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**CONGRESS
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REPORTS &
PICTURES
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TROIKA WARNING



CONGRESS general secretary David Begg has warned Taoiseach Enda Kenny that the EU/ECB/IMF Troika is using Ireland as a "social laboratory" to test out its economic policies.

He made his comments in front of 800 delegates, observers and guests gathered for Congress' three-day Biennial Delegate Conference last month.

Mr Begg was responding directly to the Taoiseach who had just delivered his speech to delegates at the INEC conference centre in Killarney on July 4.

He pinpointed the fact that "all the talk of reform" ignored the actions of the banks that had sparked the crisis in the first place.

"It occurs to a lot of people that reform is for the little people – it is not for the powerful." **SEE REPORT PAGES 6/7**

REFORM AGENDA TARGETING 'LITTLE PEOPLE' **NOT** THE BANKS, BEGG TELLS KENNY

BRUTON JLC/ERO PLAN LASHED PAGE 3 BEEB JOURNOS ON STRIKE PAGE 4

Begg: Taking €4bn out of economy will only compound our misery



CONGRESS general secretary David Begg has warned that taking €4bn out of the economy in the next budget will compound the deflationary impact of the austerity measures of the last three years.

He made his comments at the McGill Summer School in Glenties, Co Donegal, on July 26.

Mr Begg again reiterated that "austerity is not working" and warned that the "well-telegraphed" public spending cuts on the scale envisaged by the government were self-defeating.

He said: "This will compound the deflationary impact of the €20.6bn that has been cut in three budgets since 2008.

"It is difficult to see how this will not seriously debilitate public services because this is cutting into muscle.

"To compound the problem, demographic change means that the demand on public services will expand rather than contract over the next few years."

Mr Begg warned that "a lost generation" would be the price paid for sticking to such a policy.

"It would be hard to say that it is a price worth paying in any circumstances but, as it happens, austerity is not working.

"In the second quarter of this year, GNP was down 4.3% on the previous quarter.

"There is no growth in the economy and without growth to do some of the heavy lifting of adjustment, it is not possible to generate the level of primary surplus necessary to allow for debt repayment."

While Mr Begg welcomed the outcome of the recent EU summit which, though beneficial for the Republic, he claimed it remained an incomplete solution to the debt crisis.

The proposals had, he pointed out, been prompted by the looming crisis in Italy rather than the situation in Ireland.

He said: "So let's not fool ourselves that the decision of the European Council was about us. It was about Italy and the possibility that it might be next.

"With €1.9 trillion of sovereign debt – three times as much as Ireland, Greece, and Portugal combined – it is of a different order of magnitude."

Mr Begg argued that a common eurobond should be introduced in order to Europeanise the debt problem and that deeper fiscal and economic coordination across the eurozone was necessary for the single currency to survive.

NORWAY ATTACKS

LO chief thanks Irish unions for sympathy

NORWEGIAN Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) president Roar Flåthen has written to Congress to thank Irish trade unionists for their expressions of sympathy and solidarity following the July 22 gun massacre at Utøya island and the Oslo bombing.

He writes: "It is very important for us to know that you are with us in these painful times.

"It is difficult to grasp that Norway's labour movement in a few hours lost so many of tomorrow's leaders.

"July 22, 2011, will forever be remembered as the darkest day in the history of the labour movement of Norway."

Pointing out that many of the victims of the attack on the summer camp belonged to member unions of LO, he added that they were "the spine of

LO's youth work".

Mr Flåthen continues: "The bomb attack on the government buildings in Oslo and the massacre at Utøya show the vulnerability of an open society like ours.

"But we will show how important and deeply rooted this open democratic society is.

"Norway will become stronger and more united as a result of the attack.

"Thank you very much for your solidarity and sympathy."



Flåthen: Darkest day

Letter of sympathy to the Norwegian Trade Union Confederation and the Norwegian Ambassador to Ireland

Message of Condolence from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions

On behalf of the members of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions we wish to express our profound sorrow at the atrocities perpetrated against the people of Norway.

The events of last Friday were devastating. It was in shock that we witnessed the Oslo bomb attack and then deep distress as we learned about the continuing horror of the brutal massacres at the Utøya Camp. That the main target was a group of young people who want to make the world a better place is so distressing we cannot even begin to understand.

We extend our sincere condolences to the victims of the attacks: to their loved ones, families, friends and colleagues. We are united in your sadness and stand in solidarity with the citizens of Norway at this profoundly difficult time.

We hold in high regard your nation and the values of democracy, fairness, openness and respect for human rights, which are intrinsic to the Norwegian State and for which, justifiably, your country is a world leader. We share with you an abhorrence of intolerance and extremism in all of its manifestations.

On behalf of all trade union members on the island of Ireland, please accept our sympathy at this very difficult time.

Yours sincerely
David Begg
General Secretary

ASTI chief's priorities

ASTI's new president Brendan Broderick has outlined key priorities for the coming year – protecting education from further cuts and improving the working lives of recently qualified teachers.

The Kilkenny-born science teacher, who took over as president on August 1, said: "Teachers are well aware of the economic reality facing Ireland. But education is the solution to this crisis, not the problem.

"We must have a plan of action for our education service which involves protecting young people's education and supporting teachers in their work."



Brendan Broderick

Mixed response to JLC/ERO plans

PROPOSED reforms to wage setting mechanisms outlined last month by Enterprise and Jobs Minister Richard Bruton have generated a mixed response from unions.

It is understood that, among other proposals, the number of JLCs will be cut from 13 to six and will no longer be able to set Sunday premium rates or other terms and conditions of employment already covered by existing legislation.

Firms will also be able, under the Bruton plan, to derogate from employment regulation orders if they experience financial problems.

Mandate general secretary John Douglas hit out at the timing of the announcement.

He said: "This means we will now have to wait until the autumn for legislation to protect the lowest paid."

Mr Douglas warned: "The agreement to scrap the Sunday premium pay for those covered by the JLCs and the inability to pay clause will leave thousands of low-paid workers vulnerable to having their pay cut."

Unite regional secretary Jimmy Kelly slammed what he dubbed Mr

Bruton's "manifesto for change" and claimed it was seeking to dismantle structures built up to protect the lowest paid.

Meanwhile, SIPTU vice president Patricia King urged members of her union to campaign to ensure any reform of the JLC/ERO system delivers safeguards for workers.

Admitting the Bruton proposals, published on July 28, presented "a major challenge" for trade unions, she pointed out it also "showed considerable progress" on the initial plan put forward in the wake of the Duffy-Walsh report.

Ms King said: "The improvements secured on the minister's earlier proposals followed intensive lobbying by SIPTU and other unions."

"These involved detailed engagement with colleagues in the Labour Party, in particular."

"It is essential that we achieve further amendments to protect low paid workers and, to that end, we must continue our public campaign and work with our colleagues in the Labour Party in advance of the proposed legislation being published in the autumn."



Picture: John Murray

Unite: NI uni fund deficit will hit jobs

UNITE has warned higher education in Northern Ireland faces a funding crisis that could heavily impact on employment in the sector.

Mike Robinson, the union's national officer for education, said: "As a result, senior management in universities are already talking of massive job cuts, with at least five per cent of the 2,500-strong workforce at Queen's University in Belfast under threat."

"At the University of Ulster something like £6m will be removed from the pay bill element of the budget over the next four years. This will have a drastic impact on employment levels at the university."

Unite has claimed a budget shortfall of £40m – caused by the slashing of teaching grants by 90% as well as cuts to research grants – will seriously hamper Northern Ireland universities' ability to compete with counterparts elsewhere in the UK and abroad.

Mr Robinson added: "Substantial job losses are a real possibility among the 13,000 staff employed in higher education and further education institutions."

"What is needed are additional funds to support higher education in Northern Ireland. This could be achieved by the allocation of additional funds to the Assembly's Department of Employment and Learning budget, or reconfigure the department's budget itself."

UNISON protest over threat to Belfast City Hospital A&E

UNISON has held a protest outside Belfast City Hospital following the announcement of plans to close its accident and emergency department.

More than a 100 members of staff joined with patients for the July 28 demo.

Last month, Stormont health minister Edwin Poots indicated that the unit, used by more than 50,000 people a year, was likely to close due to

a lack of consultant cover. It is understood the A&E unit could shut its doors as early as October.

UNISON spokesperson Tommy Steenson slammed the proposals and claimed the closure would have a "a detrimental effect on the community in south and east Belfast".

He added: "Where are the many thousands of people who

use this service meant to go? This unit services an area with the highest population of elderly citizens and families from ethnic minorities in Belfast.

"There is considerably confusion and anger in the local community about this decision, which appears on the surface to have more to do with politics than maintaining public access to emergency healthcare."

Household charge 'regressive' in present form

SIPTU president Jack O'Connor has claimed the announcement of a €100 a year 'temporary household charge' is not progressive under current proposals.

While acknowledging that the government was obliged to bring in a property tax under the EU/ECB/IMF memorandum of agreement, he pointed out there was some leeway as to how the administration "interpreted and imple-

mented" the obligation. Mr O'Connor said: "A 'household charge' or property tax is a potentially progressive instrument.

"It could be a means by which wealthier people in our society could make a contribution reflecting their ability to pay.

"This could be achieved if the charge is related to the size and location of the property.

"However, the measure as pro-

posed does not facilitate a proportionate contribution from the wealthy. In fact, it is quite a regressive interpretation of the obligation as enshrined in the memorandum of agreement."

He added: "As structured, it will play into the hands of the wealthy who have always successfully opposed the application of a progressive tax on property and on wealth in this country."



O'Connor: Interpretation



Picture: Julia Paul

Beeb journos strike 'solid'

THE NUJ praised the solidarity of thousands of journalists across the BBC who took part in a second 24-hour strike against compulsory redundancies.

NUJ General Secretary Michelle Stanistreet claimed the August 1 action had seen a "solid turnout" on picket lines at centres across the UK – including Broadcasting House in Belfast, above.

The strike had a particular impact on regional news programmes.

There was a severe disruption to BBC schedules, with the loss of radio

flagships *PM* and *The World at One*, and a curtailed *Today* programme. The strike – the second in three weeks – was called by journalists at the broadcaster over management plans to sack hundreds of people in a compulsory redundancy programme.

Under the disputed plan, 387 posts would be lost across the BBC World Service and BBC Monitoring departments following cuts in government funding.

Michelle Stanistreet said: "The NUJ is proud that our members everywhere in

the BBC have recognised this threat to their colleagues, and the danger it poses to the quality journalism for which the BBC is rightly respected.

"BBC management seems to live in a fantasy world where it believes it can ignore the rights of staff and pretend that a serious industrial dispute simply isn't happening.

"The latest ludicrous management ploy is to claim that the strike wasn't having any effect. Clearly BBC management doesn't watch the corporation's output very much."



Stanistreet: Praise

National Gallery staff cut canned after art attack

A 17th CENTURY masterpiece was vandalised at the National Gallery in London last month

weeks after the union representing security guards at the building warned management they didn't have enough staff.

Red aerosol paint was sprayed across Nicolas Poussin's *The Adoration of the Golden Calf* on July 17. In the weeks before the Poussin



incident, the PCS had repeatedly complained about cuts to security staff at the gallery.

General secretary Mark Serwotka said: "Security guards in cultural institutions work long hours for low pay – but they are providing a vital service."

Calling on the management to immediately fill all security positions that had

been lost, he warned such cuts would only "cost money in the long term".

Union trio backs Garland anti-extradition campaign

THREE of Ireland's leading trade unionists have backed a campaign opposing a US government bid to extradite veteran republican socialist Sean Garland.

TEEU general secretary Eamon Devoy, right, joined Unite regional secretary Jimmy Kelly and SIPTU general president Jack O'Connor in issuing

a joint statement on July 19 claiming any extradition of the 77-year-old diabetic, who suffers from bouts of angina, would "amount to a death sentence".

"Over the last five years the strain which this extradition attempt has placed upon Sean has been immense.

"Any attempt to transport him from Ireland to be incarcerated in the US would likely amount to a death sentence, whatever the outcome of the legal proceedings against him."

The statement also pointed out that Mr Garland had played "crucial early role" in promoting the adoption of peaceful political struggle on the part of Irish republicans.



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<http://www.youtube.com/user/TradeUnionTVIreland#p/u/0/ATDAnrvRqg>



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Killarney address: Enda Kenny

Austerity upon austerity

CONGRESS general secretary David Begg told Taoiseach Enda Kenny the response to the economic crisis had ignored financial systems that caused the meltdown in the first place focusing instead on slashing the incomes of low earners.

He made his comments as he responded to the Taoiseach's speech to delegates on July 4, the first day of the conference.

Mr Begg pointed out that "all the talk of reform" ignored the activities of hedge funds and financial institutions.

"It occurs to a lot of people that reform is for the little people – it is not for the powerful!"

Mr Begg claimed the social model at the heart of what he termed "the European project" was being "torn asunder" by the same neoliberals whose appetite for deregulation had led to the current crisis.

He warned that the troika

wanted to turn Ireland into "an economic laboratory" to test its economic policies – policies that were not "evidence-based".

Thus far, the official response across Europe had been to penalise working people by trying to cut wages and undermine protections that had been built up over many years.

"The fact of the matter is that the drive behind this seems to be pure ideology. There is no economic or fiscal reason for making these changes to people's incomes."

Mr Begg said this focus was best illustrated in the controversy over proposed "reforms" to the Joint Labour Committees.

He deplored the fact that those pushing the "reform agenda" had utterly failed to put forward any evidence to support their case and in fact, as the Duffy-Walsh report made clear, the weight of evidence was en-

tirely "on the other side".

In place of evidence, opportunistic employers were substituting anecdotes to support their position. Mr Begg warned that it would be "very dangerous" for government to proceed to make policy on the JLCs based on what he called "anecdotes and scare stories".

Mr Begg also highlighted a recent call by Michael Noonan, the Republic's Minister of Finance, on the need for people to spend in order to boost domestic demand.

He countered that the reason people didn't spend was because of "the loss of personal economic security" as well as the fact that there was "no such thing as a safe job anymore".

Mr Begg blamed the "ideology of neoliberalism" for leaving people with no security over their retirement or pensions or without the means to put their chil-

The problem is not a strong public sector [in Northern Ireland], the problem is a weak private sector.

Liam Gallagher, Unite speaking on Motion 25

Delegate blasts EU/IMF/ECB as angels of doom

CONFERENCE heard the EU/IMF/ECB Troika described as "the capitalist angels of doom and despair".

SIPTU delegate Gerry McCormick made the comment as he moved Motion 6 on Growth, Jobs and Hope.

He claimed the austerity programme endorsed by the Troika undermined any chance of growth and was pushing the Republic towards default "in circumstances which could have been different if private debt was separated from national debt".

Mr McCormick claimed the policy appeared designed "to appease creditors and rating agencies" – yet the same rating agencies were continuing to downgrade Ireland.

He warned: "If we persist with this failed policy to pay crippling debt in the manner proposed, the consequences of the default will be uncertain outcomes for stability – not just for this country but for the whole region."

Deflationary policies had, he added, "collapsed" domestic demand and made the situation worse.

"The EU and IMF cannot wash their hands of culpability by suggesting they are saving our economy.

"We all know that the reality is to save the euro, no matter what the impact is on the Irish people."



Enda Kenny spoke to CWU delegates as he left the conference venue. They raised concerns over Vodafone Ireland's plans to outsource Irish jobs to India and Egypt

No low Corpo Tax for firms exporting jobs

COMPANIES that do not act in the national interest should not benefit from low Corporation Tax, conference was told.

CWU deputy general secretary Terry Delany made the comments as he spoke on Motion 14.

He flagged up the union's dispute with Vodafone Ireland over the company's plan to offshore Irish-based jobs to Egypt and

India. Mr Delany told delegates: "They called us in three weeks ago and told us it was their intention to offshore – or, as we would call it, export – jobs of our members based in Dublin and Dundalk to India and Egypt."

"Now, under what set of circumstances should that company be the beneficiary of a low Corporation Tax?"

He added that the manage-

ment had also refused to give guarantees to the union on a further 500 jobs in Irish-based call centres.

"Ultimately, the outcome is that the beneficiaries of low Corporation Tax can increase their profits... and leave Ireland."

Mr Delany added: "This set of circumstances should be totally unacceptable."

will only drive us down, Taoiseach

dren through university.

"The aspiration of every one of our generation that our kids will do a little bit better than the previous generation has gone," he added.

On Northern Ireland, he asked the Taoiseach to use his influence with the UK government to stop planned budget cuts, underlining the "fragility" of the "social ecosystem" north of the border.

"You can't cut back on the public sector and expect things to remain as they are.

"You can only really build up the private sector eventually. I think it is so dangerous that this course of action is being pursued."

He concluded by telling the Taoiseach that the austerity programme was not working and that some form of stimulus was needed in the economy.

Mr Begg said: "The concept of

the export-led recovery is not going to work because it will be swamped by the collapse of the domestic side of the market.

"If we are to get to grips with the problem, we need growth in the economy."

Growth, he insisted, needed to do some of "the heavy lifting" but growth would not happen unless there was some stimulus applied to the domestic market.

"We have to start believing that the economy is embedded in society and not the other way round," he added.

"Austerity upon austerity is only going to drive us deeper down."

Describing the debt sustainability of Ireland's banking and sovereign debt as an "unspeakable burden for us", he warned unless Europe "cuts us some slack", the Republic faced a "social catastrophe".



David Begg warned Enda Kenny of need for growth in economy

Capitalism isn't fixable



Gates: Corpo tax call

NIPSA delegate Carmel Gates called on conference to oppose Motion 13 put forward by the AHCPs underlining the importance of maintaining the 12.5% Corporation Tax rate in the Republic.

She told delegates that normally her union did not speak on motions dealing with a Southern issue but it was felt that Motion 13 had "a particular relevance" to the North.

Ms Gates pointed out the mover of Motion 13 had spoken of the "competitive advantage" provided by the low Corporation Tax rate in the Republic but asked "competitive advantage over who?"

She said: "Is it the jobs that might otherwise come to Newry? Should we in the North call for a reduction in Corporation Tax to 12.5% so we could compete with jobs in the South? Or should we set it at 11.5% instead?"

"So who are we competing against? Because what we are getting tied up in is the ar-

gument used by big business and what we are neglecting is the argument that we as workers use as internationalists."

Ms Gates warned against any attempt to "fix capitalism".

She told delegates: "Let's be honest, capitalism isn't fixable by any solutions we put forward, because if they can't fix their system, our suggestions on how to fix it aren't going to work either."

Instead unions should support the redistribution of wealth and a fairer society.

Ms Gates said: "If we introduce a 12.5% Corporation Tax in the North, £300m will disappear out of public services into the hands of the CBI, Institute of Directors, the Chamber of Commerce. It will be a redistribution of wealth – but in the wrong direction."

She added: "They're stealing the wealth, we need to get it back for workers."

Motion 13 was remitted.

'Mixture of the thumb screw and hair-shirt'

THE Republic's new government has "embraced" the basic policies of the last administration, conference was told.

Sam Nolan, speaking on Motion 11 on behalf of Dublin Council of Trade Unions, claimed the Fine Gael/Labour coalition had accepted the IMF/EU/ECB position that the "rich and powerful" be repaid the "principal and interest" on their "toxic loans".

And he predicted the next two budgets would be "a mixture of the hair-shirt and the thumb-screw".

Mr Nolan said politicians' claims to "represent all the people" were "very selective".

For its part, the trade union movement should be clear about what it represents.

"What we do represent is 700,000 plus trade unionists on this island. We represent the workers of yesterday who are the unemployed of today and the emigrants of tomorrow."

He called on trade unions to "fight and resist" every austerity measure contained in the next few budgets.

Callinan: Social partnership still 'a necessary ingredient'

IMPACT deputy general secretary Kevin Callinan has claimed attempts to dismiss the value of social partnership "out of hand" were part of a "false redefinition" of the causes of the crisis.

He made his comments while speaking on the economy debates.

Mr Callinan told delegates: "We can and should be self-critical about past experience of social partnership.

"Over time, we became too deeply embedded with the system. By focussing too exclusively on pay deals, we

ended up endorsing government policies that we could not influence, even when they jarred with our own position on taxation, jobs and the wider economy."

Despite this, he insisted a social partnership framework remained "a necessary ingredient" to get out of the crisis.

"In such a new approach, all sides – government, unions, employers and the other social actors – need to retain their independence. That implies a more focused, slimmer outcome, which should remain an objective of Congress policy."



Sam Nolan: 'Fight and resist'

Workers face media 'blitzkrieg'

THE CLAIM that public sector workers are sheltered from the effects of the economic crisis was slammed as "nonsense" and "blatantly untrue".

CPSU deputy general secretary Eoin Roynane told delegates that public sector workers did not live on "reservations in the outskirts of our towns and cities" but were "part of society". Many of our

members' partners, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters work in the private sector [and] they are very much part of our society."

He called for a "loud and clear" message to be sent from conference that "public and private sector workers are at one" and that all were entitled to "fairness and equality". As a former journalist, Mr Roynane

said he was tired of media commentators attacking "what we have achieved and what we seek to defend".

He added: "What would we be about as trade unionists if not to stand up for workers' pay and conditions?"

Mr Roynane also accused an alliance of "well-heeled, right-wing" media commentators and "economic

gurus" of orchestrating "a relentless blitzkrieg" against public sector workers.

But he added that there was little point in complaining about the unfairness of this coverage if unions did not redouble their efforts in using "whatever outlets are available – print, broadcasting or internet – to try and introduce balance into the debate".



Roynane: Balance needed

PHOTOLINE

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Count us in: Kerry Fleck & Paddy Mackel cast gallery vote

Right across the western world governments have decided working people will pay for a financial crisis they did not create. Governments have unleashed class war with the biggest ever attack on welfare and public services. The fabric of our society built up over decades is being destroyed before our very eyes.

Declan Roche, RMT

CHECK OUT BDC MOTIONS ON
<http://www.ictu.ie/bdc11/motions/>

I think that it's important that we never forget that the primary cause of the crisis we're in stems from the reckless economic policies of the last government and also the greed of a capitalist class that always seeks a quick route to easy money.

CPSU general secretary
Blair Horan on Motions 10 & 11

'Social partnership weakened us'



Kelly: Investment call

BEING right about what has happened to the economy should bring us no satisfaction, Unite Irish secretary Jimmy Kelly told conference.

Nearly one in five of the workforce was now "effectively unemployed" while thousands more were emigrating each month.

Added to that, hundreds of thousands of other workers were subsisting on "poverty line wages" that the government was seeking to cut further.

Mr Kelly, moving Motion 9 on economic policy, said all that the trade union movement had predicted had happened – falling demand, rising unemployment and a

widening deficit caused by a crash in tax revenues.

He suggested that the Republic was heading into "a statistical recovery" which was in fact a "long-term human recession".

Mr Kelly said the time had come to move beyond a critique of the crisis and put in place a "concrete alternative programme" through mobilising union members and the general public to force government to change course.

This should involve a "sustained and substantial" investment programme to create jobs and "modernise our economic and social base", an end to spending and wage cuts and increased

taxes on higher-income groups.

While acknowledging there were no easy answers, he told delegates, "If we start from these principles, we can change the dead-end course we are on".

Mr Kelly warned: "If we continue on the path of austerity and bailing out bank debt, we will end up as semi-permanent wards of the EU and the IMF".

An alternative programme – based on growth, investment and employment – was the only way to return to the markets in the short term.

He called on the trade union movement to build a

"solid platform for political change and action" through engaging and informing the million plus "trade unionists, families and friends".

The trade union movement should also work with other organisations "that share our values and principles" in forging the broadest possible platform for change.

Noting that there had been talk of a return to social partnership, he added: "That is not the way. Partnership weakened the trade union movement.

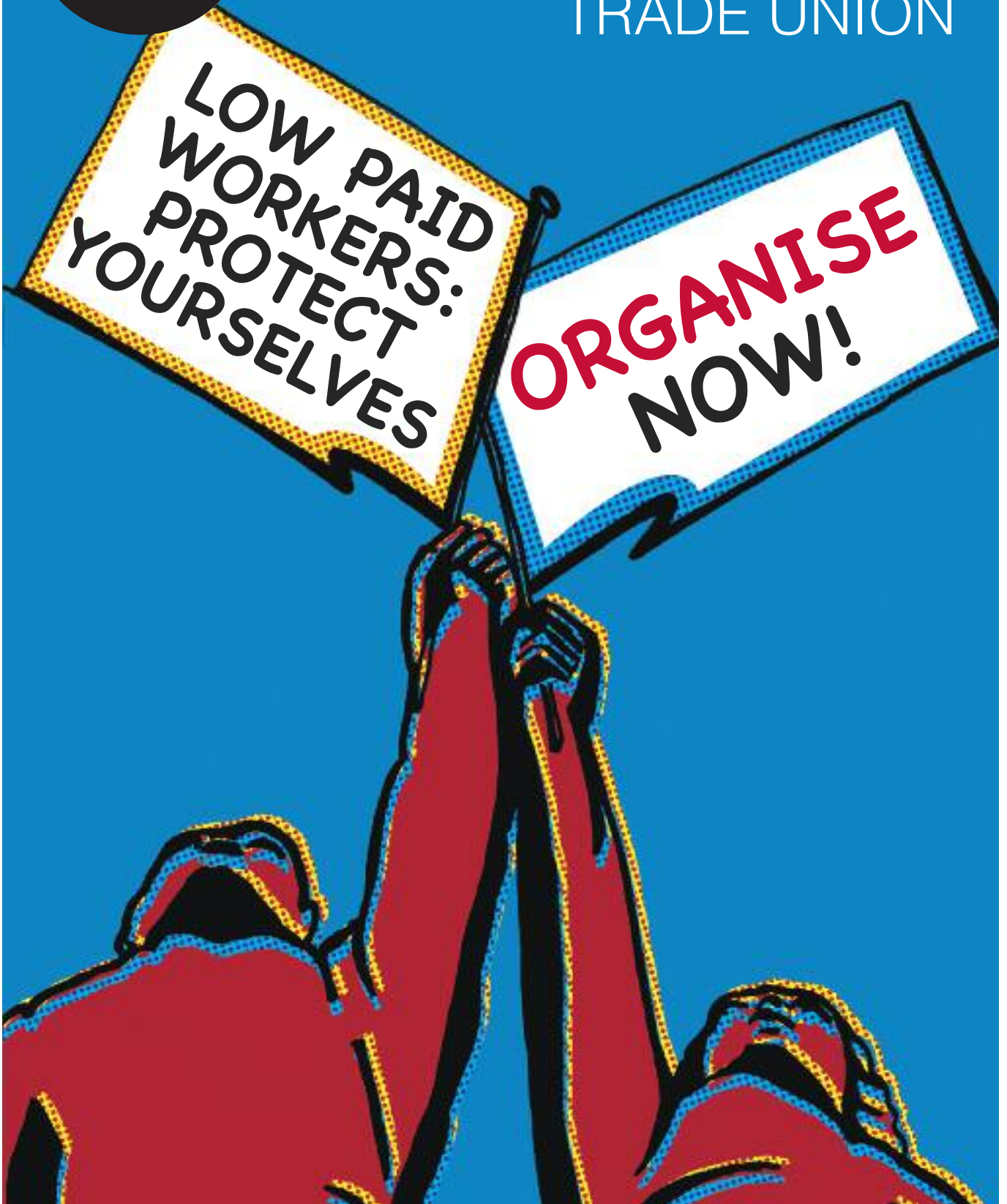
"It took us away from our members' hopes, fears and concerns."

Motion 9 was carried.



MANDATE

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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESSES

Nothing short of a redistribution of wealth to the have-nots will do

INCOMING president Eugene McGlone has insisted the people of Ireland North and South deserve a labour movement that is "fit for purpose".

Cautioning that the "only people we can rely on are ourselves", he called for a "back to basics" approach to leading and defending workers and "demonstrating that we are in business" and that "it's business as usual".

In this address, Mr McGlone also thanked outgoing president Jack O'Connor for carrying out his duties with "energy, dignity and resolve" over the past two years.

Mr McGlone called on delegates to draw on their own "common sense and experience of the past years" not to allow "greedy" bankers and "inept" economists who led the country into bankruptcy to "dictate the way out of the crisis" at workers' expense.

This, he warned, would mean that "we will have failed... not only ourselves but our children and their children".

As "our enemies" were "demonstrating all the loyalty and economic acumen of a Judas Iscariot", it was now perhaps time for the trade

union movement to "take a deep breath" and "knowingly use the 'S' word". He continued: "It is time for us – the workers of this country – who are the people who create the wealth, to say we want take control of our destinies for ourselves."

"For there is nothing short of a redistribution of wealth towards the have-nots instead of the constant pandering to the obscenely wealthy that will solve our problems. Strongly-worded letters, well-meaning speeches and hand wringing won't do it..."

Reminding delegates of the background to the crisis, he said that international banks had recklessly lent to Irish banks that had, in turn, recklessly lent to property speculators.

All this was "aided and abetted" by the Republic's last government "pump-priming the property sector through tax cuts and developer-led land policies, while at the same time degrading banking regulations".

When the crisis hit, the government then pursued deflationary policies targeting workers through spending cuts and tax rises.

He told delegates: "Then rather than repair a broken banking system, accepting that the banks were broke,



Presidential handshake: Eugene McGlone and Jack O'Connor

they raided your savings and threw billions neither they nor we had at the sector." Noting that the Labour Party now formed part of the coalition government in the Republic, Mr McGlone said: "We need to question is the electorate's confidence in returning the largest ever labour presence to the Dail being best served by a coalition with the most right wing political force in the state?"

He warned that Labour would take the blame for any attacks on workers' terms and conditions of employment while in government.

Turning to the political situation across the border, Mr McGlone claimed the time had come "to encourage our members, friends and families" to work for a "left of centre party of labour for the North".

He admitted this would be "no easy task" and would require "great courage" to go against "tribal trends".

Welcoming the work of the Commission, he described it as an "en-

abling report" to equip the trade union movement "for the next generation".

On social partnership, Mr McGlone queried whether the whole experience had been "merely a conjuror's trick – all smoke and mirrors".

He said: "What have we achieved after 22 years being best friends? Where is the right to combine and the collectively bargain with employers."

Acknowledging that this was now in the programme of government, he added that this would not prevent unions from pursuing "the legal route".

In concluding his address, Mr McGlone agreed that the next few years would be difficult "industrially, politically and organisationally" but reminded delegates that the trade union movement "had overcome worse" and predicted it would "overcome the current trials".



IN his last address as Congress president, Jack O'Connor told delegates that despite the global swing to the right, the neoliberal economic system that caused the financial crisis was still "teetering on its pedestal".

The "shock therapy" response to the crisis adopted by governments involved returning to a model "driven by the imperatives of unbridled greed".

This approach, he said, coincided exactly with the interests of the wealthiest people in the world adding, "The message has long since putrefied but the piper still calls the tune."

He warned there was still the danger of a default by one of the stressed eurozone nations that could potentially "sink the global financial system beyond trace".

Mr O'Connor, who is also SIPTU general president, said a Marshall Aid-type strategy was needed but "those in charge had opted for the shock therapy of a reparations course" instead, ignoring "the lessons of history".

He told delegates: "They are applying a supply side remedy to a demand side crisis aggravating the problem rather than alleviating it."

"They have reduced the once great institutions of the European project to mere debt collection agencies for the major banks, obstructing recovery and inflicting misery on the citizens of Europe."

European leaders had opted for an "internal deflationary dynamic" through the Merkel-Sarkozy inspired Euro-Plus competitiveness pact.

"The undeclared objective is to rid European capital of the obligations of the post-War settlement."

This strategy mirrored the agenda being pursued in Wisconsin and other US states and – more brutally – in Colombia and Palestine.

Mr O'Connor warned "the wrong people" were now running the institutions and pursuing a course that would "collapse the entire European project".

"Increasingly, it appears to be a free market business club with key decisions taken by unelected bankers and the social dimension only a decorative coating to sugar the poison pill."

He added: "If that is the case, the logic of history deems it should collapse and collapse it will."

In the UK, he claimed the Tory-Lib Dem coalition was intent on finishing the job started by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s. A total of £4bn was to be taken out of the North's economy entailing the loss



We must assert our right to have a say in shaping Ireland's future

of one in eight jobs.

And Mr O'Connor slammed the actions of the Republic's last government which even by "the standards of their own capitalist creed" was guilty of "gross mismanagement of the economy".

The "largest austerity programme ever attempted by a developed country" had ended in failure, as Congress warned it would.

He told delegates: "Throughout we challenged the strategy, insisting that it could not work and that it risked condemning the country to a prolonged deflationary spiral. We articulated an alternative course... but our efforts were dismissed – even ridiculed – as the outlook that caused the crisis in the first place prevailed."

The Republic now found itself in the "straitjacket of the ECB/EU/IMF diktat" which Mr O'Connor called

"a growth obstructing cul-de-sac".

He characterised the current approach as "working people carrying the can while others can carry on as they please".

"There is no moral justification for the proposition that we should have to pay the recklessly accumulated debts of those at the top of the top of the banking systems."

Mr O'Connor added that there was "no possibility" that 1.8m taxpayers in the Republic could pay back €200bn "in any reasonable timeframe".

Despite "the shackles" of the Troika agreement, he claimed there were steps that could be taken to construct an all-island economy

"This entails simultaneously addressing the bloated savings ratio, the investment deficit and the inequitable distribution of the burden of adjustment."

Domestic demand had collapsed in the Republic because of fears over loss of homes, pensions and jobs.

He warned: "The Minister for Finance's call to spend will ring hollow as long as people are paralysed by fear." Mr O'Connor called for a "firm and absolute guarantee" that mortgage holders' homes would not be repossessed "as long as they were making a genuine effort to service their mortgages".

Equally, he called for the €4bn - €5bn in the National Pension Reserve Fund to be used to drive a job generating investment programme.

Added to this there was €78bn in pension fund assets. He said the Minister of Finance should engage with fund trustees to develop a scheme to secure 5% of those assets to invest in the domestic economy.

Such a move, Mr O'Connor told delegates, would offset the deflationary effects of the €3.6bn cuts scheduled for Budget 2012 as well as creating more than 80,000 jobs.

It was also no longer possible, he added, to "afford the luxury" of subsidising the rich and they must contribute "in proportion to their capacity to do so" in the national interest.

He suggested a national pact for recovery in the Republic that could act as a catalyst for the entire island.

Such an approach would mean "abandoning the shallow 'quick buck' value system" that had served the interests of the few over the many.

Mr O'Connor admitted that it was unclear whether the Fine Gael-Labour government would embark on such a course or settle for "the road map to the Stone Age" laid out by the previous administration.

"The parties which, respectively, share the legacy of Connolly and of Collins should aspire to more and the people who elected them have a right to expect them to aspire to more."

He told conference the trade union movement in Ireland had reached another 'V' in the road.

"We can choose to remain as we are, limiting our aspirations to negotiating modifications on the agenda of the other side."

Mr O'Connor suggested that would be a "betrayal of the heroic legacy of those who founded our movement" and of working people today.

"We must assert our right to a say in the future – a future that works for all on this island in a Europe that works for all its citizens."

The challenges are great and the challenges are many. Unfortunately the repeated predictions made by our trade union leaders on the front line that violence will return if the working class did not see a peace dividend are coming true. If youth see no future, we note the tendency is to join someone's army. Our job as trade unionists is to build the army of the labour movement. To build confidence that we can resist exploitation, achieve real change and secure real human rights.

Ann Speed, seconding Motion 25 on behalf of the Executive Council.

I come from one of the very, very deprived areas of Northern Ireland and I feel very angry that the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister couldn't be here this morning to hear what the people of Northern Ireland have to say... I say we take to the streets of Ireland and we say 'Enough is enough' – north, south, east or west, we go, we fight, and we give people what they're always talking about – a better future.

Ann Donnelly
Derry Trades Council

'Rekindle faith' that we can make a difference

NIPSA general secretary Brian Campfield has called for "clear blue water" to be put between what unions stand for and the cuts agenda driven by administrations on both sides of the Irish border.

He made his comments as he moved Motion 7 attacking what he termed this "prevailing orthodoxy".

Mr Campfield called on delegates not to be drawn into the "relentless propaganda" that there is not enough money to pay for decent public services.

"We need to be careful that we do not get sucked into a position whereby we become apologists for those who are intent on rolling back the social and economic advances secured by organised labour and other progressive forces over the last 50 to 60 years."



Campfield: Leadership

He said there was no rationale for the trade union movement to "give comfort" to those forces intent on diluting or, indeed, destroying public services.

"The truth is we are not all in this together and we need to ensure there is clear blue water between our agenda and that of governments and parties which are implementing the severe

austerity measures in both jurisdictions."

Mr Campfield called those who believed the existing social and economic system could be reshaped to stop working people bearing the brunt of recessions "either naïve or stupid".

"The demands that this trade union movement should be promoting should go to the heart of the neoliberal agenda and challenge the supremacy that capital and profit exercises over labour and ultimately over the democratic rights of all citizens to be able to organise and run economies for the common good."

He said the motion demands of the state that it uses its resources to develop high quality jobs as well as underlining the central issue of tax fairness and

redistribution of wealth.

Delegates heard how the sovereignty and democracy in the South had been "compromised and undermined" while in the UK the "government of millionaires" had lost no time in steamrolling its plans to "redefine the post Second World War consensus".

Mr Campfield said that even though the trade union movement was "battered and bruised", there was a need to "rekindle our faith in our capacity to make a difference" and win the case for an alternative "to the present mayhem".

He added: "If the trade union movement cannot show the way to the wider community then we are in difficulty, because the fact is there is no other body – North or South – that can do this."

We need a clear and credible message

IMPACT's Louise O'Donnell told delegates that unions needed to speak with "a united voice" and have "clear, credible and comprehensible" policies that resonated with workers and their families.

"And, to do that, we need to look and sound much more like the people we represent and seek to represent.

"When it comes to speaking for unions – in the workplace, on public platforms, and in the media – we must see more young people, women and other ordinary workers articulating union positions and policies in ways that connect with others like them."

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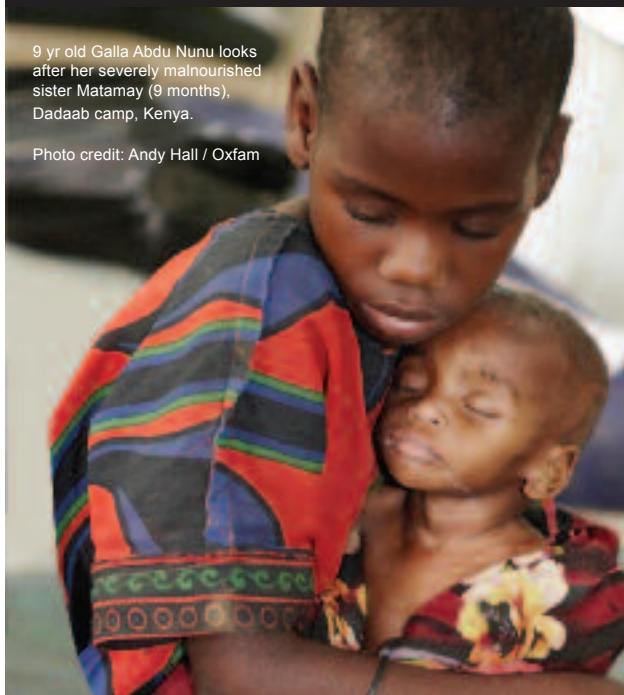
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New ICTU president Eugene McGlone shares a joke with INMO general secretary Liam Doran. Congress chiefs, right, keep up with the news during conference



Oxfam
Ireland



9 yr old Galla Abdu Nunu looks after her severely malnourished sister Matamay (9 months), Dadaab camp, Kenya.

Photo credit: Andy Hall / Oxfam

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UNIONAD11

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON TRADE UNIONS

Getting rid of our old prejudices and taking a leap into the future

IT'S time to take a leap "not into the dark but into the future", conference delegates were told during the presentation of a new report into the future of trade unions in Ireland.

Philip Boyet, of UNI Global Union, claimed the document – A Call to Action – set out why "standing still" was no option for unions in an era of globalisation.

He said: "There really has been a cultural change going on in recent years. For over a century we have been holding meetings, taking minutes, making reports..."

"Frankly, for a new generation these are not the things that give people a buzz. These are not the things that will attract a new generation to trade unionism.

"If we sit and do nothing, then of course all of those major forces are gradually going to erode the trade union movement in this country and elsewhere."

Cautioning against trade unionists adopting a doom-laden attitude, he flagged up a number of positives, describing the number of union members in Ireland – 800,000 – as a "fantastic base to start from".

Unions North and South were a "cohesive force in society" and contrasted the Irish position with that in some other European countries where union membership was "three, four or five per cent", adding that, "this was a very hard place to be".

Mr Boyet claimed the paper was not a blueprint or "a set of commandments from on high" but was titled A Call to Action because it



UNI Global Union's Philip Boyet delivered report

was up to individual unions to decide what changes were going to be implemented

He told delegates: "It's you that have to decide to get rid of some of our old prejudices and take a leap – not in the dark – but a leap into the future to build up this trade union movement."

Mr Boyet outlined various areas of action contained in the report.

He said there was a need for Congress to draw up a "vision statement" setting out its hope for a society built around an alternative to free market forces and based on social solidarity.

"In this day and age, we must make priorities, these are our standards. Whatever politicians or political parties are doing, this is what trade unions stand for."

Mr Boyet said effective organisation must be a "key part" of any future strategy and it was necessary

to have a "strategic plan" to increase membership density.

The strategic approach meant unions combining resources.

He noted: "Affiliates – with a very few exceptions – cannot see themselves on their own individually having the resources for strategic organising campaigns. It takes a lot of money, a lot of expertise..."

"What we're saying is we need a strategic plan for the whole of the trade union movement and we're asking unions to come together to form a new strategic organising committee.

"The idea is to sit down and decide and try and get something that is a strategic plan."

On the number of trade unions in Ireland, Mr Boyet noted there was a general agreement that 49 were too many.

"We have to have a look at ways of pooling unions together but it's not something that can be decreed from above or by the Commission, it's something that unions themselves have to devise and decide on themselves."

Unions should be organised along sectoral lines and claimed that such a process might lead to "structural changes" or to "federations or mergers".

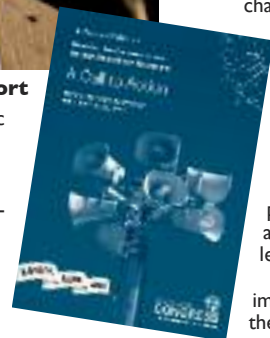
Mr Boyet flagged up the need for a "much stronger, more focussed" approach from trade unions with the setting up of joint services and through the pooling of resources such as communications and legal services.

He also underlined the importance of ensuring that the women and youth sectors of Congress were "integrated fully" into the work of the Commission.

Concluding, Mr Boyet told delegates: "For us it's important to stress the need for a sense of urgency – this is an opportunity to create a better and a bigger trade union movement

"You have that chance. It's sad that you have to wait to be attacked before you can fight your way out of the problem.

"We should seize this time to make those advances."



Unions must articulate 'real alternative'

UNIONS must forge closer links and share resources, Mandate general secretary John Douglas told conference.

In one of several responses to the Commission report, he said: "Unions can't work in splendid isolation – to do this would be to manage our own demise."

Rather, trade unions had to be "fit for purpose" and "articulate a real alternative".

Mr Douglas told delegates: "It's not all about structures and rules of trade unions. It's not about words – it's about actions.

"It's about trade unions working together and sharing resources. It's about putting personal agendas and egos to one side.

"It's about using scarce resources to best effect. It's about workers, public and private, North and South, East and

West, uniting to fight back."

Unions needed to both show leadership and to engage with members.

Mr Douglas pointed out that Mandate, with two organisers, had 45,000 members in a retail sector in which 200,000 people worked.

"The challenge for our union – as with the trade union movement generally – is to mobilise our 45,000 members into 45,000 organisers."

He added: "To do this you need resources and a cultural change."

NIPSA general secretary Brian Campfield told conference it was important to be "clear and unambiguous" about what the trade union movement stood for.

"...that we're in favour of working people and working class communities."

It was also necessary, however, to

reach out to other sectors of society "particularly those suffering as a result of this social and economic crisis".

He warned delegates that "structural change" would not be enough on its own to meet the challenges that lay ahead, but rather that "clarity" was needed about what trade unions stood for.

In his response, IMPACT general secretary Peter McLoone underlined the need for unions to "simplify the message" in terms of "mission and vision".

People needed to understand that the existence of trade unions was "indispensable to their working lives".

"People have to sense in the workplace that if they did not have the trade union movement, 'I would not be secure and protected. I'd be more vulnerable'."

He added: "You can have all the



John Douglas: Action not words



Peter McLoone: Make the argument

strategic statements that you want – unless you change that culture that instinctively resists change, you won't make the changes you need to."

CWU general secretary Steve Fitzpatrick reminded delegates that "we have more unions than counties!"

He said: "Like it our not, though people talk about a trade union movement, we don't really organise ourselves as a movement. It's quite disjointed."

Welcoming the report's "brevity", he added it would provide a "road map over co-operation".

Mr Fitzpatrick also pointed out the CWU had been forged from four unions and that the "mergers and amalgamations and the clashing of cultures" had "made it stronger".

Incoming Congress president Eugene McGlone, of Unite, noted that the difference in the Commission's document from anything that had gone before was that it had put "strategy before structure".

He added: "Previously we attempted to batter our strategy into the structures that were already in place."

Mr McGlone told delegates the report gave them "the one opportunity... to shape the trade union movement for the next generation and the generation after that."

ICTU'S NEW EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Delegates to the 2011 Biennial Delegate Conference have elected a new Executive Council. The new 34 member Executive will serve until 2013. The full list is below, along with details of member's affiliate unions.

PRESIDENT

Eugene McGlone (Unite)

VICE PRESIDENTS

John Douglas (Mandate)

Patricia King (SIPTU)

ORDINARY PANEL

Larry Broderick (IBOA)

Kevin Callinan (Impact)

Brian Campfield (NIPSA)

Shay Cody (Impact)

Eamon Coy (GMB)

Walter Cullen (Unite)

Eamon Devoy (TEEU)

Pamela Dooley (Unison)

Seamus Dooley (NUJ)

Liam Doran (INMO)

Steve Fitzpatrick (CWU)

Tom Geraghty (PSEU)

Arthur Hall (TEEU)

Avril Hall-Callaghan (UTU)

Lawrence Huston (CWU, UK)

Mike Jennings (IFUT)

Jimmy Kelly (Unite)

Pat King (ASTI)

Peter MacMenamin (TUI)

Patricia McKeown (Unison)

Jim Moore (UCATT)

Maria Morgan (NIPSA)

Phil Ní Sheaghda (INMO)

Sheila Nunan (INTO)

Jack O'Connor (SIPTU)

Louise O'Donnell (Impact)

Eoin Roynane (CPSU)

Marie Sherlock (SIPTU)

Dave Thomas (AHCPS)

Noel Ward (INTO)

LOCAL PANEL

Eric Fleming (Dublin

Council of Trade Unions)



Bernadette Ségol: Message of support

'These are harsh times... but the key is solidarity'

EUROPEAN Trade Union Confederation general secretary Bernadette Ségol delivered a "warm message" of "solidarity and friendship" from workers in the rest of Europe to delegates at the conference.

Acknowledging that these were "harsh times" for Irish workers, she emphasised that the ETUC stood with "Irish workers, Irish people and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions".

Ms Ségol slammed the "incredibly tough austerity measures" being inflicted on workers in the Republic because of the rescue package and insisted any resulting depression and deflation would not provide the growth strategy needed to "to revive the economy and employment".

She said austerity "will not get us through [the crisis]" but called for a more "sustainable" and "long-term" solution based on "solidarity".

"Now solidarity is a very dear word to us trade unionists. We are asking for solidarity, to give a concrete meaning to that word..."

Such a solidarity package would include eurobonds provision "which would pool part of the debt and give countries [such as Ireland, Portugal and Greece] access to credit at a reasonable rate".

Ms Ségol also called for Europe-wide action on unemployment and a financial transaction tax.

She told delegates: "Friends, this is not pie in the sky. This is not wishful thinking. Don't listen to those who say this is not possible."

"Of course it is possible. It is a question of political will and leadership, and we haven't seen much of either around the table in Brussels recently..."

However, she warned against an Irish default, pointing out the Republic's situation differed markedly from Argentina and Iceland, two nations that had taken the default option.

Ms Ségol added that Europe now found itself "in the midst of a risky and historic period", but that whatever the temptation, a return to "narrow nationalism" was not the way forward.

Paying for capitalist correction

PADDY Mackel, moving Motion 8, called on delegates to reject "austerity measures" which he said was just a "fancy term" for an attack on workers, on their terms and conditions and on public services.

He told delegates that everyone in the hall was being forced to pay for the "capitalist correction" so that business and global corporations could return to "unrelenting profit margins" while workers were "put back in the box where they belong" to work longer for less and at the same time as public services were "increasingly delivered by insatiable profiteers".

Mr Mackel, speaking on behalf of Belfast and District Trades Council, said



Paddy Mackel: Trade union movement only movement able to lead struggle

Taoiseach Enda Kenny and this party did not offer workers in the Republic "a way out of this mess" and blasted as "a disgrace" Irish Labour leader Eamon Gilmore's announcement that further cuts to public services were likely.

Equally, he pointed out that the UK's "cabinet of

millionaires" would "increasingly only protect and promote its own".

A total of £123bn was lost each year in unpaid tax, tax evasion and avoidance.

He pointed out that 3% of this figure – Northern Ireland's share under the Barnett formula – would amount to £3.5bn "almost

equal to what is being cut from the Assembly's budget".

He warned delegates that welfare cuts of £1bn in the North would hit "those without a voice... the most vulnerable in society".

Mr Mackel said: "The trade union movement is the only movement with the

ability and the capacity to lead the struggle against this onslaught on workers and their families."

Unions needed to develop "an effective, alternative economic strategy" that was "coherent and intelligent" to provide a "real voice" for "a decent society that puts people first rather than profits".

"There is nobody left to lead this struggle. We should learn from Portugal, Spain and Greece in particular. We should not be afraid to call protests, and organise strikes.

"Withdrawing our labour will be our voice – a strong voice loud and proud, demonstrating that workers have had enough."

'Time to go on the offensive'

UNISON regional secretary Patricia McKeown has called on the "lay leadership and the membership" of trade unions to "go on the offensive" and demonstrate it is "a force for social change".

She also called for added pressure to be put on politicians as "their programme" was "failing" in both jurisdictions.

"We have a real alternative but we must do this collectively and I would like to think that combined industrial action in the North can be mirrored across Ireland."

Croke deal defended

PSEU general secretary Tom Geraghty moved Motion 21 on the Croke Park agreement.

He acknowledged that those trade unionists who had opposed the deal had put forward "cogent arguments" but that in the end it had come down to a choice "not between good and bad" but between "degrees of stability and agonising uncertainty".

Mr Geraghty also noted the "almost hysterical level of hostility" against the deal articulated by sections of the commentariat and pointed out that Croke Park had "survived the arrival of the IMF, the change of government and its first review".

And he described the maintenance of the agreement as an "unalloyed success... as far as the public sector is concerned".

Mr Geraghty said: "I would say that all of the evidence is that it has been a considerable success for the country in circumstances

with few good news stories."

Gene Mealy, SIPTU, speaking in support of the motion, said that while the agreement had been "good for our members", there was no chance of a "Croke Park Mk II".

He told delegates: "I would caution that if they come back for more, it's not there. We have given enough.

"We will deliver on our commitments, but no more."

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Lift the lid on 'barriers to equality'

UNISON regional secretary Patricia McKeown told conference that the "one key statistic" surrounding the debate on Motion 26 was that "the majority of people facing discrimination, inequality and oppression on this island are women".

Noting that women now constituted 51% of the Irish trade union movement, she added: "If we work very hard, that figure will grow because a very large number of unorganised workers – workers we have yet to bring into the ranks of our movement – are women."

Ms McKeown called for the lid to be lifted off "the barriers to equality" and described the trafficking of young women and girls into Ireland for the sex trade as a "cesspit".

She added: "It's like a lunch menu and you will find there is a part of the population of this island with sufficient money and lack of morals and integrity to dine well on that menu."

"We as the trade union movement have a voice that should speak out against that exploitation."

Ms McKeown warned that equality and human rights was not an issue to be parked until the economic crisis was over.

She told delegates: "It is something that should have been attended to when times were better and there was money to build a genuine and equal and fair social infrastructure."

"That did not happen and it will not happen unless we come together with the oppressed and make it happen."

"So I'm not prepared to hear governments North or South use the economic crisis as an excuse for the fact that this is still a deeply divided and discriminatory society in both jurisdictions."



Bunting: Unions have allies in austerity fight

Corpo Tax change would be 'wealth transfer' to richest

CONGRESS assistant general secretary Peter Bunting lashed political parties in Northern Ireland over their stance on cutting Corporation Tax.

He warned delegates any cut in the levy would not "guarantee" a single job but would instead lead to "big increases in profits for large businesses".

Mr Bunting claimed the policy – backed by all major political parties north of the border – amounted to a "transfer of wealth from the poorest to the richest".

He contrasted Northern Ireland's politicians' loud support for tax cuts with the lack of sustained backing for a Bill of Rights.

"What happened to the Bill of Rights? Why was it stymied and stopped? In whose interest was it for us to not have a Bill of Rights?"

"Where was the Bill of Rights in the recent election to the Northern Ireland Assembly? Or the General Election last year? Why are those parties which said that they backed a Bill of Rights so silent now?"

Mr Bunting reminded delegates the trade union movement did not stand alone in its fight against cuts and austerity.

He said: "We have allies in this fight, new groups of citizens who did not feature in previous trade union protests and campaigns, using methods and technologies which are novel and can be as perplexing to their allies as much as their enemies – but I am glad that they are on our side."

"We are gaining allies because the analysis we have brought to the debate has been proved right again and again. We have long warned that the economic policies of successive governments were leading to greater inequalities of wealth and income, and it is clear that such disparities are at record highs."

Mr Bunting claimed "the historic values of the international trade union movement" reflected the views of many people in Northern Ireland and that the best alternative to inequality and division, based on wealth or religion or nationality, was the simplest:

"One society based on equality, diversity and solidarity – where every citizen contributes more than money and taxes and receives more back than the mere necessities of existence as defined by the gurus of consumerism. One society where work is valued, where service is a virtue and where democracy is inclusive and a work-in-progress."

Class interest has been redefined as the national interest... Over the next five years, 25% of government borrowing will be used to pay down the debt.

Tom Hogan, Waterford Council of Trade Unions speaking on Motion 12

Republic 'reactionary' on union rights

THE REPUBLIC of Ireland is the most reactionary state in the developed world when it comes to trade union recognition, IMPACT general secretary Shay Cody told conference.

Visitors to the Republic were, he noted when moving Motion 17, "amazed" at the absence of collective bargaining rights.

Mr Cody flagged up in particular Supreme Court rulings that the constitutional right to association also implied disassociation, effectively giv-

ing employers the right to refuse to engage with trade union representatives.

And he slammed as "nonsense" those who argued that union recognition would act as a barrier to foreign direct investment.

"Many FDI companies such as HP, IBM, IKEA and Radisson deal with unions elsewhere in Europe and around the world."

"Their approach is simple. If they must, they will. If it's not mandatory, they won't."

Mr Cody claimed the Re-

public was also in breach of its obligations under ILO conventions.

"IMPACT along with Congress has lodged a complaint with the ILO which we hope will be heard later this year. An ILO convention is an international treaty binding the state."

"We are also aware of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights which provides for the right – not the option – to negotiate and conclude collective agreements."

He pointed to recent Euro-

pean Court of Human Rights rulings that accepted the right to join trade unions includes the right to bargain collectively and the right to strike.

Mr Cody noted that the programme for government contained a commitment to reform the current legislation to ensure compliance by the state with the judgments of the court.

He told delegates: "This requires compliance with the collective bargaining ruling as well as the anti-victimisation one."

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Strengthening workers' rights will boost the Irish economy



FOR the first time in a quarter of a century, the International Labour Organisation's Committee on Freedom of Association is reviewing a complaint against Ireland.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions lodged this complaint with the international labour movement's full support.

We welcome the new Irish government's pledge to "reform the current law on employees' right to engage in collective bargaining, so as to ensure compliance by the State with recent judgments of the European Court of Human Rights," as contained in the Programme for Government.

Changes are indeed necessary not only to respect international norms, but also to bolster Ireland's tenuous economic recovery through a better distribution of income.

Ireland is facing a complaint at the ILO because its laws do not properly protect workers' rights. In particular, employers establish and control "Employee Representative Councils" as a means to avoid

SHARAN BURROW, general secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation and a guest speaker at this year's BDC in Killarney, argues that union rights must be strengthened in the Republic to bring its laws into line with international norms as well as giving the economy a much-needed jumpstart

recognising the legitimate trade unions that employees have joined.

Such anti-union practices violate the ILO's convention on the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining, which Ireland ratified in 1955.

Similarly, the European Court of Human Rights has ruled that it is illegal to offer employees financial incentives to surrender trade union rights.

It has also ruled that workers have a right to be represented by their trade union in employment matters and that collective bargaining – workers negotiating collec-

tively with their employer – is a fundamental human right.

It is scurrilous but not surprising that some employers try to gain more control over employees and pay them less by limiting union representation, regardless of international standards.

The real issue is that Ireland's domestic laws fail to prevent employers from penalising workers who engage in collective bargaining, establishing phony "employee associations," or refusing to recognise a trade union that employees have joined.

Ireland's economic vulnerability before the financial crisis was largely based on private-sector borrowing, speculative construction, inadequate financial regulation, and ultra-low corporate taxes.

A durable economic recovery will require consumer demand funded by employment income rather than borrowing and speculation.

Attempts to undermine wages and wage-setting mechanisms would undermine consumer spending and the prospects for a recovery.

By contrast, improving Ireland's labour legislation to better protect fundamental labour rights would help workers to negotiate wage increases as productivity rises.

A sustainable economy depends on workers being able to purchase the output that they produce. Extending collective bargaining to more workplaces would help to drive economic growth.

Recent experience supports the view that trade unions improve economic performance.

Countries with deregulated labour markets and legal obstacles to union organising, such as the United States and Ireland, have suffered the largest increases in unemployment.

By contrast, countries with higher levels of unionisation and social security have generally fared better during the economic crisis.

For example, Germany's strong labour-market institutions allowed unions and employers to negotiate temporary reductions in working time instead of job losses.

As a result, its unemployment rate barely rose during the crisis and it has been strongly positioned to increase output during the recovery.

Ireland should reform its labour laws to better protect employees from anti-union discrimination, stop employer interference in workers' organisations, and promote collective bargaining. These improvements are needed to meet international standards that Ireland has signed onto. They would both benefit Irish workers and strengthen the Irish economy.



ITUC chief Sharan Burrow, centre, chaired a round-table discussion 'Which Way for Europe' at Killarney conference



IBOA chief Larry Broderick points finger at management 'arrogance'

Engagement is vital

PSEU general secretary Tom Geraghty has called on unions not to fall into the situation of "putting ourselves in opposition" and "not taking responsibility" for "negotiating solutions" with government and employers.

He told delegates: "I would suggest that that would be ill-advised. I think we have to have a discussion about where we are going to go in terms of the relationship with employers and

with government. We have to be able to have some sort of formal process with which we engage with employers and government."

And Mr Geraghty, who was speaking on Motion 20, pointed out that the "most successful and fairest" societies were those who had "formal processes" to facilitate engagement between unions, employers and government.

We need Croke Pk style deal for bank sector

LARRY Broderick has called for a Croke Park-style agreement for workers in the banking sector.

The IBOA general secretary made the comments as he moved Motion 24.

Mr Broderick warned the government had identified a "two pillar" approach to the financial industry that would have the "net effect" of "eliminating" 6,000 jobs over the next few years.

He told delegates: "I use the word 'eliminated' cautiously to reflect the arrogance of management in this industry and also the arrogance of the new government that has forgotten the reality that banking is about people and about communities."

Mr Broderick insisted the trade union movement had to play a role in rebuilding the industry and agreed that "radical change" was needed.

He said: "If jobs are to be reduced I can say to conference today there will be no co-operation about changing our industry unless we too get a Croke Park agreement in our industry."

"We want a commitment of no compulsory redundancy, we want a commitment that, in a context of change, we will influence the future of our industry in a fair and reasonable fashion."

Mr Broderick also called for a whistle-blowers' charter for the banking sector to be put in place.

Workers were not born with saddles on their backs and bankers were not born with boots and whips either.

Dave Hughes, INMO speaking on Motion 32



Every wipe of his eyes takes Talla closer to blindness



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



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