

## **Equality and Human Rights Points for Congress Election 2016 Manifesto**

Motions [14](#) and [15](#) at Biennial Delegate Conference 2015

In the context of delicate economic recovery, Ireland is struggling to maximise the life opportunities of all our people, leading to deeper inequality and growing social division, with women, migrants, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups disproportionately impacted upon.

We note the increasing problem of inequality in society and the widespread agreement that liberalisation, particularly of finance, led to massive rises in inequality and had a disproportionate impact on women. Such inequality calls for a two part response.

1. First, income should be redistributed through the tax system - through taxes on very high incomes and wealth - to those who would actually spend it.
2. Second, collective bargaining by trade unions should be supported in every possible way. Trade unions are the only actors in the market system capable of effecting a redistribution of wealth in the interests of social justice.

Congress calls upon the incoming Government to make the fight against inequality a primary objective through changes to the tax system and by promoting collective bargaining at every opportunity.

Public services are an important form of social solidarity and source of social cohesion, but with policy choices hamstrung by a massive debt burden, which costs almost €8 billion a year to service, the fiscal freedom available to government to advance important public goods like childcare is limited. Congress calls on any incoming government to move towards a social investment model that would equip people with the skills necessary to participate fully in the labour market and ensure good quality jobs. The concept of investment is important because it is predicated on equipping

people with the skills and public goods to allow high levels of labour force participation in well paid, high productivity jobs. In this way a tax base capable of funding such social investment can be sustained.

Such a model could help to ensure a society where inequality of income and discrimination could be tackled by:

1. The adequate resourcing of our **Equality infrastructure** including:
  - a. a Workplace Relations Commission that ensures that any worker who has been sexually harassed, sacked because of their race, or bullied because of their sexuality can bring a case without fear of being priced out of justice;
  - b. The newly formed Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission ([IHREC](#)) is adequately resourced to work strategically with civil society, trade unions and employers on workplace rights and can take action on the under-reporting of discrimination, and the implementation of the new public sector duty
  
2. The provision of publically funded affordable, quality **Childcare**. Upcoming report from Congress will urge the Government to use our economic recovery as an opportunity to invest in quality early years services for our children.
  
3. A **Family Leaves** system that promotes the best care for children and allows parents real opportunities to reconcile work and family life

Other issues include:

#### **4. Right to be Heard**

Failure by the Irish Government to protect the rights enshrined under article 11 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights. There are outstanding issues in relation to the right of trade unions to represent their members as set out in the [Wilson Judgement](#) of the European Court of Human Rights. The European Court made it clear in *Wilson v the UK* that a trade union must be free to strive for the protection of its members interests and that individual members have a right that the trade unions should be heard. The Irish Government has failed to introduce a mechanism to ensure the right to be heard is vindicated for Irish workers.

#### **5. Gender Pay Gap**

The [gender pay gap](#) is the difference in average gross hourly wage between men and women across the economy. In Ireland, the gender pay gap stands at 14.4% (the average gender pay gap in the EU is 16.3%). Such a gap is unacceptable and Congress urges any new Government to prioritise action on the gender pay gap through means such as: pay audits - audits that require employers to assess where men and women are doing similar work or work of equal value in their organisations and to close any pay gaps between those men and women that can't be justified; introducing legislation to make every private sector company with 250 employees or more publish the gap between its average male and female earnings.

#### **6. Violence against Women**

While 1 in 5 women experience domestic and/or sexual violence, the Government should prioritise efforts to combat this. Congress welcomes the November 2015 signing of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). The Istanbul

Convention is a blueprint for best practice in the area of violence against women and Congress urges its immediate final ratification.

## **7. Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment**

Congress urges any incoming Government to hold a referendum to [repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment](#) so that our elected representatives be given the responsibility of replacing our laws in a compassionate and humane manner.

## **8. Replace the current National Women's Strategy**

It is our view that in order to promote an Ireland that values women's rights and gender equality a strong national action plan needs to be put in place to replace the current National Women's Strategy.

9. An adequately resourced Comprehensive Employment Strategy for **People with Disabilities**. We welcome the outgoing Government's road map towards ratification of the UN Convention on the rights of people with disabilities and urge the new Government to complete the necessary steps without delay. New Government should make all employment activation programmes eligible to people with disabilities. Congress condemns the recent cuts in funding to the Personal Assistants service which provides vital support for people with disabilities. This decision by the HSE to reduce funding to disability services in its 2016 service plan greatly damages the ability of people with physical disabilities to participate in their communities and workplaces and needs to be reversed. Congress, through the participation of our national network of centres in the Disability Activation Project, has been working towards inclusive job creation. The Training Options programme has been described as "a model" and described by participants as 'life changing' and by families as a massive support to their home life. Barriers to

participation included transport, childcare costs, fear of loss of income from loss of payments and the added cost of disability to people's lives and any effective strategy will have to work towards solutions to all of these issues. Tackling the issue of hate crime should also be addressed.