



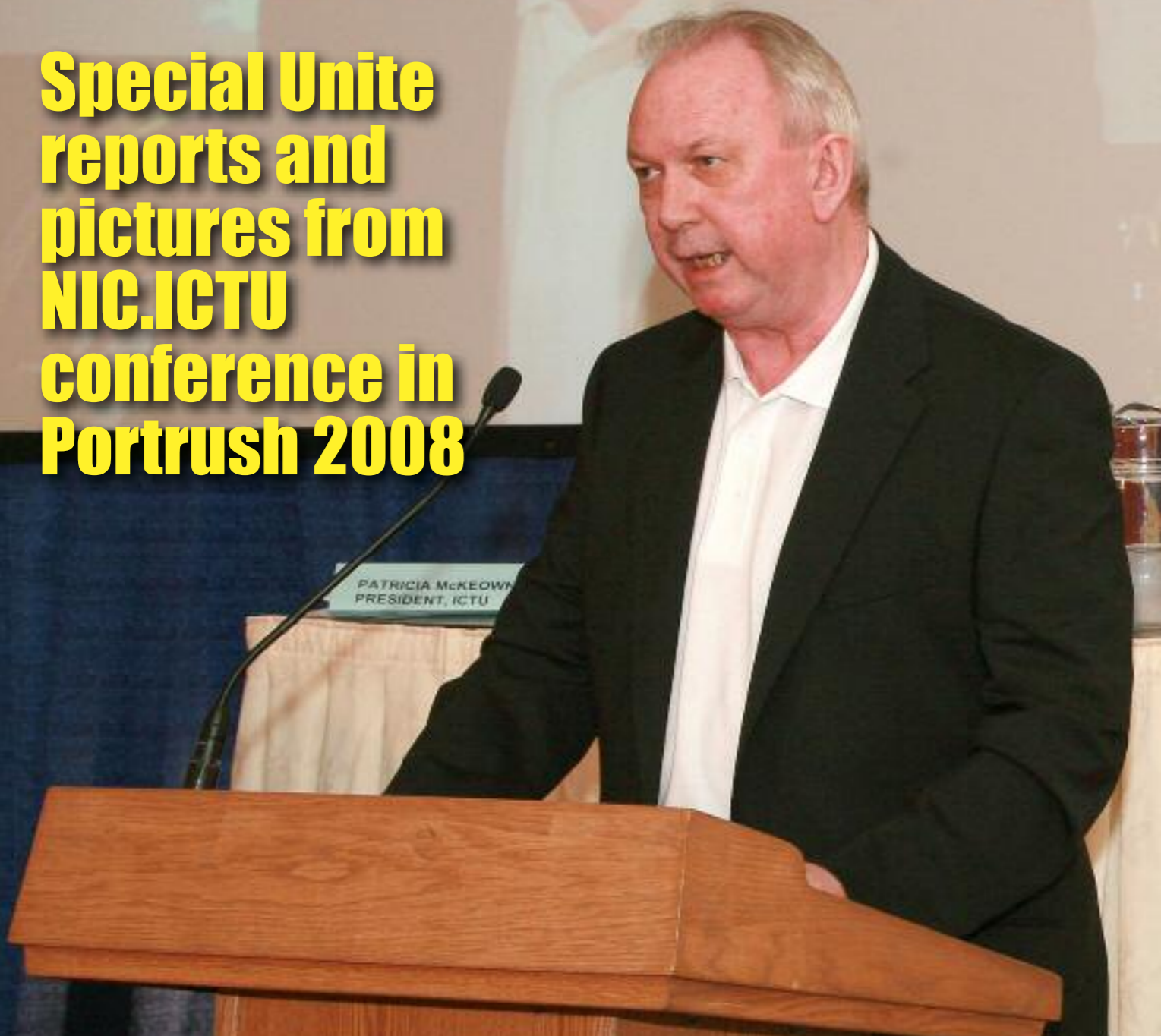
UNITED IN ACTION

A Unite web newsletter for all Northern Ireland members

April 2008

Join us for the May Day celebrations in Belfast

Special Unite reports and pictures from NIC.ICTU conference in Portrush 2008



Read Unite's Irish Regional Secretary's May Day statement on page 2

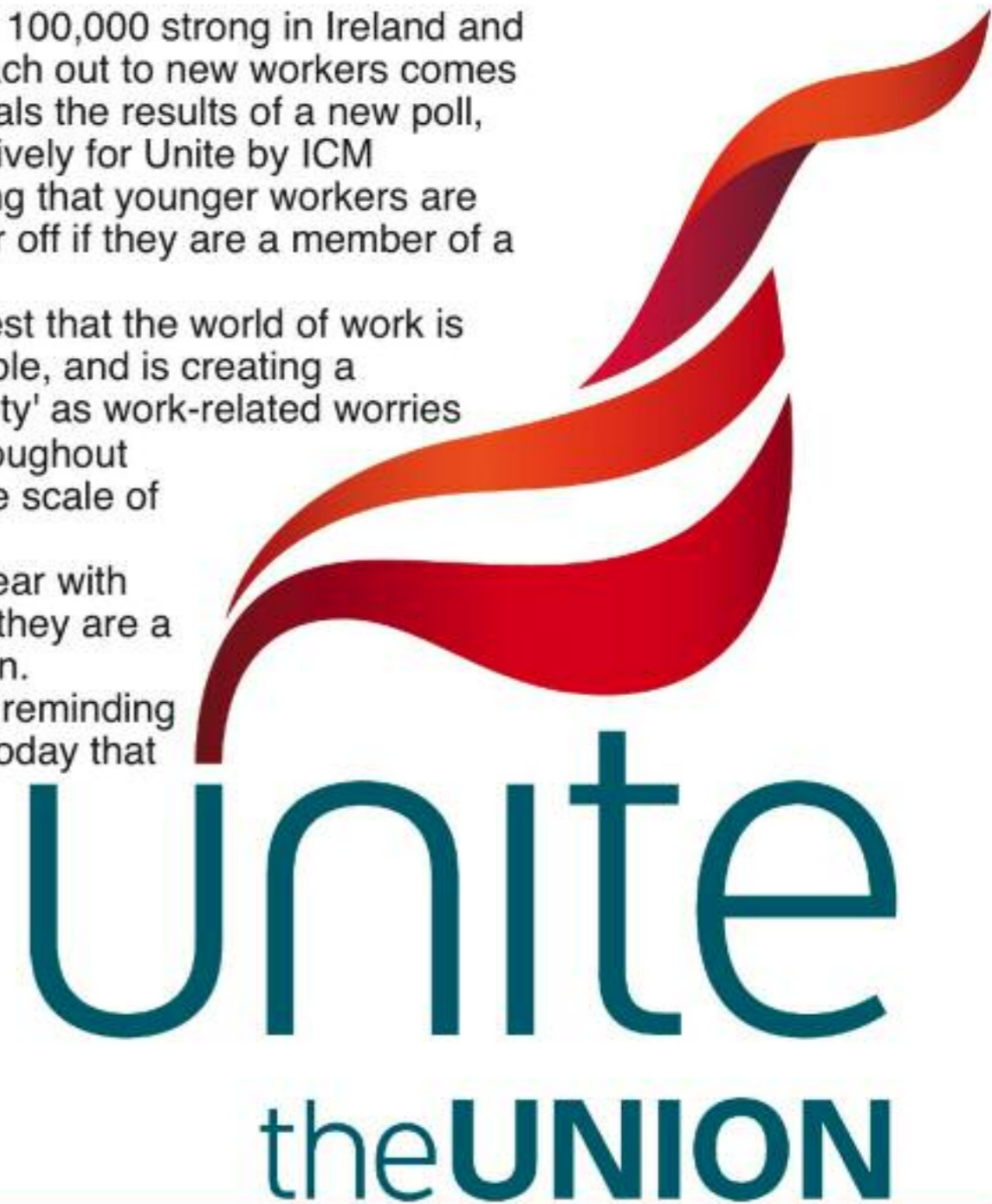
FIGHT FOR THE FUTURE

Unite the union is 100,000 strong in Ireland and its intention to reach out to new workers comes as the union reveals the results of a new poll, conducted exclusively for Unite by ICM Research, showing that younger workers are significantly better off if they are a member of a trade union.

The results suggest that the world of work is failing young people, and is creating a 'Generation Anxiety' as work-related worries spread stress throughout their lives. Yet the scale of Unite's task - and opportunity - is clear with just 1 in 4 saying they are a member of a union.

Therefore we are reminding you the youth of today that Unite is the 'UNION FOR LIFE'.

When you finish your studies and enter the world of work remember - an organised workplace is a better workplace.



The fighting back union

UNITE'S MAY DAY PARADE ARRANGEMENTS IN BELFAST

The annual NIC/ICTU May Day March and Rally will be held on Saturday 3rd May 2008.

Unite, with a band, will march from the Regional Office on the Antrim Road to the main departure point at The Art College. Following the Main Parade we will be meeting in Transport House where entertainment and refreshments will be laid on until 3.00pm for all Unite members and their families: before joining the celebrations in St George's Market.

The Antrim Road offices will be open from 9.00am until departure time at 11.30am. Light refreshments will be provided at the Unite offices for members

and their families prior to departure.

This will be a great opportunity for Unite members, friends and families to come together to celebrate May Day. The Unite parade will include banners from all sections of the new union.

All members of both sections of UNITE should make their way to the Antrim Road before 11.15 am.

I look forward to seeing you all there.

Yours fraternally

JIMMY KELLY
Regional Secretary

WHY WE CELEBRATE MAY DAY

By Jimmy Kelly,
Irish Regional Secretary

FOR more than 100 years May 1 has been international workers' day – a day of working class solidarity and a celebration of internationalism.

May Day began in the US in 1886 – with workers' fighting for the eight-hour day. On May 1 workers across the US responded to the call for strikes.

Three days later police broke up a workers' rally.

However, by the second week in May some 340,000 workers were on strike. Many won shorter hours, though the revolt was put down by a wave of repression.

In 1890 workers mark international workers' day across the world for the first time.

In Germany hundreds of thousands stopped work and demonstrated. In Italy there were mass strikes and marches. London, too, saw its first May Day demonstration that year.

In 1916 in Germany May Day was the focus for all those who opposed the First World War.

Even faced with the most desperate circumstances workers have marked May Day.

During the Second World War, socialists in the Warsaw Ghetto – where the Nazis had herded over 300,000 Jews before transporting them to death

camp – were determined to mark May Day.

Mark Edelman was one of those involved. He later wrote, "The entire world was celebrating May Day, and everywhere forceful, meaningful words were being spoken.

"But never yet had the Internationale been sung in conditions so different, so tragic, in a place where an entire nation had been and was still perishing."

May Day protests have occurred during massive upsurges of workers militancy. In Portugal on April 25, 1974, the 48-year-old dictatorship was overthrown.

A week later the capital, Lisbon, saw demonstrations of 100,000 people.

On May Day we also remember the Socialist and Trade Union Organiser James Connolly.

We remember him because he was inspired by a vision –

A vision that all great changes come from the bottom up and are forged on the anvil of workers struggle and people power.

We also remember him because his vision is just as relevant today as it was

then, because James Connolly was a great union organiser.

He brought to Ireland organising methods that he had learnt from the Wobblies in America – the Industrial Workers of the World.

The last words of Wobbly agitator Joe Hill, who, like Connolly, was executed, resound to this day,

– ***'Don't mourn – Organise'***
– ***'Today we carry forward the slogan of our pioneers,***
– ***Workers of the World UNITE.***



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Compiled, designed and edited - Bob Miller
Pictures - Kevin Cooper

Setting the tone



Fraternal greetings from Eamon McCann of Derry Trades Council

CONFERENCE was opened with a rousing address from Derry and Trades Council representative Eamon McCann, who lashed out at those claiming to be 'dynamic entrepreneurs' but who, he claimed, are really 'spongers of the public purse.'

He attacked the government's neo-liberal stance in allowing the public sector to be systematically savaged while the private sector stands with its arms outstretched and holding a begging bowl.

He told delegates that the trade union movement should recognise its achievement in stopping the introduction of water charges in Northern Ireland.

"I have no doubt that if it had not been

the trade unions exercising their clout on the streets then thousands of families would have letters dropping into their letterboxes this month with demands for new water payments. The decision for those families would then be what they would have to cut from the family budgets?" he said.

And he added that non-payment campaign was a huge success and the trade union movement should take credit for leading the opposition, but he warned delegates that the government were now working in more subtle ways to introduce these charges.

"Let's remind them what happened to the last proposals and say we are prepared to take them on again to see them off."



Unite's Deputy Regional Secretary and NIC.ICTU chair Eugene McGlone addressing conference

Organising to succeed

NORTHERN Ireland trade union representatives have called on the Stormont Government to actively engage with the movement to secure to the rights and dignity of workers.

In his opening address to the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions conference in Portrush today, (Tuesday, April 15) the chair Mr Eugene McGlone, reminded the Government that the trade unions had played their part in the Good Friday Agreement. "While the country is rightly celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement let us again remind the Stormont Government that there are 250,000 reasons why they should engage actively with the trade union movement in Northern Ireland," said Mr McGlone.

Three hundred delegates from trade unions across the north representing 250,000 workers heard Mr McGlone add: "For years we called for the restoration of the Executive and the Assembly. Responsible trade unionists we played our part in the process. We now call upon the politicians to play their part."

"It is imperative that the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to pay attention to us as a major force within our society, to recognise our role and to give it its appropriate position and place. Not merely because it says

so somewhere in the Good Friday Agreement or in the St Andrews Agreement but because it is the correct thing to do.

"We had already made an arrangement with a Secretary of State to engage with us in a bi-lateral forum, a process that recognises our unique position in civic society and permitted both parties to bring issues of major concern to each other at the highest level. This was done formally including a memorandum of agreement. If a British Secretary of State was doing this surely it is not too much for our Executive to engage at the same level. This needs immediate attention and I trust it will come sooner rather than later."

Mr McGlone declared that the conference theme this year is "Organising to Succeed." "The value of properly organised workplaces is obvious to us it usually means better pay and conditions including holidays, sick pay and pension provisions. It also provides a collective voice for workers and creates the platform to deal with issues. It brings with it a better-informed workforce through the unions education and training programme. It means all this and more."

"The struggle for workers rights goes on," he said. "The weight of history this conference carries, with the expectations of past generations in their struggle for respect and dignity at work, remains undimmed.

"We haven't for example achieved

equal pay, some may say nothing like it and they would be correct. Our society still goes on its way quite merrily discriminating against women in the 21st Century- isn't that as alarming as it was in the 20th Century.

"Add to that the fact that we have the potential, if not the reality, of a whole new massive underclass of labour to add to the already existing underclass of labour.

"They are easily identified they speak foreign languages. They need our help now as much as we needed help forty, fifty, a hundred years ago. They are, as previous generations of us were, migrant workers.

"Any commentators, particularly the ill-informed and those detached from reality who laud the migrant workers because they are forced to tolerate low paid jobs and by inference denigrate the indigenous workers are dealing in very dangerous currency. "Let me say clearly and loudly, that we will not, as a movement, tolerate the potential for such patronising discrimination and exploitation."

Mr McGlone added: "Not one of these problems and issues equal pay/treatment migrant workers rights, privatisation of the public sector and the wholesale destruction and apparent neglect of our manufacturing base has been resolved; indeed they are growing and throwing up even greater challenges, which we must face by organising to succeed."



Unite's Senior Regional Organiser Albert Mills supporting Motion One

Let's get smart

POLITICAL DEBATE

Develop Relationship with Devolved Administration

Motion One carried

This conference welcomes the introduction last May of local accountable government and notes this means a different approach to governing Northern Ireland through an Executive and the Assembly Committees. We call on NIC.ICTU to develop a relationship with 'Stormont' that will benefit affiliates by focusing and maximising the approach taken by the Trade Union Movement. Conference believes this can best be done through NIC.ICTU providing a post for a co-ordinator or liaison officer who can assist and facilitate affiliates and direct the NIC's agenda to the new Devolved Government. Such a role should serve to reinforce with Government the part played by NIC.ICTU as a social partner and should also be used to strengthen the organising agenda for workers in Northern Ireland by campaigning for improved standards in the workplace, reinforcing the existing minimum pay legislation, the working time regulations and the right to trade union recognition including organising and trade union facilities.

AMICUS Section of Unite

KEVIN McAdam of Unite proposing said the motion calls on ICTU to get smart and stay smart in relation to interaction with government.

"We have new boys and girls on the hill and we need to be able to integrate them into society and to encourage them to take responsibility for the role they play in running Northern Ireland.

He said; "Trade unions have a responsibility to work effectively with Government and that can best be done by having an individual in place at Stormont who can act as co-ordinator, link and lobbyist for the movement, who can ensure that when collective trade unions want to demon-

strate or meet with minister, committees or MLAs that can be arranged speedily and effectively.

"The position would give Government a point of reference and contact to work the other way too. There is a new team at Stormont let's show them how to do business with the trade union movement."

Albert Mills of Unite seconded and said all the affiliates would benefit from having a lobbyist acting on their behalf at Stormont.

"We need somebody at Stormont who can fast track meetings in order that we can claim that we are here to do business and the MLAs had better listen."



The Unite delegation listening to the motion on pensions.

PENSIONS

Motion 19 carried

This conference calls upon the Northern Ireland Committee of Irish Congress of Trade Unions to organise and campaign for a legislative change in Northern Ireland to compel Private Sector employers to provide and contribute to a retirement pension fund for all workers which would provide for a personal pension on retirement benefits which would be at least equivalent to those currently enjoyed by local government workers.
T&G Section of Unite

End this pension scandal

RITCHIE Browne moving the motion on behalf of Unite said workers needed dignity and respect when they retire.

"Poor or no proper pension provision means for many a life of physical and psychological hardships. Employers have to be made to contribute from their profits so nobody loses their respect and dignity."

"Ironically it is the lowest paid workers in the private sector," he added "who are generally the ones hit hardest and it is they who contribute through their taxes all their working lives to the pension of those employed in the public sector."

"Employees working without a decent pension scheme are then told by the government to work longer. This has to be changed."

ENERGY STRATEGY

Motion 21

Within the context of an over all Energy Strategy this Conference calls on the NIC.ICTU to develop a strategy in the workplace for dealing with environmental waste, recycling and exploiting renewable energy. We call on the NIC to incorporate the essential elements of these topics into the training programme for shop stewards and to produce a policy paper on the Movement's stance on these issues that can be used by affiliates in employer negotiations.

It is in all our interests to ensure that all employers (including Congress and the affiliates) take seriously their corporate responsibility and accountability for our environment, the future of society and the future workforce.

This motion calls on workplace reps to place this agenda on their negotiating table with employers to develop the use of renewable energy resources, reduce waste, reuse where possible and be proactive in recycling.

AMICUS Section of Unite



Unite's John McGuinness speaking on energy strategy

Attracting investors

BY supporting this motion John McGuinness of Unite said it would help employers improve their profit margins and therefore workers could make a case for better wages.

"The lower the energy costs in NI means the country will be more attractive to future investors," he said.

MANUFACTURING

Motion 22 carried

Conference calls on Congress to initiate with government agencies an integrated approach to enhancing the manufacturing base in Northern Ireland.

In the aftermath of the Seagate disaster, politicians lined up, as they do on a regular basis when redundancies are announced, to make the call for the setting up of a task force. These task forces never materialise.

Congress must lead the way in the defence of what is left of our manufacturing industry. Our economy cannot prosper on the basis of the service industries alone. We therefore call on Congress to campaign for the establishment of a serious task force that will address issues such as:

- Sustainable industry
 - Direct employment for all
 - Proper wages
 - Union recognition
 - No more redundancy ransom
- Craigavon Trades Council**



Dwyer McKerr a Unite member speaking for Craigavon Trades Council on manufacturing

Freedom of association

UNITE member Dwyer McKerr on behalf of Craigavon Trade Councils in moving the motion said: "The greatest and most fundamental challenge for us all is to set in place a mechanism whereby global manufacturing enterprises are properly regulated so as to provide their workers with a right to a civilised, dignified and sustainable workplace.

"Furthermore, the freedom of association, the right to engage in collective bargaining, equality at work and the implementation of an international basic living wage, not a minimum age, are of utmost importance."



Martin Stroud of Unite (seated far left) who proposed the motion on integrated education.

INTEGRATED EDUCATION

Motion 29 carried

Conference welcomes the fact that Integrated Education has come a long way during the last 25 years. Now there are over 60 such schools educating about 18,000 pupils. All Integrated schools are both co-educational and all-ability and aim to bring up their children to live as adults in a pluralist society, recognising what they have in common as well as what separates them, and accepting of both. These schools are committed to achieving and maintaining a balanced enrolment of the two major traditions in their pupils, staff and governors.

Conference recognises the importance of the Integrated Education sector as a significant social development, given both the violence of the recent past and the continuing sharp political divide that has characterised our society.

While we should support the continuing parent-led campaigns for greater access to such integrated schools we also support the emphasis in the recent Bain report that all schools in Northern Ireland must be more 'integrating' in their approach. We expect that the Bain proposals on such integrating measures, including those on area planning, should be implemented by the Devolved Administration.

AMICUS Section of Unite

Breaking down segregation

MARTIN Stroud of Unite moving the motion said if Northern Ireland wanted to reduce sectarianism and racism then school children should have better access to integrated schools.

Patricia O'Neill of Unite who said that 90pc of the public lived in segregated housing supported him. "We need to breakdown this segregation which leads to sectarianism and racism – getting our children will help immeasurably."

LEADING FROM THE FRONT

ECONOMIC DEBATE
Union Organisation

Motion 14 carried

This conference recognising that the traditional methods of organising, which in past generations served the movement well, are becoming less effective. Conference also notes that substantial employers are becoming more anti trade union and are bringing into sharp focus an apparent disregard for workers rights. Treating workers like a mere resource to be dispensed with if and when they become too expensive or someone else is prepared to do the job cheaper. Conference further notes the ease with which employers can abrogate their limited responsibilities towards workers and recognising that Northern Ireland is one of the easiest places in Europe to sack workers, calls upon the Northern Ireland Committee to develop and promote proper co-operative structures to assist affiliates to better organise workers, particularly those employed in multi-national, non or, anti-union employments. Conference also calls upon affiliates to co-operate fully in any such programmes with a view to encouraging the development of greater trade union density within the private sector, which can only be for the benefit of all trade unionists.

T&G Section of Unite

UNITE'S Assistant General Secretary and Irish Regional Secretary Jimmy Kelly spoke on the urgency of getting union organisation at the top of the agenda when addressing the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions conference.

He told the 300 delegates in Portrush: "Great to be here leading our delegation of our new Union UNITE to our first NI Committee of ICTU.

"We are looking forward to making our new union more than just the sum of the two parts of AMICUS and the Transport and General Workers – making this an organisation fit for taking on any employer on behalf of our membership – maintaining an independent organisation founded and funded by working class women and men to fight for and defend them politically and industrially.

"But also I would give a genuine commitment and assurance that our new Union will be absolutely committed to making our movement stronger. Working with all other unions and delivering solidarity to other groups of workers in struggle.

"Commenting on union organisation goes to the very heart of what the movement has to come to terms with.

"Not because it might be a good idea but because we are a movement in serious membership density decline. As affiliate unions we have brought union organisation to thousands of workers. We have brought hope to tens of thousands. We have lit a beacon for union organisation for years.

"We must now declare very clearly that the years of trade union decline are over.

Declare confidently with organising strategies in place that we are moving forwards, not just struggling to hang on to what we have got.

"That we are not going to rely on lobbying government or putting phoney partnership in place to win justice at the workplace.

"That we are tackling low pay – and long hours – tackling employer bullying and abuses.

"At the sharp end in the workplace, building trade unionism – always the first and best line of defence for working people.

"Workplace organisation must be the foundation that we build our future on – otherwise we are built on sand.

"Building robust structures of workplace representation – shop stewards, a network of activists. Because unions are not ultimately made by their officers. They do not grow strong in offices, at conferences or on websites.

"A union is a force in the workplace or it is nothing."

"The union we are building is one that empowers workingmen and women themselves.

"A union founded on self-sustaining organisation, which begins to generate its own future growth.

"The good news is that for the first time in the last few years we have now begun to see sizeable net growth in our membership figures.

"More importantly hundreds of new shop stewards and activists coming into union activity, taking union organisation to traditional so called no go areas.

"So Comrades we cannot drift along recruiting individuals or groups in individual workplaces. Retaining the practice of offering an advice and representation service which very often achieves little more than minimum rights – does not approach the problems strategically – does not increase the workers influence in the sector and often depends on the goodwill of the employer.

"More important this strategy works – here in Northern Ireland in poultry it has brought 1,000 agency workers into the union in two years and is now moving 90% of them to the di-



Unite's Irish Regional Secretary Jimmy Kelly leading his delegation at Portrush.

rect workforce – a similar plan is now being developed for the red meat sector – also we are targeting the fish processing industry – the food industry being a major exploiter of workers, it will only be brought into line through campaigning and organising, winning on the issues that workers care about.

"We have forced major companies with an anti union reputation to both recognise the union and we would argue put in place the best facilities agreement for stewards – membership has doubled in the last two years with this particular employer.

"What this motion on union organisation is about is how we ALL need to address - how our movement here can support our work.

"And making our Congress a real organising engine for the

whole movement

"This motion sets out some of the things the NIC.ICTU needs to be doing

"My vision is of a Congress much closer to the daily work and concerns of the affiliates - Dedicated to supporting all of our work. Supporting us in disputes.

"And above all helping us reach out to the unorganised."

Brenda Irvine seconding the motion on behalf of Unite the union said: "All too often we have seen many companies approach the north with glee where they empty the taxpayers' pockets and... at the end of the day... we end up paying for the disappointment that entails when it all goes wrong.

"Let's get it right... many companies want to invest in NI...

because many here are promoting it as a low-wage economy... and too many are willing to have us... the taxpayers... subsidise these new companies without restrictions

"We have to put this right... We have to demand that any of these so-called subsidiaries or new start-up companies that receive one penny from the public purse should be automatically obliged to engage with the trade union movement.

"We must be allowed, having put up our stalls outside the building, to sell our wares.

"We must, at the end of the day, be allowed without hindrance, to have the right to promote the benefits of trade union membership as the best and only way to protect the rights of workers."

TRAINING FOR SUCCESS

Motion 30 carried

That Congress call for the ending of the monopoly in running the modern employer lead apprenticeship and allow F.E. Colleges to offer skills lead apprenticeships training in areas of high unemployment. Within the new Training for success programme 4 private companies were given a monopoly in delivering the level 3 strand apprenticeship training. The procurement procedures used by D.E.L. should be investigated in light of the revelations surrounding one of the successful bidders, Carter and Carter, who won the contract for Motor Vehicle training in N.Ireland. In England F. E. Colleges are allowed to operate apprentice training with the private sector and why should this not be the case in N.Ireland. The requirement that 16 to 24 year olds must have an employer before accessing an apprenticeship will lead to regional disparity and prevent the growth of skills in areas of social deprivation.

DERRY Trades Council

Apprenticeship training row

LIAM Gallagher of Derry Trades Council and a Unite member said in proposing the motion it was 'scandalous' that apprenticeship training could only be offered to those who were in employment.

"This requirement has to be broken, our young people who wish to take up apprenticeship training should be able to do so within the Further Education system. The idea that this type of training should be in the hands of the private sector is ludicrous."

Bid to scrap Agricultural Wages Board condemned

AGRICULTURE WAGES BOARD

Motion 28 carried

Conference commends the work of the NIC.ICTU and UNITE The Union in successfully arguing for the retention of the Northern Ireland Agricultural Wages Board. Conference recognises the important role the board has played and continues to play in developing a basic minimum wage which recognises the skills of agricultural workers. Conference believes that the role of the board should be strengthened by the development of a wages and conditions inspection process which does not necessitate the naming of individual agricultural workers who are being paid below the rate or not receiving the correct holidays.

Conference condemns the actions of the Ulster Farmers' Union in trying to have the NIAWB abolished and those politicians of all those political parties who support such abolition
FERMANAGH TC

Unite's organiser Jim Quinn attacks bid to scrap NI AWB



JOHN Martin of Fermanagh Trades Council condemned the Stormont Assembly and the Ulster Farmers Union bid to scrap the Agricultural Wages Board.

"You don't see any farm workers, earning less than £6 per hour driving 4x4s or Mercs."

Jim Quinn from Unite said the proposal to scrap the AWB was 'ill-conceived' and backed by vested interests.

TRADE UNION EDUCATION, TRAINING AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Motion 32 carried

This conference applauds the thousands of trade union members who have accessed learning through the support of the NI Union Learning Fund and calls on the Department for Employment and Learning to increase funding for the NI ULF in line with funds in Scotland, England and Wales. Conference acknowledges the positive role of DEL in the NI ULF and calls on the Department to confirm a funding commitment to enable trade unions to plan their learning activity in a strategic fashion.
NIC

SPEAKING on behalf of the NIC and moving motion 33, Unite's Eugene McGlone said: "With one noticeable exception, that is the Fair Employment Acts, every other piece of industrial or employment relations legislation that we have is in fact legislation that we hold in common with the rest of the United Kingdom.

In some instances the legislation is changed to take account of the fact that in previous times the government in Northern Ireland passed these acts and in latter times that the acts passed in GB became orders that were enacted for Northern Ireland. And as I said, specifically the only piece of legislation designed for Northern Ireland in the last 40 odd years was the Fair Employment Acts 1978. "In any real sense, none of the legislation with the exception of the aforementioned Fair Employment Acts took into account the specific needs and demands of Northern Ireland and in any real sense left us with the task of trying basically to top and tail legislation for a bigger industrial economy, i.e., Great Britain, than ours could cope with and it is of course Employment Legislation that is versed in adversarial contexts. It is the legislation which creates a 'them and us', which ultimately produced winners and losers.

"Since 1976 the mainstay of industrial relations dispute resolution has been the Employment Tribunal System. In the olden days of 30 years ago it was possible to go round to an Industrial Tribunal sitting with more than two cases and have them heard in a day. This could not happen now. The simplest case will take two days. That case may well be preceded by case management hearings and hearings for directions. Industrial Tribunals have become a win/win situation for lawyers and those other paralegals that ply their trade at the Industrial Tribunals. For them the longer a case goes on the better. They are getting paid for every minute that they are there and the Industrial Tribunal System has produced a cottage industry of its own, where the first argument of the day is not whether indeed an individual has been unfairly treated, unfairly dismissed or discriminated against, but whether or not we can agree on which particular piece of case law we should use as a precedent in any given case. The system of dispute resolution as envisaged in the Employment Tribunals has long since ceased to be effective or an

SECOND CHANCE WELCOMED

Laurence Houston of the CWU reported that the Northern Ireland Union Learning fund had secured for the next three years. However, he said the funding from the Department of Employment and Learning had remained the same.

The NIULF, he added, had provided a second chance for 1,500 people so far and had proved a

useful recruitment tool for the trade union movement.

Ritchie Browne from Unite said the learning fund had encouraged many with poor innumeracy and literacy skills to take part in the scheme.

"Workers," he added, "were more prone to take up the offer of this scheme offered by trade unions rather than expose the difficulties they were experiencing from similar schemes offered by their employers."

Resolving disputes needs new mechanism

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Motion 33 carried

Conference calls on Congress to campaign for a review of Industrial Relations procedures and the establishment of new models which will be a vehicle for expeditious and voluntary resolution of collective and individual disputes. Part of this review should include the role, effectiveness and cost of the Industrial Tribunal system. Conference further calls for new powers for the Labour Relations Agency to independently require parties to potential disputes for compulsory, non-binding conciliation.
NIC

effective way of dealing with what is after all nothing more than an industrial dispute. Discrimination cases, which happen to come before, Employment Tribunals, which might result in the individual being fortunately awarded £15,000, £20,000 or maybe even £30,000, lasts considerably longer than the biggest murder trial that we have. Why is it that something as simple as dispute resolution should be so costly and so ill rewarding of the individual?

"The system of dispute resolution has in recent years been tinkered with. However, there hasn't been any substantial examination of the purpose and the 'fit for purpose' use of the system. It is now far more difficult for an individual to actually lodge a case. It is virtually impossible for an individual worker to prosecute a case of their own and unless an individual has actually jumped through the hoops in relation to the formula for lodging a grievance and adhered to all the proper time limits they will not even be permitted to get across the start line. "None of this benefits workers and I would stab a guess that none of it benefits business. It also creates a circumstance whereby once these proceedings com-

mence there is an inevitable breakdown in the relationship between the employer and the employee, which would make it virtually impossible to carry on with a reasonable relationship at their place of work.

"It is the Northern Ireland Committee's view that it is quite possible and relatively simple for us to create a new system of Industrial Relations, generating new models which are fit for purpose, our purposes, which will be a vehicle for assisting in the expeditious resolution to disputes, whether they be collective or individual. A system that would in effect reduce the Industrial Tribunals to a court of last resort, as was the original intention. Rather than as it is currently, viewed as court of first resort. A system that would allow workers and their representatives, the

unions, to negotiate speedy resolutions to disputes that do not interfere or impact negatively upon the employer/employee relationship. A system that is designed to resolve the dispute - rather than dismiss the worker. The Northern Ireland Committee is also aware that in order to create this new dimension it is necessary to have the state agency, i.e., the Labour Relations Agency re-empowered or further empowered to allow it to be proactive and publicly seen to be proactive in requiring parties to potential disputes or actual disputes to attend for conciliation. In much the same way as the Labour Relations Commission in the Republic of Ireland call publicly for parties to come to them to seek resolution to disputes.

"The Northern Ireland Committee believes that the opportunity now exists particularly so given that our Executive have come out of their honeymoon period and are now getting down to the business of creating legislation for Northern Ireland that is designed for Northern Ireland to assist people of this area in every aspect of their lives. It is our view that this is something that we can and should undertake and we call upon Conference to endorse the motion accordingly.

Fighting for temporary agency workers rights

The following letter was sent to all MPs, MEPs and MLAs in Northern Ireland on behalf of Unite. The union is planning to meet with political representatives to outline its concerns and seek action on behalf of TAWs

UNITE the union is in the forefront of the campaign calling for equal treatment of agency workers in UK and Ireland.

British and Irish employment law currently fails to protect agency workers. To ensure the equal treatment of temporary and agency workers in Northern Ireland Unite is calling for domestic legislation which will enshrine the equality of esteem for all, as promised by the Good Friday and Saint Andrew's Agreements.

At Westminster the Temporary and Agency Workers (Pre-

vention of Less Favourable Treatment) bill, promoted by Andrew Miller MP, would outlaw discrimination against agency workers. It is backed by Unite, the GMB, Unison, UCATT and the CWU as well as the TUC and Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU.

Andrew Miller's Early Day Motion reads as follows: "That this House notes there are 1.4 million agency workers in the UK and that many new jobs are considered temporary and are often filled by agency staff; recognises that such staff are often used to cope with fluctuations in demand and form a le-

gitimate part of the labour market but considers that they are subjected to inferior pay and conditions and blatant exploitation; further recognises that agency workers are sometimes employed to undercut permanent workforces, creating divisive conditions and resentment; and calls on the Government to take appropriate action to establish the principle of equal pay and conditions for agency workers compared with their permanent counterparts."

MPs voted by a majority of 136 on 22nd February 2008 to back the bill which now moves to the committee stage when MPs will examine the bill in detail.

Unite would like to congratulate the five NI MPs who supported Andrew Miller's EDM – Jeffrey Donaldson, Gregory Campbell, Mark Durkan, Eddie McGrady and Sammy Wilson. We now invite the remaining NI MPs to offer their support

for the bill to ensure it moves to the report stage and a third reading to ensure that it becomes law and enacted in Northern Ireland.

If the proposed bill fails to get the necessary support in Westminster then Unite the union asks that MLAs adopt the spirit of the bill and introduce it at Stormont.

The evidence of the need for legislation now is overwhelming and Unite will not accept the jam of tomorrow.

Unite is happy to arrange a meeting with all political party representatives to discuss this very important issue.

Unite will also call on the Equality and Human Rights Commissions in NI to immediately launch an investigation to see if the Stormont Executive is in breach of the Good Friday and Saint Andrew's Agreements if it does not implement Andrew Miller's proposed bill.

**'We WON
our case...
We WERE
organised'**

MIGRANT WORKERS RIGHTS UNIT

Motion 4 carried

Conference welcome the NIC ICTU's positive response to the recommendations contained in the research report 'Migrant Workers and their Families in Northern Ireland - A Trade Union Response.'

Conference particularly congratulates ICTU on the establishment of a Migrant Workers Rights Unit.'

Conference also welcomes the activities of affiliates who have put resources into supporting migrant workers and their families. However more needs to be done. A key finding of the ICTU research report identified that trade unions here have both the duty and capacity to organise and represent migrant workers.

Conference calls on NIC ICTU to work with affiliates to develop strategies for recruiting, organising and servicing migrant workers who are amongst the most vulnerable and exploited workers here. Experience from the Migrant Workers Employment Rights Advice Clinics, currently being established across N.I. by the ICTU Support Worker, indicates that in many instances the first encounter migrant workers have with trade unions is when they experience problems in their employment. This initial contact presents opportunities for recruitment and can provide access for unions to unorganised workplaces.

*Conference therefore calls on NIC ICTU to encourage affiliates to invest resources to support the Migrant Workers Employment Rights Advice Clinics and the representation service they provide.
Belfast & District Council of Trade Unions*

MOYPARK employee Roy Settiwan, of Unite and chair of its National Poultry Combine who hails from East Timor, recalled his experiences when he came to NI six and a half years ago as an Atlantco agency worker employed at the company.

Speaking to Motion Four this is his story: "To say myself and my colleague were badly treated would be an understatement. Atlantco paid us a lower basic rate than the local workers for exact same work. They paid us no overtime premium. They gave us less holidays. They charged us exorbitant prices for housing, transport and anything else

they could take off the miserable wage they were paying us. Their world was law and as migrant workers we had to put up with it as our families needed the money.

"Eventually some of started to complain and contact a community scheme called the South Tyrone Empowerment Project for help. Through their office we began to make contact with the trade unions in the Moypark factories we were working in at Dungannon and Portadown.

"From the start a few dedicated shop stewards highlighted our situation and done their best to help us. However, they were climbing a major hill of prejudices in the company and amongst their own members. To their credit they did

not give up.

"Eventually Atlantco's behaviour was so bad that it was highlighted on national TV. The company was forced to replace them with local agencies who were not much better and latterly with the nationally known agency Addecco.

"Although by then I had become a direct worker for Moypark, nothing had changed for may agency worker friends except the name of the exploiter.

"Then three years ago the local Unite branches linked into our union's national organising department and started the drive to improve our organisation in the poultry industry in Ireland and the UK. Part of that drive was to organise the agency workers in the industry and introduce minimum standards



Roy Settiwan of Unite addressing conference during the migrant workers debate

for them.

"Colleagues I cannot emphasize enough to you that we did not recruit them. We organised them by identifying and dealing with the issues that they wanted sorted not the issues that we

thought they wanted sorted. We put information out to them in their languages, we put organisers into the factories that spoke their languages, we encouraged them to be union leaders in the factories, and we encouraged them

to become shop stewards in the factories.

"We organised 1,000 migrant workers in 18 months. We demanded fair play for them and the integration of agency workers into the direct workforce.

"At the same time we worked with the local workforce to highlight the exploitation of the agency workers and the threat it posed to their jobs and their terms and conditions if they remained unorganised. Little by little they came on board. Working together local and migrant workers with the help of shop stewards and the organising department put the pressure on the poultry companies who represented 85% of the industry.

"And you know what brothers and sister – we won. Not by depending on the law. Not by recruiting but by organising the local and migrant workers together to fight for a better deal in their industry.

"In a short time the majority of agency workers will be assimilated into the direct workforce. For those remaining in agencies we will be putting a minimum standards agreement in place. Never again will this kind of exploitation be allowed to happen in the British or Irish poultry industry. This was a major victory for workers and a major victory for the trade union movement. We showed that fighting back works.

"Our next major targets are the red meat industry and the mushroom processing industry. I hope by the next time this conference meets in two years that we will have them cleaned up and properly organised as well.

"In conclusion brothers and sisters, migrant workers don't just need advice or tea and sympathy. Just like Irish and British workers, what we need to be is organised!"

One inspector is not enough to check on agencies

TARYN Trainor from Unite said she welcomed the Department of Employment and Learning's new agency inspector who has begun inspecting the hundreds of employment agencies in NI.

"However, I am concerned about the effectiveness of only one inspector to regulate more than 300 agencies, which can be established by anyone, whose primary aim is profit.

"Currently these agency workers are the most vulnerable and exploited section of workers in NI. Many who are migrant workers speak little or no English. Most of these migrant workers are under 35 years of age, working for the minimum wage or less and expected to work up to 80 hours per week on mushroom farms. They are employed mainly in the food processing, hospitality and construction industries in low skilled jobs.

"The Department according to its website, can enter and inspect employment agencies records ensure compliance with regulation. Inspections are carried out routinely or upon receipt of a complaint. Serious or repeated breaches of the legislation will be prosecuted and in some cases the department may seek to prohibit an agency from operating – sounds wonderful!

"I would like to see the figures of where and when these regulations have been applied and agencies have been prosecuted accordingly. How effected has this new inspector been in tackling



Unite's Taryn Trainor speaking to Motion Five

disreputable agencies. Because let's face it 'the only place you won't get a fiddle in a brass band!'

"I also welcome the new regulations which Reg Empey spoke of earlier to increase protection for vulnerable agency workers in NI, but I would like to see them strengthened if they are to be effective in addressing the exploitation of agency workers.

"At present only the agency worker can make a complain. How will they pursue such a claim if they don't know the procedure, they can't speak Eng-

lish, lack of confidence, or they are afraid of their employer?

"We need the Northern Ireland Committee to campaign to ensure that trade unions can make a complaint on behalf of members and groups of workers. This will encourage the exploited to complain and ensure the department take the appropriate and effective action.

"Therefore the incoming NIC has to be mindful for the need to constantly monitor the activities of the inspector and such agencies with a view to highlighting any breaches of the existing minimal standards asset out in legislation and to campaign vigorously for improvement to agencies and employment practices."

Roy Settiwan for Unite said that while he too welcomed the creation of an inspector for employment agencies, he had little faith in the effectiveness of one person to address the exploitation of these workers.

"Previous speakers have already highlighted the outrageous conditions that agency workers have to endure, such as when a minimum wage increase occurs the employer adds the rise on to the workers house rent, charging for flight, heating oils, protective clothing etc.

"Well conference if we are serious about helping these exploited workers we need NIC to prioritise this campaign and pursue stronger legislation with more effective inspectors and protection for workers who pursue a complaint."

Returning to the platform for a quick comment Settiwan received a huge round of applause when he said: "By the way, I do not like being labelled a migrant worker ... **I am just a worker... working alongside you.**"

AGENCY LABOUR/ MIGRANT WORKERS

Motion 5 carried

Conference notes the Department of Employment and Learning's establishment of an inspector for employment agencies, who has begun the work of inspecting the hundreds of employment agencies that abound in Northern Ireland, in welcoming this development conference looks forward to reports he will produce.

Conference instructs the incoming Northern Ireland Committee to be mindful for the need to constantly monitor the activities of the inspector and such agencies with a view to highlighting any breaches of the existing minimal standards as set out in legislation and to campaign vigorously for improvements in the standards of employment practices of such agencies.

Conference mindful that the migrant workers coming into Northern Ireland are the group of workers most open to exploitation from these agencies, and while commending the work of the Northern Ireland Committee in assisting migrant workers since its last conference; calls upon the incoming NIC to continue to reach out to migrant workers to assist them to organise in appropriate trade unions.

T&G Section of Unite

United through the camera lens



Unite's Jimmy Kelly with PUP MLA Dawn Purvis and Unite member Jim Donaghy



Unite's Brenda Irvine and Roberta Doble at the Portrush conference.



Checking out the agenda is Unite's officer Davy Edmonds (second left) with his team from the GPM.



Unite's Eugene McGlone with Patricia McKeown and Peter Bunting of NIC.ICTU welcome Minister Reg Empey.



Pictured above are Unite's Eugene McGlone and NIC.ICTU deputy chair (UTU's) Avril Hall-Callaghan.



Unite's Gerry Keenan



Pictured left is ICTU General Secretary David Begg.



Chair of NIC.ICTU Eugene McGlone and Assistant General Secretary Peter Bunting welcome Minister Martin McGuinness.



Unite delegation members (from l-r) Beverley Heaney, Jean Dunlop, June Dunlop and Patricia O'Neill



Unite's Craig Potts during the pensions debate.



Former Unite Irish Regional Secretary Mick O'Reilly at conference