

THE

PUBLISHED IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS

# UNION POST



ETUC DAY OF ACTION

SEPTEMBER 2010

▶ FIGHT CUTS ▶ SAVE JOBS ▶ PROTECT SERVICES

# PEOPLE POWER

▶ PROTESTS NORTH, SOUTH **AND** ACROSS EUROPE

**WEDNESDAY**  
**SEPTEMBER**

**29**

## DUBLIN

Meet 12.30pm outside Anglo Irish Bank, Stephen's Green.  
March to rally outside Dail @ 1pm

## BELFAST

Assemble outside City Hall @ 12.30pm **RALLY**  
1pm - 2pm

## L'DERRY

Assemble outside Guildhall @ 12.30pm **RALLY**  
1pm - 2pm

▶ GENERAL STRIKE IN SPAIN. DEMOS IN POLAND, PORTUGAL, ITALY, LATVIA, UK, LITHUANIA, BELGIUM, CZECH REPUBLIC, CYPRUS, SERBIA, ROMANIA & FRANCE



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# CAPT COWEN IS STEERING US TO DISASTER...



THE government's economic policy is steering Ireland towards disaster, Congress general secretary David Begg has claimed.

He insisted the current cuts strategy of aggressively reducing the budget deficit to below three per cent of GDP by 2014 was already causing "a downward spiral of further contraction and deflation".

Mr Begg, who made his comments during a speech to FETAC graduates at the National College of Ireland on September 24, posed the question, "What is so critical about that figure and that timescale?"

He likened the government's decision making to two crucial errors made on the bridge of the Titanic.

Mr Begg said: "The first error was that there were two steering systems on the ship, the operation of which required diametrically opposed operations.

"At the moment of crisis the ship's officers

selected the wrong system and steered the ship straight into the icebergs. The second error was to keep steaming ahead even though the infrastructure of the ship was badly damaged."

He explained: "For over a year now Congress has argued that the consequence of following this course [the current economic policy] will be to prevent growth from re-establishing itself."

Warning that Ireland was facing a "lost decade ... just like Japan in the 1990s", he added: "The data published by the CSO yesterday reveal that the economy is still contracting.

"If, in these circumstances, we take another €3 billion – or perhaps more – out of the economy in December's budget, we will kill the possibility of growth reigniting.

"Like the officers of the Titanic, by steaming on, we will compound our first error with a second.

"We must slow down and change course before we do irreparable damage to the economy and society."

# CBI BLUEPRINT RUBBISHED



CONGRESS has slammed the CBI's self-styled "radical blueprint" on reforming public services in Northern Ireland as ill thought through and based on sloppy research.

Assistant general secretary Peter Bunting, above right, claimed the proposals even did the CBI's own local membership "no favours".

He said: "One in three private sector businesses in Northern Ireland depend upon contracts from the public sector.

"Every year, the state which the CBI feels obliged to slash and shrink buys services and goods from the Northern Ireland private sector worth £3 billion."

The CBI report – Time For Action: Delivering Public Services in a Time of Austerity – calls for sweeping reforms to Government departments, in particular health, housing, education and policing and

justice. It calls for an immediate pay-freeze and a revision of pension arrangements.

The authors also want the slashing of the amount spent on legal aid, increased domestic rates and the introduction of water charges.

CBI Northern Ireland chairman Terence Brannigan claimed local businesses had already "taken the hit" by streamlining, downsizing, freezing and cutting wages as well as dealing with pensions.

He said: "We now need to see similar action from the public service if Northern Ireland PLC is to achieve a level playing field that will address the chasm that exists between the public and private sectors."

But Mr Bunting countered these CBI arguments in a live discussion with Mr Brannigan on the BBC's Newsline programme following the publication of the report.

In an earlier statement he said: "Most of the assertions made in this shoddy report have been made for years, and seem as stale as they are wrong.

"For instance, the old canard about public sector wages being 'higher' than those in the private sector is repeated without thought or realization that the real pay gap for Northern Ireland's private sector workers is with their equivalents in Great Britain.

"The private sector pays too little here, that is the problem, and one they want replicated in the public sector as well.

"If they got their way, and public sector wages were slashed, what would happen to the local shops and hair-dressers and builders if millions of consumer spending is removed from the economy?"



# JOBS **NOT** CUTS!

**SINCE Government TDs broke for holidays on July 8, the numbers out of work in the Republic have soared to more than 455,000 – the highest since the Live Register began in 1967.**

At the same time, the Government has already spent (or committed) €25 billion to the banking black hole.

***The economic strategy of this Government just isn't working.***

We have already seen three deflationary budgets and a fourth is looming.

Taking another €3 billion out of the economy will lead to further job losses.

Pay and welfare cuts were imposed in last year's budget and the numbers out of work have climbed steadily since.

But Government still has no plan for jobs, or growth: no strategy to get people back to

work or keep them working. Almost every other EU state has a 'job protection' scheme in place and in some countries – such as Germany – unemployment has started to fall.

The final bill for the banking bailout will rise – the bill for Anglo-Irish alone could rise to €35 billion or more.

Even conservative voices such as the Financial Times and Barclays Bank say our banking plan is lunacy because it places the entire burden on the taxpayer.

September 29 marks the European Trade Union Confederation Day of Action against Austerity Measures and in support of jobs and growth, as unions across Europe protest at the imposition of cuts in response to the crisis.

***Remember on the day to join with your brothers and sisters from Belfast to Belgrade in opposing the cuts agenda.***

## CUTS CAMPAIGN

# UNION BODIES AGREE JOINT APPROACH

REPRESENTATIVES of the Scottish, Welsh and Irish trade union congresses met with TUC officials to discuss a united response to public sector cuts.

It was agreed that the leaders of the devolved administrations be called upon to underline to central government the dire consequences cutbacks will have on Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as the English regions.

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber warned the Tory Lib-Dem strategy would only serve to "derail our fragile economic recovery", while

Scottish TUC chief Grahame Smith called for an alternative economic policy based on growth, investment in jobs and fair taxation.

Welsh TUC general secretary also warned of the danger of a double dip recession caused by "callous" UK government cuts.

Claiming the government had no mandate for what it was intending to do, Congress assistant general secretary Peter Bunting said: "For the people of Northern Ireland – as in Wales, Scotland and the English regions – these cuts are unjustified, unnecessary and undemocratic."

"The trade union movement across the UK is speaking with one voice in saying that these unnecessary cuts can and must be resisted.

"We urge all sectors of our society, from large businesses to small local community groups, to unite in opposition and to support realistic and fairer alternatives to this misguided strategy.

"It is crucial that the politicians who we have voted for, especially in the devolved regions, speak out and join with civil society in support of a better and fairer way." ► **TUC congress: p18/19**

## UCATT calls on UK govt to rethink hike in retirement

CONSTRUCTION union UCATT has claimed an increase in the retirement age will put manual workers at a serious disadvantage.

The warning comes after new figures from the UK's Office for National Statistics revealed that manual workers were more than twice as likely as professional workers to die before they reach 65.

Statistics show manual workers died before the age of 65 at a rate of 407 per 100,000.

For professional and managerial workers the rate is 178 per 100,000. The UK government plans to increase the retirement age to 66 by 2016 with a later rise to 70.

UCATT general secretary Alan Ritchie said: "The ONS figures prove what manual workers already know, that the decision to raise the retirement age discriminates against them.

"If the government had a shred of decency they would rethink their proposals and allow manual workers to retire earlier, in order to be able to enjoy their hard earned retirement."

## Poor 'silenced in the slump'

THE voice of the poor and marginalised has been largely silenced in the current recession, it has been claimed.

European Anti Poverty Network Ireland chairperson Philip O'Connor warned the infrastructure of services and bodies that support people in poverty was "fragile and overburdened".

Speaking at a recent book launch, he said: "The over 14% of Irish people living in poverty and those who are increasingly drifting into long-term unemployment have few advocates and little power."

Mr O'Connor also pointed out that what help that did exist had been "seriously diminished" by "disproportionate cuts to vital community supports".



THE Communications Workers' Union is launching a new website on October 4 to mark the start of its national campaign in defence of the postal service.

The union claims this vital public service is being put at risk as the market is liberalised and opened to full competition.

[www.protectyourpost.ie](http://www.protectyourpost.ie) will explain what liberalisation will mean for Ireland and will highlight the damaging consequences this approach has already had on jobs and quality of service in other countries.

Critically, the website will feature an advocacy tool that will allow visitors to quickly send a message of protest to their local TDs, senators and MEPs by simply clicking on their constituency.

A CWU spokesperson said: "The site is designed to make it as easy as possible for citizens to raise their voice and highlight their concerns on issues that would otherwise not get the attention it deserves – despite its importance."

The union is also preparing an 'Easy Guide To Liberalisation' booklet that will set out what is meant

by liberalisation.

The booklet will contain postcards that can be sent to elected representatives.

The European Parliament has already passed the Third Postal Directive.

It now only remains for the Irish Government to ensure its implementation to allow for the market to be fully liberalised by January 1, 2011.

The CWU spokesperson said: "The passage of the Third Directive into Irish law represents the final chance for anyone who has an interest in protecting the Irish postal service to influence the legislation that will dictate the kind of market and service we will have in Ireland for generations to come.

"This is, in effect, the last throw of the dice on postal liberalisation in Ireland and we can leave nothing to chance."

According to the CWU, the main issues surrounding the legislation are:

● How will the Universal Service Obligation (USO) be financed after the monopoly that An Post uses to finance it has been taken away?

● How will Downstream Access (which allows competitors to use the An Post network) be managed?

● How will the legislation deal with cherry-picking (where competitors only compete for profitable postal routes and leave the loss making routes to An Post)?

● How can the market be protected from social dumping (where competitors drive down employment standards in the market and force the national operator to do likewise) which has happened in other liberalised EU postal markets already?

The CWU spokesperson added: "It is vital that this campaign focuses on bringing our message to the political representatives in your local area and impress upon them the vital public service that is provided by An Post as well as the fact that there are potentially a huge number of jobs at stake if these changes are not carefully considered.

"It is essential that everyone plays their part for this last important battle to ensure the long-term viability of the Irish postal service for this and future generations."

# Reform pledges sidelined

ITUC general secretary Sharan Burrow has claimed pledges made by the G20 group of nations to reform the global economy in the face of a worldwide recession have not been followed through.

Speaking on September 7 as millions of workers in France and India took part in national days of action, Ms Burrow said: "Working people are still paying a heavy

price for the world economic crisis, as the banking and finance sector returns to business as usual.

"Governments pledged major reforms to the global economy at the G20 in 2008 and 2009, but have failed to follow through.

"The jobs crisis, especially for young people, is getting worse, economic stimulus has been with-

drawn too early in several major economies, and vital public services as well as development aid are being cut back in the name of fiscal consolidation.

"Today's actions in France and India reflect the deep anger felt by people around the world, and will be followed by strikes and demonstrations in many other countries."



**NO TO AUSTERITY – PRIORITY FOR JOBS & GROWTH**

# JOIN THE PROTESTS

*Trade unions across Europe are taking to the streets – **Unite** with us to defend jobs and show **your** opposition to the cuts*



## EUROPE-WIDE DAY OF ACTION

### Wednesday, Sept 29 at 1pm

**Rallies outside the Dail, Belfast City Hall & Guildhall, Derry**

**WHO SAYS THERE'S *NO* ALTERNATIVE? THERE *IS* A BETTER, FAIRER WAY**

# Redundant J&G workers get payout

AROUND 60 workers made redundant in January have been awarded 90 days back pay by an industrial tribunal.

East Belfast-based electrical contractors J&G Engineering had debts of approximately £2.3m when it went into liquidation just after Christmas.

An industrial tribunal held the firm broke employment law by failing to consult with its workforce.

The company was told to pay employees the full 90-day period of consultation, which should be carried out when employers dismiss 20 or more workers.

The case was brought by UNITE after employees were made redundant without warning.

The tribunal backed the union's claim that J&G Engineering had breached its duty to consult the workers and had taken "no steps at all to provide any consultation".

It found "no evidence of any special circumstances in existence to mitigate the failure".

The judgment covers all the sacked workers, including non-union members.

UNITE representative Jackie Pollock said: "This goes to show what unions can do on behalf of their members when they pursue these types of cases.

"The tribunal agreed that J&G Engineering had failed to consult with its workers.

"The Department of Employment & Learning will now pay up to eight weeks pay to the former workers at J&G."



WORKERS in Los Angeles took to streets last month to demand US government action over jobs after the unemployment rate edged up to 9.6%. AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka, left, said: "It's time for our leaders to fight to create jobs, reject unfair trade deals and put us on a path to make things in America again." Picture: AFL-CIO

# Media 'hype' over bonds issue lashed

CONGRESS president Jack O'Connor has predicted the media hype around the bond auction will be used to justify another savage round of budget cuts.

Describing such coverage as "totally unnecessary" and "exactly as we expected", he claimed market speculators knew "they were on to a sure thing" with Irish government bonds.

Mr O'Connor pointed out that – despite fears stoked up from some quarters – the successful auction was 2.9 times over-subscribed "exactly to the same degree as the June auction of bonds".

He said: "They successfully extracted the last cent in terms of interest premium in the confident knowledge that our economy is well capable of honouring the debt."

Mr O'Connor now fears "the purveyors of the hair-shirt" will be "armed with justification" for "the most savage budget in modern times".

But he insisted this was "exactly the last thing we need. Indeed it is even bad for the speculators on the money markets.

"What we need is government vision and courage to develop a coherent plan for recovery through sustainable investment in the economy."

# Tribute to Ross – a workers' champion

SIPTU general secretary Joe O'Flynn has paid tribute to the memory and lifetime commitment to trade unionism and the Labour movement of Ross Connolly, who died last month, aged 83.

Speaking at the funeral Mass in Greystones, Co Wicklow, on August 31, Mr O'Flynn told mourners: "Ross had the proud legacy of being James Connolly's grandson but as long as I knew him, he never once traded on that famous connection.

"Instead, Ross worked and organised to achieve the aims that his grandfather lived and died for – a socialist republic that cherished all of its citizens equally and with fairness and justice."

Describing Mr Connolly as a "man of great wisdom" who people listened to, Mr O'Flynn added: "He was a champion of workers and their families using his many talents as a trade unionist and labour activist to improve conditions at work and in the greater society.

"Ross had a great intellect and he was a fine scribe. But most of all he was a man with a big heart and a deep and caring compassion."

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# Jobs and not cuts must be priority

CONGRESS economic advisor Paul Sweeney has blasted the Irish government for getting its priorities wrong by concentrating on budget cuts rather than on saving and creating jobs.

He made his comments on September 21 after new figures revealed a doubling in the number of long-term unemployed in the Republic.

Describing it as a "very serious and disturbing trend", Mr Sweeney said: "It shows quite clearly that government has got its priorities completely wrong.

"Jobs – not cuts – must be the priority if we are to have any hope of recovery."

The figures were contained in the Central Statistics Quarterly National Household Survey, which showed a virtual doubling in the numbers out of work for more than a year.

The long-term unemployment rate now stands at 5.9% – up from 2.6% last year.

Mr Sweeney added: "That figure represents an awful lot of hardship for an awful lot of people and is just one more sign that government needs to change course.

"Instead of banks and cutbacks, they need to be focusing on people and jobs."

## UNITE warns of jobs crisis

UNITE has urged the government to address the jobs crisis that is threatening to engulf the state.

Speaking on September 1 as new figures revealed another jump in the number of those without a job, regional secretary Jimmy Kelly said: "Today we have seen unemployment rise to 13.8 per cent, retail sales fall month on month and year on year again, and we now have as many as one in 20 mortgages in arrears of more than 90 days.

"These are real problems, caused by unemployment and affecting every family and every street in Ireland.

"And yet the Cabinet engrosses itself in further deliberation on swingeing cuts in public expenditure to fund further bank bailouts.

"Any hope that a summer of reflection on the part of ministers might have awakened a sense of responsibility and prompted real action appears to have been forlorn.

"The government needs to act swiftly and decisively to bring the haemorrhaging bank crisis under control and then concentrate on the real world imperative of maintaining and creating employment through imaginative infrastructure projects that will stand to us for generations."



Reaction: Sheila Nunan, INTO, Pat King, ASTI, and TUI's Peter MacMenamin

# Unions: OECD report gives top marks to our teachers ... but govt gets the cane!

IRISH teaching unions have welcomed a new OECD report which flagged up the "economic and social benefits of education" but also pinpointed "damning" evidence about the level of investment by successive Irish governments in the sector.

ASTI general secretary Pat King said the report once again confirmed the importance education plays in "keeping individuals in the labour force" as well as "upgrading their employability" and "meeting the demand for skilled labour".

However, he noted that out of 31 countries surveyed, the Republic's level of investment of just 4.7% of GDP exceeded only Italy and the Czech and Slovak Republics.

Mr King said: "The average level of OECD investment is 5.7% of GDP.

"Given that these figures relate to 2007 – before the crisis – they are an even bigger indictment of the failure of successive governments to build the educational infrastructure necessary for the knowledge economy."

The Teachers' Union of Ireland also claimed the report highlighted the continuing failure by Irish governments to invest meaningfully in education during the boom years.

General secretary Peter MacMenamin said: "The OECD findings are extremely damning. Ireland languishes in the relegation zone of a table of countries based on the proportion of national wealth spent on education."

Meanwhile, Mr King pointed out that Ireland's teachers provided good "value for money" with only six countries out of 31 having a lower teacher salary

cost per student as a percentage of GDP per capita – a point echoed by the TUI chief. Mr MacMenamin said: "The report also endorses the work of Irish teachers, who teach 735 hours per annum compared with European average of 661 hours."

According to INTO general secretary Sheila Nunan, the OECD survey also showed how Irish primary school teachers were "among the most productive in the EU".

She said: "Irish primary teachers do 152 hours more teaching per year than the EU average.

"Irish primary teachers teach on average 20% more pupils than their EU counterparts and Irish pupils get more lesson time in primary school than in any EU country – nearly twice as much as in Finland and Germany."

Mr King insisted that it was vital the "undisputed relationship" between "educational attainment" and "participation in the labour market" be recognised by the government.

He added: "It is therefore more vital than ever to protect education in the next budget. Schools must not be forced to drop programmes which prevent early school leaving, a sure route to unemployment and long-term welfare dependency."

Ms Nunan also claimed the report showed opposition to education cuts was entirely justified.

She added: "Irish primary education is significantly underfunded and under-resourced.

"Teachers and parents are rightly outraged when they see less than adequate funding for the education of young children being cut in order to rescue failed economic policies."

## INTO: Govt is failing newcomer children

THE IRISH government is failing newcomer children, the INTO has warned.

It claimed cutbacks in the number of English language teachers took no account of the needs of this group of pupils.

The union said it had many examples of schools where the number of pupils without English was increasing while the number of teachers was being cut.

General secretary Sheila

Nunan said: "Two years teaching is only enough for children to develop surface understanding of a language and conversational competence.

"To get to a standard where newcomer children can learn subjects like science and geography through English takes a further five to seven years."

She pointed out that because class sizes in Irish primary schools are the second highest in Europe, newcomer children

did not get enough opportunity to socially interact with native speakers. Slamming the lack of teacher training in the area, she added: "Other countries are training their teachers for these jobs. We are putting them on the dole.

"Current government policy has nothing to do with meeting children's English language needs. It is a crude mechanism to cut jobs from primary schools and nothing else."

Pictures: INTO/TUI/ASTI

# Pensions ruling at EU court is setback for workers

CONGRESS has described a recent European Court of Justice ruling on pension service contracts as another setback for workers.

The judgment, concerning a case brought by the EU Commission against Germany, means that above a certain threshold, public sector social partners cannot, on their own accord, award service contracts for their occupational pensions.

The Commission had argued local authorities awarding such contracts on the basis of the selection criteria agreed under the collective agreements violated EU public procurement directives.

Despite substantial legislative underpinning for the practice, the ECJ found that Germany had infringed the directive and ruled that a call for tender must be advertised at EU level.

Congress legal and social affairs officer Esther Lynch said: "It is never certain how far-reaching these judgments will be, but it is difficult to escape the impression that staff in the Commission's DG internal market are actively pursuing procurement cases before the European Court to undermine collective agreements.



Esther Lynch

"They see collective bargaining as limiting competition but they forget that competition law was supposed to benefit consumers, citizens, workers and their families – not make their situation worse.

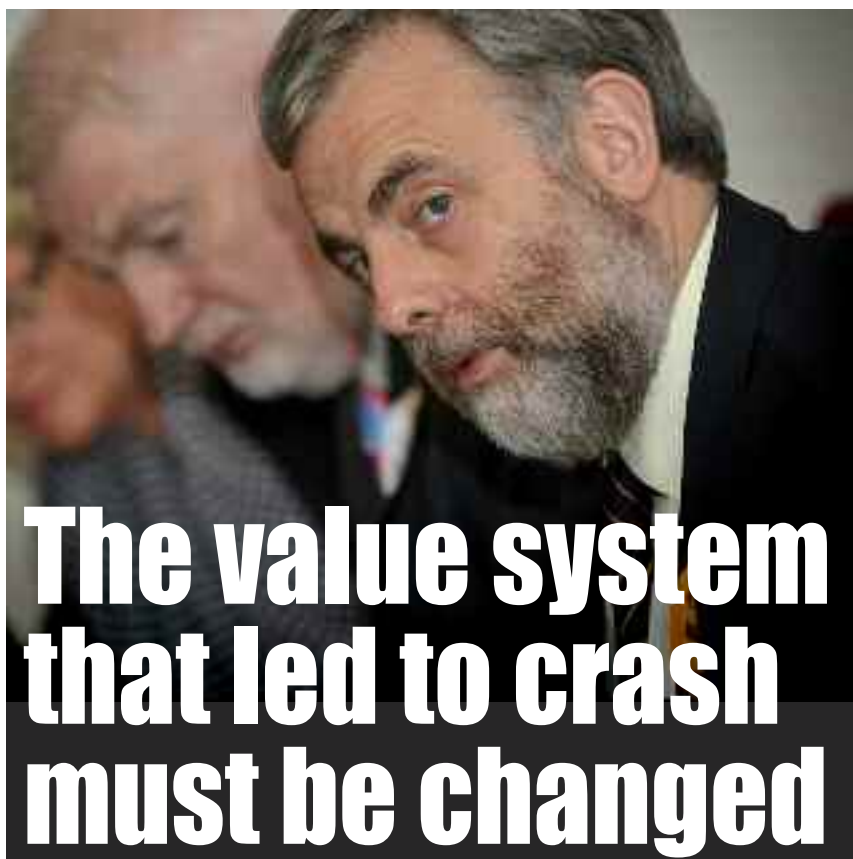
"Restricting the unions' and employers' possibility to select the pension provider could create uncertainty for the employees.

"In the end it is their money, so it is difficult to see why the ECJ ruled that public procurement law should apply."

This case is the latest in a series of negative judgments for workers and underlines the need for a social progress clause in EU treaties as has been demanded by the ETUC.

Congress has also argued that it is now time to amend EU public procurement rules so that they recognise collective bargaining as well as fair and ethical business practices and move the emphasis away from competition on price.

A spokesperson added: "Otherwise we will have a rat race to the bottom."



## The value system that led to crash must be changed

CONGRESS president Jack O'Connor, above, has called for the scrapping of the discredited value system that led to the economic crash.

He made his comments in a debate on entrepreneurship in the public sector at the Richard Cantillon School in Tralee, Co Kerry, on September 9.

Mr O'Connor, who is also general president of SIPTU, insisted that speculation and entrepreneurship should not be confused and contrasted the "beggars on horseback" who had brought the country to its knees with true innovators.

Flagging up the need for change, he said it was now essential to mobilise the "collectively owned resources of society" – the semi-state enterprises – to rescue the economy after the collapse of private investment.

This could best be achieved by setting up a state holding company that could free up capital for innovation and investment.

Mr O'Connor said: "When you boil it all down, our self-styled entrepreneurial culture incentivised speculation while starving innovation."

He added that it was unclear if the necessary lessons had been learned from the crash.

"I think we need, as a society, to come to terms with weaknesses more profound than inadequate regulation or greedy bankers and short-sighted politicians.

"We have to address the value system that promoted and facilitated this malign strategy that has crippled Irish society.

"It was a value system that resulted in the election of governments that prized speculation and starved innovation over three successive general elections and that gloried in private affluence while ignoring public squalor.

"It is a value system that venerated those who displayed the contempt for their fellow citizens, particularly those who worked for them – and our democratic institutions for that matter – a value system that seemed to have a penchant for elevating the most obnoxious elements in society, confusing avarice with acumen and excess with entrepreneurship."

Warning that "the day of reckoning must come" for those who had created the crisis and had since been insulated from its effects, Mr O'Connor added: "Those with real wealth, who didn't lose it all on the equity markets, have to be asked to make a contribution."

He continued: "The key to recovery is the development of a credible plan which has the potential to mobilise the entire resources of the nation, which offers not just a coherent vision of the future but the prospect of establishing a truly sustainable economy and a fairer and more just society.

"I am confident that there is a way out of the current debacle and that entrepreneurship in both the private and public sector is critical to it.

"But to achieve that we must address the fundamental deficiencies in our value system that has repeatedly confused beggars on horseback with entrepreneurs."

Picture: Congress



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## Mandate hits out at IBEC's minimum wage call

MANDATE has dubbed IBEC's call to "tackle" the minimum wage "irresponsible and counterproductive".

In responding to the employers' group call for the minimum wage to be brought into line with the EU average, general secretary John Douglas said: "IBEC is fully aware that comparing the Irish national minimum wage with that of other European countries is like comparing apples with oranges.

"We have very different economic and social systems in Ireland. Our VAT rate is higher, our cost of living is higher and our income tax is lower."

Citing a recent National Competitiveness Council report that flagged up the high cost of utilities in Ireland, Mr Douglas added: "IBEC would be better served focusing their attentions on bringing these charges into line with other European countries rather than going after the easy targets – low paid workers."

Mr Douglas also lashed IBEC's cherry-picking of EU data.

He said: "We don't hear them calling for the corporate tax rate to be brought back into line with other European countries.

"Or for income taxes to be increased to supplement lower paid workers as they do in some European countries.

"Rather they are calling for the lowest paid sector in the economy to take further hits following increased hospital charges and the withdrawal of dental and optical benefits among other public sector cutbacks.

"At the same time, the implementation of the income levy has already reduced the real value of the minimum wage to €8.48 per hour from €8.65 and I would hasten to point out that it hasn't been increased since July 2007 – over three years ago."

## HSE's admission on mental health

NURSES working in mental health are coming under "extreme pressure" at work with a resulting impact on patient services, SIPTU has claimed.

It follows an admission by the HSE at a conference in Dublin on September 16 that no new funding had been provided for mental health services in 2008 or 2010.

SIPTU national nursing official Louise O'Reilly said the disclosure was made against the backdrop of a recent rise in suicide rates.

She added: "Nurses working in the mental health services are coming under extreme pressure and the HSE mantra of 'do more with less' is going to impact on patients.

"It is no surprise that the dramatic fall in spending comes at a time when suicide rates are escalating."

# CBI tighten strike law call lashed

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber has dubbed a CBI call for the tightening of UK labour laws a "demolition job" on workers' rights and "a charter for exploitation".

His comments follow the recent publication of a CBI report 'Making Britain the Place to Work'.

The report's authors urged the Con-Lib Dem government to tighten further the already stringent rules over balloting for industrial action as well as slash the consultation period for collective redundancies from 90 to just 30 days.

Justifying the call, CBI deputy director-general John Cridland said: "Strikes cause misery... Strikes also cost the economy dearly and undermine our efforts to help rebuild the economy.

"That is why we believe the bar needs to be raised, so strike action is not possible unless 40 per cent of the workforce has actively voted to withdraw its labour."

TUC chief Brendan Barber pointed that the UK already had some of the toughest legal restrictions on the right to strike in the advanced world.

He said: "The courts regularly strike down democratic ballots that clearly show majority support for action. The number of days lost to industrial action is historically low and less than in many other countries.

"Any further restrictions would be extremely unfair and almost certainly breach the UK's international human rights obligations.

"While we expect the CBI to lobby against rights at work, please spare us the hypocrisy of pretending that a cut in the period for consultation over redundancy is for the benefit of employees."

## GMB security site to monitor attacks

THE GMB has launched a new website as part of its SafeGuard campaign in a bid to reduce the number of attacks on security staff at work.

Security guards can access the site at [www.gmb-security.org.uk](http://www.gmb-security.org.uk) and log details of violent incidents in the workplace.

According to the union, in the past two years 1,500 security staff working at just 35 companies in the UK suffered injury as a result of being attacked while on duty.

That is just a snapshot of the overall problem – there are more than 600 firms in the sector.

GMB is also asking all UK security firms to sign the GMB SafeGuard Charter committing them to act to tackle the attacks on 350,000 licensed security staff in the course of their work.

## Cam's Big Society 'smoke & mirrors'

UNITE has slammed David Cameron's 'Big Society' initiative as a throwback to a 1950s Britain that never existed.

The union – which has 60,000 members in the not-for-profit sector in the UK – claimed it was "smoke and mirrors" for "an avalanche of privatisation under the Tories".

National officer Rachael Maskell added: "Volunteering is not a replacement for jobs. Charities still need professional skills and good managers.

"And if we want the sector to add quality then well-trained professionals need to do this."



## When Jorge met Jim...

COLOMBIAN trade union leader Jorge Gamboa gives a clenched fist salute next to a picture of legendary Irish trade union chief Jim Larkin.

The picture was taken during his visit to Ireland in May. At the time, Jorge – who has survived an assassination attempt – said: "I know that I risk my life by being

an active trade unionist, but there is no alternative if we want to change life to the better in Colombia.

"I want my two sons to live in a future Colombia which is built on peace and justice." Jim Larkin would certainly have approved of those sentiments...

*Picture: Congress*

# UNISON and PCS forge a united front on cuts

UNISON and PCS have vowed to forge a powerful nationwide alliance to fight the UK coalition government's cuts to jobs and services.

It mirrors an already close working relationship the PCS has with NIPSA in Northern Ireland where both unions work together to oppose cuts and attacks on civil service terms and conditions of service.

Dave Prentis, general secretary of UNISON, insisted this was no "paper policy" but an "alliance with teeth".

He said: "Working together we can build an effective fighting machine to combat the cuts and protect vital jobs and services.

"And, when the circumstances are right, we will take action together.

"Across the country UNISON will work with the PCS to promote an alternative economic vision to the Con Dems' monosyllabic cuts agenda.

"We want to build a fairer future for all, not

just a haven for the super-rich." PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka added: "The millionaires in David Cameron's cabinet insist that we are 'all in this together'.

"But low-paid public sector workers and other vulnerable members of our society do not share this view when they can see the government's plans seek to punish them for the mistakes of bankers and financial speculators.

"Our alliance with UNISON is a crucial first step towards building the kind of united opposition that will be needed to oppose the government's spending cuts.

The unions, representing 1.7 million workers across the UK, are setting up a national liaison group to promote joint activity and co-ordinate a national campaign together.

The group will work with the TUC and co-ordinate public sector alliances across central and local government.

## Health workers feel they make difference

MORE than three quarters of health and social care workers in Northern Ireland – 86% – feel their role makes a real difference to patients.

The snapshot survey of 17,500 staff carried out last November and December also showed that two thirds of respondents – 68% – said they had worked more than their contracted hours in the preceding 12 months.

In the research, conducted by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, members of staff were asked about their working lives. The survey found:

- 77% said that they had an interesting job,
- 80% said that they were satisfied with the quality of care they delivered to patients, and
- 68% said that they had worked more than their contracted hours, with 83% of those claiming the reason they did so was to provide the best care they could for patients.

Welcoming the findings, Stormont Health Minister Michael McGimpsey said: "This survey demonstrates the high level of commitment and dedication of staff working in our health and social care organisations."

Worryingly, the survey also showed that 15% had experienced physical violence at work in 2009. A further 22% said they had experienced harassment, bullying or abuse from patients and service users during the same period.

## INMO backing for new safety drive

THE Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation has welcomed the 'Patient Safety First' initiative launched by Irish Health Minister Mary Harney on September 23.

The drive is aimed at improving the safety and quality of healthcare services.

General secretary Liam Doran formally signed up for the initiative on behalf of the union along with other stakeholders.

He said: "The organisation, having indicated its support today by signing up for the initiative, looks forward to working with all of the other stakeholders in ensuring every aspect of this initiative has a constant presence in every action taken when delivering health care to patients/clients."



## Strikers get €100k payout

DOCKERS who were strike for more than seven months at Marine Terminals earlier this year have been awarded over €100,000 by the Social Welfare Tribunal.

The decision was welcomed by the Marine Port and General Workers section of SIPTU who dubbed it a major victory for the strikers.

They were on the picket line from July 2, 2009, until February 19 this year.

During the dispute the

workers would have been entitled to €200 a week strike pay.

The average award per person is €6,000, and is made under Section 68 (1) and/or Section 147 (2) of the Social Welfare (Consolidation Act) 2005.

SIPTU organiser Oliver McDonagh described the people involved in the dispute as "young family men and women with mortgages and other regular payments to

meet". He said: "They were put through financial hell during their eight months on the picket line.

"During the strike they were informed that they were not entitled to any social welfare payments."

"So the union decided to make an appeal to the Social Welfare Tribunal on the grounds the company did not properly utilise the dispute resolution machinery of the State."

Picture: Paula Geraghty

# TDs warned over Work Time Directive

EMPLOYMENT standards set out in the EU Working Time Directive are being undermined in many Irish workplaces, it has been claimed.

Congress legal and social affairs officer Esther Lynch made the comment at a recent meeting of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on European Affairs.

She told TDs the key goal of the directive was to protect employees from risks posed by "long and irregular working hours".

Ms Lynch said that now that the Charter of Fundamental Rights was legally binding, unions should be "given the tools" to negotiate better working times and schedules.

She also warned that some employers were responding to the recession by pressurising employees to work harder and longer for their wages.

"This is particularly the case where salaries are based on commission.

"Instead of the employer resetting sales targets to more realistic and achievable levels, workers are being pressurised to work longer hours, many of which are not recorded as they are considered to be employees 'who control their own hours'."

Ms Lynch underlined that this practice of working "excessive and unpaid" hours was not limited to the private sector.

She said: "The economic crisis is giving a particular edge to the debate on working time, with unemployment on the increase the logical thing to do is to promote solutions which keep as many workers as possible in employment, rather than putting pressure on some workers to work longer hours."

The committee was also told of Congress' concern over the increasing casualisation of employment involving "excessively flexible, unpredictable and precarious working time arrangements, where employees do not know from one week to the next what hours they will be working".

Ms Lynch said: "Employers not only demand excessive flexibility from their workforce they also treat unsocial working hours as if it was nine to five.

"They want to pay the same flat rate no matter what day or what time the person is working at.

"All of which can lead to increased stress and illnesses, directly related to lack of control over one's work and life because the worker is trying to earn a living wage. These must be addressed in any review of the Working Time legislation."

She told TDs Congress was seeking legislation placing a duty on employers to:

- Provide reasonable notice of changes in working arrangements,

- Take seriously employee requests to alter working time,

- Restrict circumstances in which employers can refuse such requests to specified limited objective reasons, and

- Oblige employers to provide information on the availability of part-time and full-time positions in the workplace to help facilitate transfers from full-time to part-time work, or vice versa.

Citing in particular the Jaeger and Stringer/Schultz-Hoff decisions, Ms Lynch highlighted unions' concern that EU rules and European Court of Justice rulings were being ignored where the outcome was favorable to workers.

She added: "It is worth pointing out here that with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the Charter of Fundamental Rights has become legally binding.

"Article 31 of the Charter provides that 'every worker has the right to working conditions that respect his or her health, safety and dignity' and 'that every worker has the right to limitation of maximum working hours, to daily and weekly rest and to an annual period of paid leave'."

She pointed out that the 'individual opt out' was clearly incompatible with Article 31 and warned that the health and safety of workers "cannot be subordinated to purely economic or financial considerations".

# PCS: £90bn unpaid tax bombshell

THE Public and Commercial Services union has claimed Revenue bosses have underestimated how much tax is being left uncollected in the UK.

HM Revenue and Customs announced on September 17 that £42 billion in tax was uncollected in 2009/10 – but, according to PCS, this figure is wide of the mark – by a staggering £90 billion. General

secretary Mark Serwotka, right, said: “We have long argued the total amount of uncollected tax is in fact closer to £130 billion – £28 billion of which is made up of taxes which are known to be owed.

“Starting to collect these massive sums lost to our economy every year would be a major contribution to the alternative to the govern-

ment’s devastating plans to cut public spending.”

He added that it was clear “insufficient resources” were being funnelled towards collecting the tax.

In fact, Mr Serwotka, flagged up how in the five years since HMRC was formed, 30,000 jobs had gone – most of them directly responsible for tax collection.



Picture: PCS



Number-cruncher: Paul Sweeney

## True jobless rate ‘could be nearer 20 per cent’

IRELAND’S “true unemployment” rate could be close to 20%, Congress economic advisor Paul Sweeney has claimed.

Responding to the release of new Central Statistics Office figures on the number of jobless last month, he said they “significantly underestimate the ‘true’ level of unemployment and thus the scale of the social and economic devastation in communities across the country.”

Mr Sweeney continued: “When you add in the tens of thousands who have been forced to emigrate, the tens of thousands who have stayed in or returned to education for the same reason and the many thousands who want full-time work but can only get part-time or casual jobs, you get a more accurate picture of the scale of the problem and its huge social impact.

“Taking those numbers into account, the true unemployment figure could be close to 20%.”

He pointed out that the CSO itself had calculated this rate – comprised of the unemployed and “discouraged workers” – as having risen to 17%.

Mr Sweeney added: “Congress believes the figure is actually higher. We need a major reordering of government priorities with people placed firmly before banks and private profit.

“Their deflationary policies are taking money out of the economy and destroying jobs.”

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT

*Maqdas Ghulam Mustafa and her family receive emergency food from Trócaire in a school in Kotri, southern Pakistan.*

Trócaire would like to thank you for your generosity in supporting our emergency appeal for families affected by flooding in Pakistan.

With your help we have provided food, water and emergency supplies to over 15,000 people and will help a further 60,000 people in the weeks ahead.

We will continue to help families to rebuild their lives in Pakistan after the floodwaters subside. Through our partners we will provide secure housing, replace lost seeds and tools, drain farmland and replenish livestock.

For more information on how your donation has made a difference please log on to [www.trocaire.org](http://www.trocaire.org)

We look forward to your continued support in the future.

## 60% drop in work deaths welcomed

CONGRESS has welcomed new figures that show a fall in the number of workplace deaths in Northern Ireland.

Reacting to figures contained in the Health & Safety Executive for Northern Ireland's annual report, assistant general secretary Peter Bunting said: "The 60% reduction in workplace deaths is a significant improvement, and shows the real human value of agencies, employers and trade unions co-operating for safer work environments.

"However, we should pause and remember that six workers were killed while doing their duty to their families – by putting bread on the table.

"Each fatality is more than a statistic. They are missed by their friends and families and they deserve to be remembered and vindicated."

Mr Bunting also noted the willingness of the courts "to aggressively pursue employers who, through negligence or meanness, contribute to the killing or wounding of a worker" and paid tribute to the HSENI for their role in creating safer workplaces.

## Work safety top concern in US

A NEW study has shown 85% of US workers rank workplace safety as their top concern on the shopfloor.

However, researchers working on behalf of the University of Chicago also found that the general public and media often overlook the terrible personal consequences for victims and their families.

Tom W Smith, director of the polling firm NORC that carried out the study, said: "Workplace safety is too often ignored or accidents taken for granted.

"It is striking media coverage and public opinion polls virtually ignored the 11 workers killed by the blowout and destruction of BP's Deepwater Horizon drilling platform in April."

## 20,000 die early because of work

MORE THAN 20,000 people a year in the UK are killed prematurely by their work, a new TUC report has claimed.

Analysis contained in The Case For Health And Safety, published in early September, found that the equivalent of the entire population of the Orkney Islands die early due to conditions such as occupational cancers, lung disorders, exposure to fumes and chemicals and fatal traffic accidents.

Researchers also revealed that 1.2 million working people in the UK believe they are suffering from a work-related illness.

These illnesses include heart disease, stress, musculoskeletal disorders such as back, shoulder and neck pain, and mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.

[www.tuc.org.uk/extras/the\\_case\\_for\\_health\\_and\\_safety.pdf](http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/the_case_for_health_and_safety.pdf)

# THINKING



Horror: Congress president Jack O'Connor recalls his recent visit to the mass grave in La Macarena

## Mass grave is testimony to rights abuses in Colombia

CONGRESS president Jack O'Connor gave delegates an emotional report of his recent visit to Colombia.

He had travelled there during the summer as part of an international delegation that included several trade union leaders and MEPs.

Newly-elected Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos met with the delegation and informed them the overall situation regarding human and trade union rights was much improved in recent years.

However, this view was completely contradicted at many subsequent meetings the delegation had with local union leaders and human rights lawyers and activists.

Mr O'Connor insisted the truth was that situation on the ground was worse than before and pointed out that more trade unionists had been killed so far this year than last year.

At the same time, the Colombian government had been extremely active lobbying to spread a positive view abroad to ensure the approval of the Free Trade Agreements with both EU and US.

Mr O'Connor told delegates he had asked to meet with Minister for Foreign Affairs Micheal Martin to relate his own firsthand account of what was really happening in Colombia.

He recalled how he had visited as part of the delegation the mass grave in La Macarena – a municipality 280km south of Bogota.

The grave contained more than 2,000 corpses allegedly taken there by the army and "identified" as combat casualties.

The shocking truth is that these were the remains of completely innocent victims killed by soldiers and right-wing vigilantes.

According to reports, they were then dressed in guerrilla

uniforms and photographed so as to look as if they had been killed in combat. Jack O'Connor met with several parents who for many months had been looking for their missing sons and daughters only to finally know the horrible truth after the discovery of the mass grave.

Liam Craig Best, of Justice For Colombia, spoke about his group's campaign against the Free Trade Agreement between EU and Colombia.

He emphasised Congress' lobby work on this issue and said Ireland is the first country where all the MEPs had signed their names in support of the trade unions' position against the agreement.

Mr Best also spoke in favour of a campaign to free political prisoners, who were active trade unionists, in Colombia and asked Congress to "adopt" some political prisoners and start a campaign for their release.

# GLOBALLY

INTERNATIONAL trade union solidarity and climate change topped the agenda at Congress's Global Solidarity Forum held last month in Dublin. Trade unionists from across Ireland gathered at the ASTI head office on August 27 and 28 to hear contributions from a number of overseas speakers. In her opening remarks, Congress assistant general secretary Sally Ann Kinahan underlined how hard the economic crisis had impacted on the global south, where millions of people have been forced into extreme poverty after losing their jobs. She underlined how important international solidarity work was and told delegates she was heartened to see so many trade unionists at the gathering.



ITUC's Georgios Altintzis at the Forum

## Sweden's CCC drive

THE Forum held a session on the Clean Clothes Campaign.

Participants were shown a film – 'Race To The Bottom' – about the extreme exploitation of garment workers in Bangladesh.

Milan Begocevic, right, spoke on behalf of the Clean Clothes Campaign in Sweden.

Mr Begocevic, a shop steward in the IF Metall union, gave a comprehensive presentation of the CCC work carried out in Sweden.

In particular, he stressed the value of forging a broad alliance between unions, NGOs and youth organisations.

He said that both the retail workers' union Handels and the metal workers' union IF Metall had gained much understanding of the issue and further strengthened their solidarity work due to their involvement in the Clean Clothes Campaign.

Mr Begocevic said: "The CCC in Sweden is dedicated to improving working conditions and supporting the empowerment of workers in the garment and sportswear industry in the global south.

"Local groups of CCC are focused on educating and mobilising consumers in Sweden.

"When consumers demand that their clothes and sportswear is produced under decent work conditions, things can start to change."

He added that CCC-Sweden, and especially the trade union member organisations, is lobbying Swedish firms such as IKEA and H&M, asking



them to respect workers' rights. Mr Begocevic also spoke about his own visit to garment workers in Cambodia. He said that he knew before that they were poor and exploited, but what he witnessed was much worse than he had expected.

He claimed the experience gave him a great deal of motivation to continue his work in the Clean Clothes Campaign.

Following Mr Begocevic's presentation, the preparatory group of the Irish CCC network made a series of short statements – Kate Nolan, on behalf of the ethical fashion group Re-Dress; Alison Leahy, on behalf of the development NGO Comhlambh; Brian Forbes, on behalf of MANDATE; and Stellan Hermansson on behalf of ICTU Global Solidarity.

A short message was read from Trocaire, the fifth member organisation in the Irish CCC network, whose representative could not be present. The preparatory group is planning to launch the Irish Clean Clothes Campaign on October 7 – the World Day for Decent Work.

## Climate change is vital issue for unions

FORUM participants listened to feedback from the ITUC's Second World Congress held in Vancouver in June.

Owen Tudor from the TUC delivered the report which was followed by a lively discussion that centred on how the international trade union movement could best communicate with its grassroots.

Georgios Altintzis, of the ITUC, spoke about the absolute necessity for trade unionists to involve themselves in climate change activism.

He highlighted ITUC World Congress' resolution on this issue and the importance of a just transition to green jobs and energy.

Mr Altintzis also welcomed the fact that the letter of Congress Global Solidarity Committee had been approved by the Executive Council on the setting up of an ICTU working group on these issues.

Colin Roche, representing the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition, spoke about campaign and lobbying work undertaken by his group in Ireland.

He noted that the coalition had 30 member organisations – but not a single trade union member.

Mr Roche underlined how important it was for union to get involved in the issue.

Moirá Leydon concluded the Forum pointing out that Congress' Global Solidarity work had developed in recent years, with its focus on both development education and concrete international trade union solidarity work.

## Call for concrete action

THE first day of the Forum concluded with a session on Palestine and Congress' campaign for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions – or BDS – against Israel.

Mags O'Brien, of SIPTU, gave some background on the subject detailing a report from the ICTU delegation that visited Palestine/Israel in November 2007 and the motions supporting BDS at Congress' Biennial Delegates Conferences in 2007 and 2009.

Assistant general secretary Sally Anne Kinahan presented the plans so far for Congress' BDS campaign. Owen Tudor, who

heads up the TUC's International Department, spoke about the TUC's work on boycotting products produced in the illegal settlements. This position was adopted as policy by the TUC at congress last year.

Several participants underlined the importance of Congress' BDS campaign and in particular how it had to move on "from decision to concrete action".

Freda Hughes, who chairs the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign, and Hilary Minch of SADAKA, both gave their full backing to the BDS campaign.



Budget call: John Douglas

## Don't hit low paid in budget

MANDATE has called on the Irish government to ensure those on low incomes are protected in December's Budget.

It came after the union claimed the latest economic data published on September 10 backed up its view that low income earners are being put under the most pressure by the recession.

General secretary John Douglas said: "Earnings figures from the Central Statistics Office show that the weekly earnings of the lowest paid workers in the economy – clerical, sales and service staff – fell by 5.9% in the year to the first quarter of 2010.

"Average weekly earnings for such staff are now less than €470 per week and work out at around €24,000 per year.

"Ironically, while the incomes of the lowest paid workers are falling lower than others within the economy, the pressure they are experiencing from rising prices is the greatest.

"As a result, lower-paid workers are being caught the hardest in the pincer movement of declining incomes and increasing costs.

"This is why Mandate is calling on the government to ensure that those on low incomes suffer no further declines through welfare cuts or increased taxation in December's Budget."



## Amnesty International REPORT

### Ramze Shihab Ahmed

Ramze Shihab Ahmed, a 68-year-old, London-based UK national, has been detained in Iraq without charge or trial since December 2009.

Amnesty International is asking people to write to UK Foreign Secretary William Hague, urging him to pressure the Iraqi government to either release Ramze Shihab Ahmed, or charge him with a recognised criminal offence and give him a fair trial.

Ramze alleges that he has been repeatedly tortured – including being suffocated with a plastic bag, suspended by his ankles and given electric shocks to sensitive parts of his body – while held at Iraq's Muthanna prison between December 2009 and April 2010. He was forced to sign a confession incriminating him in involvement in terrorist acts.

He had returned to Iraq on November 9, 2009, hoping to secure the release of his son 'Omar from detention. 'Omar had been arrested at the beginning of September 2009 in Mosul, in northern Iraq, along with about 380 other people.

Ramze was arrested by Iraqi security officials on December 7, 2009. None of his family knew where he was being held until March 25, 2010, when he managed to call his wife from prison. He told her he was being held in a secret prison in the old al-Muthanna airport in Baghdad and that she should alert the British authorities straight away.

His case is sadly not unique. A recent Amnesty International report describes how an estimated 30,000 detainees are currently held without trial in Iraq, often in secret prisons and sometimes for several years without even being charged. Many have also suffered severe beatings to obtain forced confessions.

Take action for Ramze Shihab Ahmed at [www.amnesty.org.uk/ramze](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/ramze)

## NI decade of gloom

A RECENT study has predicted a decade of "gloom" ahead in the North as a result of public sector cuts.

The authors of the report – commissioned by NICVA – claimed Northern Ireland will be particularly hard hit because 31% of the workforce are public servants as against a UK average of 25%.

The sector is facing swingeing cuts of £1.2bn over the next five years.

Stormont Finance Minister Sammy Wilson has already outlined £367m cuts throughout this year; but unions and workers are braced for the axe to fall in the autumn under the Comprehensive Spending Review.

## FEEDBACK

YOUR VIEWS MATTER. EMAIL: [braziermedia@btinternet.com](mailto:braziermedia@btinternet.com)

## Long hours make us ill

WORKERS in the UK are suffering physical pain as well as stress from working long hours, not taking lunch breaks and going to work when they are sick, new research has revealed.

A survey commissioned by physios' union CSP found that a quarter of employees regularly work all day without a break – and more than half said they often went to work when stressed or physically unwell.

Almost half of the workforce (46%) had physical pains caused by working in the same position for long hours, while 41% of employees said they were too busy with work to exercise regularly.



# Trade Union TV

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to discuss your media needs





Brendan McGinty



Sally Ann Kinahan

# IBEC claims on union recognition rubbish

CONGRESS has rejected as "extraordinary nonsense" IBEC's claim that greater levels of union recognition could threaten jobs.

It follows a recent warning by IBEC director Brendan McGinty that introducing mandatory union recognition would deter multinationals from locating in Ireland.

He told an employment law conference in Dublin earlier this year such a move would be "a barrier to job creation".

Mr McGinty said: "Mandatory trade union recognition or a legal right to collective bargaining would not create a single job in this economy and would instead threaten many thousands of jobs by damaging our capacity to attract and retain inward investment."

But hitting back, Congress assistant general secretary Sally Anne Kinahan claimed IBEC was engaged in "reprehensible scaremongering".

She said: "If you are trying to build an economy based on low wages, low pay and low standards then of course you see the right to union recognition as a threat."

"If IBEC's scaremongering had any substance, then the economies of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden would be in crisis and they would have record levels of unemployment, given their unionisation rates of between 70 and 80 per cent."

"Instead, they sit consistently in the top 10 of the world's most competitive, dynamic economies."

"There is a serious flaw in Irish labour legislation, which allows people to join trade unions but not to be represented by them or have them negotiate collectively on your behalf. That situation does not exist anywhere else in Europe."

Ms Kinahan also described IBEC's view of the Lisbon Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights as "somewhat muddled" on the question of union recognition.

She said: "It is our advice – both legal and from EU sources – that the Charter assumed the status of primary law, upon passage of the Lisbon Treaty and EU primary law effectively trumps Irish constitutional law."

"Therefore, there is no legal impediment to legislating for collective bargaining, it is now a matter of political will."

"I think IBEC would be better served addressing the high levels of illegality and the consistent breaches of labour law, in low pay areas of the economy such as catering, cleaning and retail."

"Repeat inspections by the National Employment Rights Authority have found remarkably high levels of illegality among employers, in terms of their failure to observe basic labour law."

# NOT having equal pay is such a drag!



THE Australian Services Union have been hitting the streets to futher their equal pay campaign supported by the Australian Council of Trade Unions.

On average Australian women are paid 18 per cent less than men and have to work 66 more days a year in order to bridge the income gap.

The ASU and other unions, staged an

Equal Pay Day on June 10 under the slogan 'Pay Up! No More Lip Service To Equal Pay', using a 'lipstick kiss' motif as a logo. Thousands of women workers – and their families and supporters – took part in demos across Australia, with some, like the above protestor, entering fully into the spirit of the day.

Picture: ASU



## DCAL cuts 'info poverty'

CONGRESS has warned of the dangers of "information poverty" after a Stormont official revealed plans for swingeing cuts at Northern Ireland's Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

Assistant general secretary Peter Bunting, left, claimed reported cuts in department spending of 17.2% over four years would be wrong "strategically, economically and politically".

Speaking on September 6, he added: "Cuts in libraries will remove a lifeline to knowledge from the most marginalised in our society."

"We already have fuel poverty, work poverty and cash poverty – are we about to accept information poverty as well?"

## CAMPAIGN

# Unions join community sector to battle cuts

IRELAND'S community sector and trade unions have forged a new partnership to fight anticipated cuts of €3 billion in the next budget.

Defending Ireland's Communities aim is to highlight the growing threat posed by the cuts to the community and voluntary sector.

There are currently more than 6,000 community bodies in Ireland employing almost 55,000 people.

The sector provides support to some of the most vulnerable people within Irish society.

Services include social inclusion, childcare, eldercare, youth work, drug rehabilitation, disability, literacy, education and training.

Uniquely, community organisations also attract hundreds of volunteers who give thousands of hours back to their communities.

The campaign will be launched with a rally in Eyre Square, Galway, on Wednesday, September 29 at 1pm.

SIPTU community sector lead organiser Darragh O'Connor claimed the sector is bracing itself for "disproportionate cuts" in the 2011 and 2012 budgets.

He said: "The victims of these cuts will be among the most vulnerable sections of our society – the disabled, the elderly, and those suffering from social disadvantage."

"The job of supporting families in financial difficulty, of providing child care and other health services, of youth education and training, of disability services is not something that should be seen as dispensable in times of economic recession."

"Simply put, this sector cannot absorb further cuts and will be severely undermined during an economic crisis when it is most needed."

THE Communication Workers' Union Band has issued an appeal for new members with musical abilities – and beginners can join too.

Band members would particularly welcome brass, woodwind or percussion players.

Rehearsals are staged every Sunday morning at the CWU's premises on the North Circular Road in Dublin. For further details email [cwuband@gmail.com](mailto:cwuband@gmail.com)

THE right to request flexible working in Northern Ireland has been extended to cover working parents of children aged 16 or under.

Up to the change, which came into effect in July, only parents of children under six, disabled children under 18 and carers of adult dependants could have made a formal request for flexible working if they had been an employee with six months continuous service.

# JUST LOOK AT IRELAND, TUC

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber has held Ireland up as a grim warning of what will happen to the UK if the coalition government pursues its cut-to-the-quick policies.

He urged delegates at the organisation's 142nd congress in Manchester to "look across the Irish Sea" to see "what can go wrong".

"They have made huge cuts, and yet the economic slowdown has been so great that their credit rating has been downgraded time and time again."

Deriding claims from ministers about "progressive cuts" and "we're all in this together", he called for this "insulting claptrap" to be exposed "for what it is".

Mr Barber told conference: "Let's be clear about this – cuts always hit the poorest, most vulner-

## TUC CONGRESS 2010

able, most disadvantaged people. That's why the IFS described the Budget as 'clearly regressive'.

"And that's why an OECD study of Sweden's and Canada's cuts in the 90s found that inequality and poverty rates accelerated faster there than anywhere else in the developed world."

He warned that David Cameron had made it clear that the cuts were not temporary but "a permanent roll-back of public services and the welfare state".

"I fear the best we can hope for in the years ahead is an economy that scrapes along the bottom."

"One that fails to generate growth and jobs. One that betrays a generation of young people."

"One that hinders our transition to a low-carbon future."

Mr Barber predicted Tory-Lib Dem cuts would have devastating consequences that "could take generations to rebuild", adding, "decent public services are the glue that holds a civilised society together, and we diminish them at our peril."

Concluding, he told the 700 delegates packed into Manchester's Central Convention Complex that now was the time to build a "diverse, dynamic and progressive alliance for change" which he dubbed "a coalition against cuts".

He said it was essential to win the battle for hearts and minds and to "together shape a more hopeful future for all".



Mary Turner, GMB

## Bullish display from Mary

BANK of England governor Mervyn King heard the bluntest of responses from the conference floor about who was to blame for the crisis.

During a question and answer session following his 20-minute speech, GMB president Mary Turner told him: "Mervyn, if you want to know what went wrong I can tell you – the bankers are greedy bullshitters."

Earlier he sympathised with delegates and said he understood the strong public feeling against massive bankers' bonuses and admitted that "radical reform" of the financial system was needed.

Mr King told conference they were "entitled to be angry" and admitted the finance sector and policymakers were to blame for landing the UK with the largest peacetime budget deficit in history, adding, "In fact, I am surprised it [public anger] has not been expressed more deeply."

## Burst into the boardrooms



Europe view: John Monks

ETUC chief John Monks has called on unions to "burst into the boardroom" to curb shareholder short-termism in order to grow businesses and protect jobs.

He asked delegates if it was possible to change the way firms were run.

"Can we have a more long-term, socially-responsible system, with companies responsible to all their stakeholders – workers, the community, the environment – as well as to shareholders or other owners?"

Mr Monks pointed out that the UK had "much to learn" from other EU countries on worker involvement in company decision making.

He said: "We have to burst into the boardroom to make sure that managers concentrate on growing the business, not growing the share

price and their own bonuses.

"That's what the bankers did, with disastrous consequences for us all!"

Turning to a return to neoliberal solutions by EU governments "after a decent Keynesian start", Mr Monks said: "They panicked when they saw Greece floundering on the economic rocks."

"They felt they could be the next in trouble on the world's bond markets. Even the strongest like Germany and the Netherlands started austerity programmes."

"And, as you all know, the UK coalition government panicked and followed the stampeding herd."

However, he insisted unions across Europe could not accept this approach.

"Cutting in a recession is crazy and we must fight it."

# WHAT HAPPENED IN DELEGATES WARNED



Warning: Brendan Barber urged delegates to look at the Irish experience



Lions' den: Mervyn King spoke to TUC

## Shameless if you don't impose tax

SHAMELESS star David Treffall gave his backing to a Robin Hood tax on bank transactions at a fringe meeting at the TUC congress in Manchester.

## Path of folly

GOVERNMENTS are once again "bowing to the demands" of the bond markets and financial elites who caused the crisis, ITUC general secretary Sharan Burrow, right, has warned.

She told TUC delegates: "Instead of the decisive action to support the recovery that initially characterised the global response, I see a growing complacency on the part of world leaders. That complacency seems particularly prevalent in Europe."

Ms Burrow slammed the UK coalition government for "leading the charge" to slash public spending, describing the policy as "without concern" for vulnerable workers and their families.

She said: "It is heartless, and it is economic folly, to drive down demand and risk double-dip recession."

"The cumulative impact of austerity at home and austerity abroad is going to be devastating."





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