live in the real world - we know there is a global economic crisis and we are willing to do our fair share... but only our fair share and we want to know that those at the top are paying their fair share too."

Attacking the recruitment freeze in the health sector, she said it showed a lack of creativity on the government's part.

Ms O'Reilly added: "It seems to me that the Department of Finance is now running the health service, so what do we need the Department of Health for?"

SIPTU's national industrial secretary Matt Merrigan also addressed the conference and described the Health Service

Executive approach to cuts as counterproductive.

He said: "The reality is that much of our health service is already over-extended because of a deliberate policy of outsourcing over many years and filling front line activities such as nursing through agencies.

"It is of course a lot easier to reduce expenditure by cutting front line staff who do not have permanent employment contracts but the end result impacts directly on the patient.

Meanwhile, Prof Tom Collins, who chairs the Commission on Nursing Hours, told the conference that nurses and midwives felt marginalised and frustrated over the unresolved issue of the number of hours worked each week.

The conference called on Health Minister Mary Harney to publish the report compiled by the Commission.

Ms O'Reilly said: "There is no justification for nurses and midwives to be the only profession in the health service who do not enjoy a 35-hour week."

'Had enough' IMO slams government health policy

THE Irish Medical Organisation "has had enough" with government health policy. The doctors' body passed a motion of no confidence at its AGM in Killarney on April 16.

Speaking on the motion, Dr Ruairi Henry, an IMO NCHD committee member, called the abolition of the over-70s medical card "a callous betrayal" of elderly people and attacked "the continuing filth and squalor" on the wards which put thousands of lives at risk.

He added: "This government has attempted to undermine and silence us through oppressive legislation and anti-medical propaganda.

"By adopting this motion we have sent them a message on behalf of all those we care for, on behalf of all those who have suffered, who are suffering, who have died and who will die as a result of their incompetence and their failures.

"The message is clear. We, the IMO, have had enough. We have no confidence in our government's health strategy."

Policies 'manifestly' failed

THE Irish Pharmacy Union has passed a vote of no confidence in government health policies at their annual conference in Waterford.

IPU president Liz Hoctor claimed these policies had "manifestly" failed and urged a fundamental review of

health strategy. She said pharmacists had also noticed cash-strapped patients were cutting back on medication and called on the government to allow the sale of cheaper generic alternatives to the public.

Garda recruitment freeze slammed

THE Garda Representative Association has warned the freeze on recruitment imposed by the government will impact heavily on frontline policing.

It follows the announcement in March by Irish Finance Minister Brian Lenihan of a ban on taking on new staff within the public and civil service as well as a halt on promotions.

The GRA claim that with nearly 400 officers set to retire over the next year, the move will lead to a drop in Garda numbers with a knock-on impact on fighting crime.

Meanwhile, Joe Dirwin, general secretary of the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors, also attacked the blanket ban on recruitment and promotions.

He said: "We are concerned about the operational independence of the Garda Commissioner in making appointments and promotions."

"We see the moratorium as seriously affecting service and we have serious concerns about the safety of both the public and our own members."

Mr Dirwin pointed out the Garda had to have superintendents to sign warrants and authorise the detention of prisoners.

Small cars doing Garda 'donkey work'

GARDAI are using some patrol cars that are not fit for purpose, it has been claimed.

Delegates at the annual conference of the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors heard that smaller cars were "masquerading as police vehicles".

Sgt Seamus Burke told the conference in some instances Toyota Yaris and Ford Fiestas were being deployed.

He added: "Simply placing a set of blue beacons and Garda signs on a vehicle does not make it a patrol car any more than placing a donkey in a stable would make it a racehorse."

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Yesterday's news, tomorrow's fears: Printers at work on a regional paper press

Spiral of decline in UK regional press

THE NUJ has warned the regional press in the UK faces "a spiral of decline" if the British government scraps restrictions on mergers between large media groups.

Media interests faced with a drop in huge profits have been lobbying hard to have anti-monopoly regulations relaxed.

The Office of Fair Trading is currently reviewing regulations covering ownership and mergers and a proposed summit on the issue is set to be chaired by Culture Secretary Andy Burnham.

The NUJ believes bigger monopolies will lead to more cuts – and that any state aid is likely to fund shareholder dividends and management bonuses unless strict conditions are set.

According to the union, intense profiteering by the likes of Trinity Mirror, Newsquest, Johnston Press and Northcliffe Newspapers coupled with their lack of investment in journalism and new media, means they cannot continue to control the local press.

In a document presented to the OFT, the union said: "The inevitable fact is there is no longer the prospect of sufficient returns from local newspapers (and their websites) to sustain a model of ownership that requires a quarter or more of their revenues to be siphoned off to holding companies

and their shareholders." The paper pointed out that media groups will seek to consolidate their holdings to maximise profits leading to "fewer titles, even fewer journalists and a rapid fall in the amount and quality of news" and accelerating "a spiral of decline".

The union wants all takeovers sanctioned by the OFT and Competition Commission to carry enforceable conditions.

These could include "commitments to invest in newsgathering, with a specified proportion of profits going into editorial resources and requirements over staffing ratios."

Meanwhile, the NUJ has backed an early day motion calling on the UK government to demand guarantees about regional journalism before relaxing monopoly rules or bailing out media companies.

Deputy general secretary Michelle Stanistreet welcomed the fact 100 MPs had signed the motion and called on those who cared about regional journalism to write to their local representatives on the issue.

She said: "Please write – even if you have done it before or you think your MP is a hopeless case."

"We need to keep the issue of the regional media in the thoughts of parliamentarians."



Facts: Gerry McCormack

Food outlets panned over legal bid

SIPTU has accused a newly-formed body of fast food firms of "hypocrisy and greed", claiming they should be known as "fast buck outlets" instead.

It comes as the Quick Service Food Alliance launched a High Court legal bid in the Republic over payment and employment conditions for its workers.

The group, representing 170 businesses in the sector, claims current legislation threatens businesses and jobs because of high labour costs.

It is challenging the rights of the Catering Joint Labour Committee to set minimum wages and employment conditions for catering employees and claims only the Oireachtas has the right under Section 15 of the Constitution to make laws.

At present the Catering JLC formulates proposals that, if

rubberstamped by the Labour Court, bind employers to pay certain wage rates and provide conditions of employment.

Claiming the industry was not "recession-proof", QSFA chairman John Grace said the current set-up meant "an approximate 20 per cent increase in labour costs compounded by proposals for sick pay and paid breaks".

Slamming the legal challenge, SIPTU national industrial secretary Gerry McCormack said: "If they were honest they should at least have the decency to call themselves the fast buck food alliance and stop their hypocritical posturing."

He added that the QSFA showed "a brazen disregard for facts and fair play" in its attack on the employment rights of workers.