

PRESENTATION TO THE STUC CONFERENCE

DUNDEE 2ND NOVEMBER 2015

THERESA DWYER

CHAIRPERSON ICTU WOMENS COMMITTEE

Colleagues,

I would like to take a few minutes to talk about the work of the Congress Women's Committees in the North and South of Ireland.

In the South we are finalising our Programme of Work for the current term of office which we have broken down into three key areas – Women Organising for Decent Work which included collective bargaining, pensions, family leaves, affordable childcare and flexible working; Women in Society which includes women in decision making and violence against women; Women in Trade Unions which includes an audit of women in Trade Unions including delegations to union conferences. We have been guided by Motions from the ICTU Biennial Delegate Conference 2013 and 2015, the Congress Women's Committee Conference 2014 and ETUC data and analysis. We also intend to conduct a survey of women workers across the country to identify the issues that are a priority for working women.

A major focus for the Northern Ireland Women's Committee has been campaigning against austerity and the impact of welfare reform. Northern Ireland has the highest percentage of people (28%) earning below the living wage and as we know women are the most likely to be in low paid, vulnerable jobs on zero or low hours contracts. The Northern Ireland Women's Committee continues to contribute to the policy debate in Northern Ireland responding to consultations including those on childcare,

shared parental leave and flexible working as well as taking an active and robust role in the development of the Gender Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland.

These issues formed part of our discussion with our colleague Trade Unions at the Council of the Isles forum in Glasgow last month. The lack of affordable childcare and the gender equality impact on working women was of particular concern. I am pleased to report that the Government in our Budget last month have made provision for two weeks paid Paternity Leave for fathers which is the first official recognition of the caring role of fathers in terms of the child and in terms of support for the mother of the child at such a joyous time in their lives. Unfortunately there is no commitment to paid Parental Leave.

At the end of June 2015 the European institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) launched the Gender Equality Index 2015 which is a body of work that assessed the current situation in each EU Member State in six core areas – Work, Money, Knowledge, Time, Power and Health. The Index measures gender equality from 1 (the lowest) to 100 (full equality). The average score is just over 50 (52.9) which means that in 2015 we are only half way to full gender equality. Ireland has shown some improvement scoring above the EU average in most areas except when it came to Power/Decision making but even at that we are still only half way there in terms of full equality!

At the ICTU Biennial Delegate Conference 2013 we passed a Motion, put forward by the Congress Executive Council where Conference reaffirmed our commitment to create a fairer, better, more equal society. We agreed that within the Trade Union movement we would develop impact assessments of our own actions in policy-making at the bargaining table with employers and in our negotiations with

Government to ensure that we are genuinely contributing to the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity. A Motion passed at the Congress Women's Conference 2014 called for equality proofing of all collective agreements in advance of their implementation. To date Trade Unions have not been doing this at the bargaining table. But we need to start doing this because if we don't then we will only ever be half way there in terms of eliminating inequality and that's not where a progressive Trade Union movement wants to be.

The Ethical Workplace Initiative is the Trade Unions response to the "*The President of Ireland's Ethics Initiative*" which was launched over a year ago. From the 1st to the 31st March 2015 ICTU sought input from wide range of working people across the country by asking one simple question: ***What does an Ethical Workplace Mean to You?***

Several hundred people responded in a range of ways, postcards, online and on social media. On the 30th April last an Ethical Workplace Initiative event took place in Dublin where all of the information collected was presented to President Higgins by Patricia King, Congress General Secretary, on behalf of the Trade Union movement. Common themes in those responses were words such as respect, dignity, equality, trust and fairness.

In his address President Higgins acknowledged and recognised the role Trade Unions have in determining a good workplace. Over the coming year Congress are developing a National Charter for Fair Conditions at Work that will provide clear guidelines on the principles that govern fairness, dignity and equality of conditions in the workplace for all workers across the country. The culture in any organisation dictates the ethical environment in which work is carried out and affects the

wellbeing of workers. The Women's' Committee are heartened by the ICTU Charter and feel that employers that sign up to this Charter are also pledging to eliminate discrimination in the workplace and this a step in the right direction.

On the 7th October 1983 the 8th Amendment was inserted into Bunreacht na hEireann (Irish Constitution). ICTU opposed this Amendment on the basis that "the rigidity and inflexibility of constitutional directives on social and moral issues was inappropriate in a democracy." As of now, 32 years later, that position has not changed. The ICTU position is that "Women comprise more than half of the trade union membership in Ireland and it is unacceptable that they live in a country where the law puts their health and lives at risk, criminalises them and forces them to travel abroad to avail of safe and legal abortion services." The ICTU Executive Council recently took a decision to support the Trade Union Campaign to repeal the 8th Amendment.

Earlier this year the Irish Government went to the electorate on the issue of same-sex marriage or Marriage Equality as we in the Trade Union movement preferred to call it. In order to make Ireland a more inclusive and tolerant society the Trade Unions for Marriage Equality called on all members to go out and vote YES in this referendum so that we can make Ireland a more inclusive and tolerant society.

Referendum day was Friday 22nd March 2015 where citizens were asked to vote on the insertion of a new sentence in the Irish Constitution that will state: "Marriage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex." As you know the YES to Marriage Equality had a great victory with 62% of the electorate voting in favour of the constitutional change. Legislation giving effect to the Constitutional change is to be enacted this month.

I want to finish by thanking you for your invitation to speak to you today and share some of our experiences with you. I wish you well with your Conference and look forward to hearing about your issues throughout the Conference.

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