

THE

PUBLISHED IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS

# UNION POST

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JANUARY 2011

**PEOPLE'S CONGRESS** FOR A BETTER, FAIRER WAY  
**FEB 5** CONFERENCE DETAILS P2  
Octagon Room, King's Hall, Belfast

**INMO VOWS ACTION ON NURSING STUDENTS PAY CUTS** P4



Picture: Paula Geraghty

## European Commission warned over alleged 'interference' in Ireland's labour market

# HANDS



# OFF

THE European Trade Union Confederation will meet European Commission chief Olli Rehn over reports the EU is "intervening" in national collective bargaining rights.

Under existing agreements, the Commission has no powers to determine wage levels in individual states.

In a letter to Mr Rehn, ETUC general secretary John Monks, pictured, slammed the use of "diktat pressure"

to cut minimum wages and pensions in countries struggling to escape the economic crisis, claiming this amounted to "an attack on Social Europe".

Mr Monks told a meeting in Dublin on January 19 that what Europe needed most was a "a spirit of generosity" to help hard-hit countries, "not the kind of penalty regimes and punishment squads imposed at present".

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# OUR PAY

TRADE UNION NEWS NORTH AND SOUTH

# UNION POST



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Irish Congress of  
Trade Unions  
31/32 Parnell Square  
Dublin 1  
Ireland  
Tel: +353 1 8897777  
Fax: +353 1 8872012  
Email: congress@ictu.ie  
www.ictu.ie

Northern Ireland Committee  
Irish Congress of Trades Unions  
4-6 Donegall Street Place  
Belfast BT1 2FN  
Northern Ireland  
Tel: 02890 247940  
Fax: 02890 246898  
Email: info@ictuni.org  
Web: www.ictuni.org

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Email: braziermedia@btinternet.com

ORGANISED BY THE IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS

# PEOPLE'S CONGRESS

## FOR A BETTER, FAIRER WAY

**The Octagon Room, King's Hall, Belfast  
10am - 2pm, Saturday, February 5, 2011**

Registration: 9:30

Conference Chair: Avril Hall-Callaghan, Chair NIC-ICTU

10:00

First Session:

**The Facts of the Real Economy and  
the Myths used to Justify Cuts**

Introduced by Peter Bunting, ICTU

Overview by Dr Andrew Baker, Economist, Queen's University Belfast

10:30

Second Session:

**Towards an Economy which  
serves Society, and not vice-versa**

Introduced by Eugene McGlone, Unite & Vice-President, ICTU

Overview by Paul Nowak, Head of Organisation and Services, TUC

Panel Discussion and open mic for questions and statements.

11:15 Break

11:30

Third Session:

**Big Society, Small Future:  
The Assault on the Welfare State**

Introduced by Maria Morgan, NIPSA member on NIC-ICTU Overview by  
Prof Eileen Evason, University of Ulster & BBC's On Your Behalf

12:00

Fourth Session:

**Rights in a Time of Recession**

Introduced by Pamela Dooley, Vice-Chair, NIC-ICTU

Overview by Ursula O'Hare, Law Centre NI

Panel Discussion and open mic for questions and statements.

13:00

Conclusion

13:30

Working Lunch & End of Conference.

**FOR MORE INFO CONTACT:**

E: [eileen.gorman@ictuni.org](mailto:eileen.gorman@ictuni.org)

E: [john.ofarrell@ictuni.org](mailto:john.ofarrell@ictuni.org)

T: 028 90 247940

# ETUC: EC must clarify its role in Ireland's labour market

Picture: ETUC



THE European Trade Union Confederation will meet with EU Commissioner Olli Rehn after it was reported there has been direct intervention to cut salaries and change agreed systems of determining pay in Ireland and Greece.

General secretary John Monks, left, denounced reports of what he called "diktat pressures" to cut minimum wages and pensions, to reduce wage "rigidities" and to make labour markets more flexible in both countries.

In a letter to Commissioner Olli Rehn – and copied to other senior Commissioners – Mr Monks pointed out such policies trampled over "pious Commission statements about the autonomy of social partners, the importance of social dialogue and the specific exclusion in the EU treaties of a European competence on pay".

He also described the reports as "an attack on Social Europe" and in marked contrast to the "relaxed, non-interfering view on rapidly increasing levels of top pay, including bank bonuses".

Under EU treaties, the Commission has no capacity or competence to determine pay levels in individual member states.

The Lisbon Treaty specifically rules out any such competence.



Commissioner Olli Rehn

[http://www.etuc.org/IMG/pdf/110111\\_Olli\\_Rehn.pdf](http://www.etuc.org/IMG/pdf/110111_Olli_Rehn.pdf)

Monks: We need spirit of generosity not punishment squads

## TOO MUCH AUSTERITY TOO LITTLE GROWTH

ETUC chief John Monks has warned of the impact strict new EU rules on fiscal governance will have on how member states manage their economies.

Addressing the Institute of International and European Affairs in Dublin on January 19, the leading trade unionist predicted difficulties ahead in reconciling "parliamentary autonomy" with "European commitments".

### LEVERAGE

The economic governance rules, agreed at the EU Summit in December, mean that budgetary matters relating to individual member states will be discussed at Commission level months before they are put before each nation's parliament.

Mr Monks pointed out that though it won't be easy to co-ordinate varied economies and political cultures, he predicted most of the leverage applied to individual states will be to cut deficits.

Touching on how the Republic's economic plight was seen by a section of opinion in Brussels and across Europe, he said there was the view that Ireland deserved it

"given the folly of the government guaranteeing its banks in the way it did".

Once Ireland did that, other countries had to follow suit "as all the capital flows came here [to Dublin] in a weekend".

With so many bad banking debts being taken on to public balance sheets, there had been a Keynesian reaction – involving maintaining public spending, subsidising short-term working and cutting VAT among other measures – from many states.

Mr Monks said this approach had ended when what had been a banking crisis became a sovereign debt crisis sparked off by the economic collapse in Greece.

He added: "From that moment on, market attentions switched away from banks and started to focus on the strengths and weaknesses of every EU economy."

Ireland's austerity programme – which once had been hailed as "a model for others in trouble" by the European Commission – did not stop it from being next in line after Greece. The lesson that was drawn was the original austerity model for Ireland did not go far

enough. Mr Monks said: "When Ireland had to go to the European Financial Stability Facility – more austerity was required."

But he added that Ireland was not alone and pointed to tougher new stress tests for banks coming into operation in the spring.

"Ireland already knows about economic governance – others are about to find out..."

### OBJECTIONS

Mr Monks said the ETUC had provoked strong objections from some quarters when it criticised detailed interventions in the labour market by EU/IMF teams in Greece and Ireland.

The description of EU acting like the "governor general or grand vizier of some quasi-colonial administration" had drawn sharp criticism from the Commission president and from Business Europe [which includes IBEC].

He claimed exception had been taken to the description of these interventions resembling more a Versailles Treaty than a Marshall Plan – the former being "punitive" scheme, the latter a "generous" initiatives. Mr Monks said: "What

Europe needs now is a spirit of generosity to help the hard-hit counties – not the kind of penalty regimes and punishment squads that are being imposed at the present time."

Stressing the need for the EU to get the balance right, it wasn't possible for the ETUC to support the current economic governance proposals.

This was because they were "imbalanced towards austerity and punishment with not enough emphasis on growth".

He pointed out that what was needed was a focus on social partnership "that can do the heavy lifting when countries are in trouble".

Other necessary measures included the principle that everyone does their bit for the national recovery – "the rich as well as those on benefits".

"I look forward to the Irish rich, who made so much during the boom, paying their fair share – or will they threaten, like some bankers and hedge-fund managers in Mayfair, to emigrate if they have to pay normal taxes?"

<http://www.iiia.com/events/secretary-general-of-the-european-trade-union-confederation-john-monks-european-solidarity-and-the-jobs-crisis>

MAGAZINES, LEAFLETS, NEWSLETTERS, POSTERS **DESIGN** DO YOU NEED YOUR UNION PUBLICATION REVAMPED? **braziermedia** @btinternet.com



Picture: INMO

# INMO VOW OVER PAY CUT

THE INMO is to mobilise a nationwide campaign of resistance to Irish government plans to phase out payments to student nurses and midwives on rostered clinical placement.

The Department of Health intends to slash payments from the current 80% of the minimum point on the staff nurse scale to 76% from next year, then to 60% in 2012, followed by 50% in 2013, and finally to 40% in 2014.

Under the plan there will be **NO PAYMENT AT ALL** from 2015 on.

The INMO pointed out that during their 36-week placement, student nurses replaced staff nurses and played an integral role, providing essential, direct and immediate bedside care.

Describing the move as “unfair and draconian”, the union’s Executive Council vowed to fight until the pay cut had been reversed.

General secretary Liam Doran said: “As we said on the day that we learned of this savage cut, the INMO will never accept its student members being exploited by the government, and will fight to achieve a reversal of this cut for as long as it takes.

**‘CRUEL & OFFENSIVE’**

“The government decision is cruel, offensive and smacks of pure opportunism against what they perceive to be young and vulnerable employees.”

It is understood the INMO has already referred the pay cut to the Labour Relations Commission.

Union sources say they will, if necessary, take the issue to the Labour Court.

According to the INMO, the pay cut is a complete breach of guarantees given under the Croke Park Agreement and runs foul of requirements

contained in the EU Information and Consultation Directive.

It is thought the union will also lodge a claim, under equality legislation, on the grounds that the pay cut had been introduced to a predominantly female workforce.

Meanwhile, SIPTU has lashed the targeting of student nurses for pay cuts as “disgraceful”.

Nursing official Louise O’Reilly said student nurses did vital frontline work and “deserved to be paid”.

She added: “The rostered placement is unique and therefore cannot be compared to other models of education.

“As well as learning, these students are working. This proposal is disgraceful and introduces a form of slave labour for young student nurses.”

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**Applications including full CV should be submitted to David Begg, Chairperson, EIU at [david.begg@ictu.ie](mailto:david.begg@ictu.ie).**

**Closing date for receipt of applications is 15th February 2011. Interviews will be held in Dublin on the 24th/25th February, 2011.**

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## All sectors of society must unite against cuts

NIPSA general secretary Brian Campfield has called on all sectors of society in Northern Ireland to unite together to oppose public spending cuts.

In his New Year message, he predicted "unprecedented" cuts over the coming year and warned they would derail any chance of an economic recovery and lead to thousands of private and public sector workers being thrown on the dole.

He said: "The attacks on public services, on jobs, and on people dependent upon the welfare state cannot be disguised or hidden and it is imperative that the whole community take a determined stand against these measures, even if they are being implemented under the banner of the Northern Ireland Executive and our local political parties.

"There has to be a renewed focus on achieving a fairer and more equal society and this means raising the profile on tax avoidance and evasion practices which the wealthy utilise so successfully to avoid having to pay their fair share of tax."

Mr Campfield added: "It is wrong that ordinary people have to shoulder the burden of a crisis which has its origins in the finance sector, while profits and bonuses outstrip the earnings of the vast majority of people."

**NIPSA conference: P12/13**

## Budget USC is regressive

SIPTU has slammed the Universal Social Charge, introduced in December's budget, as "regressive and unfair".

Speaking at the first meeting of the union's new National Executive Council on January 20, general president Jack O'Connor said the reality of the budget had now hit home to workers seeing their net take-home reduced by an average of 3.4%.

He said: "More than 132,000 of the lowest paid workers now find themselves in the tax net and having to cope with a dramatic drop in their take-home pay of up to €594 per year."

Mr O'Connor, who is also Congress president, described as "grossly unfair" the fact that income tax payers had to shoulder 90% of tax raising measures, while only 6% of the tax changes in the budget came from capital taxes, with no wealth tax and no measures to deal with tax exiles.

He added: "To add insult to injury, the USC is regressive with the result that those earning just under €26,000 will lose up to €979 annually. In contrast, someone earning in excess of €200,000 will actually see a reduction in their tax liability."

## Public right to be angry over winter water crisis

A GROUP campaigning against the introduction of separate household water charges has claimed the Northern Ireland public have "every right to be angry" about the loss of water supply in the recent freeze and the way the crisis was handled.

Calling for an independent review, the Congress-organised Coalition Against Water Charges insisted questions needed to be asked about why so many households had supplies cut off – some for up to 10 days – over Christmas and the New Year.

But in a January 6 statement, the CAWC queried whether the Utility Regulator's Office was the right body to carry out any probe and pointed

out that last year it had demanded NI Water cut its costs by £91m over three years.

The CAWC also hit back at suggestions from some quarters – "many with their own agendas" – that the fault lay with the Northern Ireland Executive's failure to bring in the charges.

The statement continued: "There is no evidence that if people had been forced to pay an additional £400 per year for their water supply that the problems would not have arisen."

Instead, the CAWC argued, more funding could be raised through scrapping the current freeze on regional rates.



## Unite: Major spending drive needed on water

UNITE the union has called for a major capital spending programme to fix Northern Ireland's crumbling – and leaking – water and sewage systems.

Regional secretary Jimmy Kelly claimed the recent period of extreme cold weather had shown how 50 years of chronic under-investment had caused "a near meltdown" of the system.

He said: "What the



**Kelly: Meltdown**

weather has shown was that the system is clearly on its last legs and not fit for purpose in the 21st century.

What is needed is a complete overall and this requires major capital investment."

Mr Kelly added: "Billions of pounds can be set aside to prop up the casino bankers and clean up the financial mess they have left us in.

"If money can be found to save the bankers' skin and their bonuses, then it can be found to sort this mess out."

<http://www.waterchargesnonpayment.com/>

## Private sector jobs boast is a Tory 'sham'

UNISON has rubbished claims the UK's private sector can do the "heavy lifting" on jobs as cuts to public services threaten to throw tens of thousands of workers on the dole.

The union has revealed a new analysis that details how for every 100 vacancies avail-

able in November 2007, there were just 68 in November 2010. UNISON claims this has exposed "a fundamental flaw" in the Tory-led coalition's economic strategy.

General secretary Dave Prentis said: "There is serious trouble ahead. Osborne's and

[http://www.unison.org.uk/asppresspack/pressrelease\\_view.asp?id=2124](http://www.unison.org.uk/asppresspack/pressrelease_view.asp?id=2124)

## UNEMPLOYMENT Jobless rate rise pointer to deflation

CONGRESS economic advisor Paul Sweeney has warned the substantial rise in the number of jobless on the Live Register last month was a pointer to where the government's deflationary economic strategy was leading the country.

Predicting that the situation will worsen in the coming year, he pointed out the absence of a real jobs programme and the lack of investment in skills and training will mean the most vulnerable groups will continue to be hit most.

He said: "The rate of unemployment is up again to 13.4%. This figure would have been far higher only for the resumption of mass emigration.

"The net outflow was around 70,000 to April last and it is expected to be of a similar number for the year to April 2011."

He described emigration as "only a safety valve" for the government but was for those forced to leave Ireland "a shameful betrayal of their ambitions".

Mr Sweeney added: "Instead of pouring billions of our savings from the Pension Reserve Fund into zombie banks, the new government must invest this precious money – which we have in hand – in jobs, in skills and in the real economy."

**JOB vacancies in the UK public sector hit a record low last month – under half the figure recorded in December 2009.**

**Figures contained in The Reed Job Index for December revealed that public sector job opportunities dropped to a new index low of 42. This marks a drop of seven index points from the month before, and ends a year of monthly job vacancy falls in the sector.**

**It is understood the public sector figures were in marked contrast to the overall employment trend across the UK economy.**



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# TUC chief predicts 2011 will be 'horrible'

TUC chief Brendan Barber has predicted 2011 will be "a horrible year" of job losses, benefit cuts and continued economic stagnation.

In a gloomy New Year message, he warned throwing tens of thousands of public servants on the dole would lead to the loss of just as many private sector jobs, dashing hopes of a recovery.

Mr Barber was particularly scathing about the 10% cut in housing benefit kicking in after a year of unemployment as "a top contender" for the "unkindest cut of all".

He also hit out at the UK coalition government's cynical strategy of frontloading cuts in local government and the police in the hope the public will forget about them before the next election.

Warning that public anger was "likely to grow", Mr Barber added: "The British people are never that interested in politics, but do have a deep sense of fairness that goes across traditional party lines."

"As none of these policies were put to voters before the election, this could well be the year the country starts to say 'no' to government in a way that they have not since middle Britain made a previous Tory government abolish the poll tax."

"This is going to be a year when many people suffer, but it just could be the year when the campaign for change really gets going."



Picture: Kevin Cooper Photoline

Three of Northern Ireland's most well-known journalists – front, from left: Ivan McMichael, Helen Greenaway and Deric Henderson – were recently honoured for marking up a total of 120 years membership in the NUJ. Also pictured are Belfast & District NUJ branch chair Bob Miller and NUJ assistant organiser Ian McGuinness



# PRESS



**Julian Assange**  
 Publisher, Journalist, Internet Activist

Mock up: What Julian's new press card might look like

## AUSSIE JOURNOS UNION HELPS WIKILEAKS JULIAN

**JULIAN** Assange, WikiLeaks' editor-in-chief, was presented with a new press card at a special event in his native Australia last month.

The card – showing Mr Assange is a member in good standing of journalists' union the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance – was accepted on his behalf by his Melbourne lawyer Rob Stary QC at a ceremony outside of the offices of The Age newspaper in Melbourne on December 23.

The campaigning journalist had contacted the Media Alliance in November to let them know he may not be able to pay his union dues because of his bank accounts being frozen.

MA Victoria branch secretary Louise Connor said the union had acted quickly to deal with this "extraordinary situation" and that it

was decided that Mr Assange's subs should be waived.

She added: "We've drawn up a new union card for him and offer him the full support of his union and professional association."

ACTU presiden Ged Kearney, who made the presentation, said Mr Assange and WikiLeaks deserved trade union support.

She added: "WikiLeaks is simply performing the same function as media organisations have for centuries in facilitating the release of information in the public interest. Mr Assange's rights should be respected just the same as other journalists."

"WikiLeaks has broken no Australian law, and as an Australian citizen, Julian Assange should be supported by the Australian government, not prematurely convicted."

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## Retail staff opposition to Sunday hours plan

THE VAST majority of shopworkers in Northern Ireland are strongly opposed to the extension of Sunday opening hours, it has been revealed.

Retail union Usdaw made the claim after surveying more than 1,000 of its members before Christmas.

It follows the recent publication of a Department of Social Development consultation paper setting out possible changes to Sunday trading laws.

A massive 73% of respondents said they were opposed to shops opening longer than the currently-allowed five hours on a Sunday.

More than half of those who currently work on a Sunday said they were put under pressure by their employer to do so while 71% said that they would be put under even more pressure to work on Sundays if opening hours were longer.

Crucially, only 54% of those who currently work on Sundays said they received any additional pay for doing so.

Concern for family life, maintaining a work/life balance and the need to attend religious services were the main reasons shopworkers cited in opposition to any change.

Kevin Smyth, Usdaw's area organiser for Belfast, said: "Shopworkers are all too often put under pressure to work on a Sunday, often in an informal way that makes them feel that if they want to maintain a good relationship with their manager, or even keep their job, then they have no choice."

"Shops can already open 149 hours a week, 363 days a year and Usdaw does not believe there is a clamour from the public for extending Sunday opening."

## Unite chief in new role

FORMER joint Unite general secretary Tony Woodley is taking up a new role as executive officer for organising with the union.

The move follows the election of Len McCluskey as Unite's first sole general secretary in November. Mr Woodley, who became joint secretary with ex-Amicus chief Derek Simpson in 2005, said it was clear the union was now ready to "move on in a unified way" following the election of a new leader.

It is understood he will continue to lead Unite's attempts to settle the BA dispute.

Mr McCluskey said he was "delighted" Mr Woodley would continue working with the union. He added: "His role will help this union deliver on its pledge to stop the most vicious attacks on the lives of working people for generations."

# IBEC BLASTED OVER 1.25% PAY RISE CALL

MANDATE has accused IBEC of an unjust and opportunistic attack on low-paid shop workers.

It follows the business association's call – in the run up to Christmas – for a hold to be placed on the 1.25% pay rise to staff in the grocery retail sector.

Director Brendan McGinty claimed many retailers could not afford to pay the increases, due under the terms of an employment regulation order.

He said many of Ireland's regulated wage rates were too high and were "a major stumbling block to regaining competitiveness" and "not sustainable".

Despite IBEC's objections, the increases – approved by the Labour



Brendan McGinty



John Douglas

Court and thus legally enforceable – came into effect earlier this month.

MANDATE's general secretary John Douglas accused the business group

of backtracking on commitments and of "looking to close the door after the horse has bolted".

Speaking last month, he said: "Earlier this year IBEC agreed to paying grocery workers the princely pay increase of 1.25% – three years after nearly all other workers in the economy got the same increase."

"Having agreed to this minimal pay increase for these workers – among the lowest paid in the economy – IBEC are now seeking to back out of their commitments."

"When taken together with the recent cuts to the minimum wage, IBEC's move represents a further unjust and opportunistic attack on low-paid workers."



**A 'SNOW' OF SOLIDARITY:** Mandate members mount a picket in sub-zero temperatures outside the Athlone branch of Laura Ashley in support of their colleagues at fashion retailer's Grafton Street store in Dublin who have on strike since October 22 last year. The December 18 action taken by the Athlone workers was described by Dave Moran, the union's divisional organiser, as "an act of breathtaking selflessness".

Picture: MANDATE

## Employment plan 'sackers' charter

CONSTRUCTION union UCATT has called new UK government proposals on employment a "sackers' charter".

It is reported that ministers are intending to extend the period when bosses can dismiss workers without being subject to a claim for unfair dismissal from one to two

years. The government is also understood to be considering bringing in fees for workers taking claims to an employment tribunal as well as reducing the period when statutory sick pay is payable.

General secretary Alan Ritchie said: "This amounts to a sackers' charter, allowing unscrupulous employers to

hire and fire workers at will.

"In an industry such as construction where work is already highly casualised and many workers don't even have a contract of employment, these plans will simply increase levels of exploitation and will further reduce workplace justice."



Picture: Amnesty  
**Broumelha: high risks**

## IFJ mourns 'heavy loss' of journalists

THE International Federation of Journalists has warned media workers remain prime targets for political extremists, gangsters and terrorists throughout the world.

Figures compiled by the IFJ show 94 journalists and media personnel were killed in 2010 – victims of targeted killings, bomb attacks and crossfire incidents.

Three others lost their lives in accidents.

The figures represent a drop on the total for 2009, when 139 killings were recorded.

Pakistan tops the list of the most dangerous zones, with 15 journalists killed – ahead of Mexico (10), Honduras (10) and Iraq (6).

The IFJ represents more than 600,000 journalists in 125 countries.

President Jim Broumelha said: "Nearly 100 journalists killed is a heavy loss which ought to stir the world governments into action to offer better protection to journalists

"The sheer number of murders and conflict-related incidents has brought into sharp focus the high risks associated with the practice of journalism today."

<http://www.ifj.org/assets/docs/205/203/5d21bd-97a13cb.pdf>

## PHOTOLINE

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### CONTACT

Kevin Cooper

E: [photoline@supanet.com](mailto:photoline@supanet.com)  
T: 028 9077299  
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# AUSTERITY REALLY GETS MY BACK UP!



This protestor shows a bit of backbone outside offices of the European Commission in Brussels during the ETUC day of action on December 15



Pictures: ETUC

## Ballots decisively reject pension changes



Mark Serwotka: Investment call

TWO major UK public service unions have voted decisively to reject changes to the civil service redundancy scheme.

On January 14, it was revealed that 90% of the 80,000 PCS members who cast a vote – on a turnout of 32% – voted against the changes, with 96% also backing the union's 'There is an alternative' drive.

This was followed up on January 17 with news that the Prison Officers Association had voted by 95% – on a turnout of 48% – to reject the new compensation scheme.

The POA balloted its 31,000 eligible members, which means a total of

almost 90,000 civil servants have now voted against the changes.

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said: "Our members have sent a crystal clear message that they will not tolerate their contracts being ripped up simply to allow the government to slash jobs and public services.

"There is an alternative to the spending cuts which would see us invest in our future and target those wealthy individuals and organisations who go to great lengths to avoid paying tens of billions of pounds in taxes and starve our economy of vital revenue."



Picture: INMO  
**Doran: Urgency call**

## Govt must act to tackle crisis on beds

THE INMO has called on the government to react with urgency to the overcrowding crisis in the Republic's healthcare system.

It comes after it was revealed a record number of people were on trolleys waiting on an inpatient bed in hospitals on January 5.

A total of 569 people were logged in the union's 'trolley watch' audit on the day.

Currently 1,600 beds remain closed across the country.

General secretary Liam Doran claimed the figure of 569 represented the rough equivalent of the number of beds in the average large hospital.

He said: "It is imperative that the government now reacts to this crisis with the same urgency, and priority it has given to our economic difficulties and the supposed need of our bankers and saving our banks.

"It is time this government looked after ordinary people – many of them elderly – who are facing this indignity, loss of privacy and potential compromising of their health and well being.

"Saying there is no money and we must do more with less, is cold comfort to the 569 patients and will not address their immediate needs or give them back their dignity."

## DESIGN

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# DELEGATION HAILS 'THE SPIRIT OF SOLIDARITY'

Left: Tarcisio Mora

CONGRESS marked International Human Rights Day by hosting a delegation of Colombian trade unionists and civil rights activists on December 10.

The high-powered group was headed by Tarcisio Mora, chief of the CUT trade union federation.

They were joined by Lina Malagon of the Colombian Commission of Jurists and Reinaldo Villalba from the 'Jose Alvear Restrepo' collective of human rights lawyers.

Congressman Hernando Hernandez, who represents Colombia's indigenous population in the Colombian Congress, was also part of the delegation. And it turned out to be a busy day for the visitors.

They first met with Congress general secretary David Begg and president Jack O'Connor – who visited Colombia last year – before appearing before the Oireachtas Committee on European Affairs.

They held discussions with a number of Irish parliamentarians, including Foreign Minister Micheal Martin, Labour chief Eamon Gilmore, before attending a special meeting at Liberty Hall, jointly organised by Congress and trade union network Justice For Colombia.



Activists Lina Malagon and Reinaldo Villalba spoke at event

Pictures: John Chaney/Congress

erty Hall, jointly organised by Congress and trade union network Justice For Colombia.

In his speech, Mr Mora underlined how Colombian trade unionists were united in opposition to any Free Trade Agreement between



their country and the European Union. He warned any deal on trade would reward a government responsible for human rights abuses.

Mr Mora insisted that the European Union – with its fundamental respect for human rights and

democracy – should only agree such a deal when the Colombian administration had proved it respects basic human rights.

At his inauguration last year, Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos had claimed that "respect for life" was "a sacred principle" for his administration.

But since then local trade unionists and human right activists have continued to be targeted.

According to the ITUC, trade unionists across the world are increasingly the subject of arbitrary arrest, imprisonment, assault and worse.

The latest figures show a surge in the number of trade unionists murdered because of their activism – 30% up on the previous year.

Before leaving Dublin, the delegation said they were impressed by the friendly reception and empathy shown for their cause by those who attended the meeting.

Lina Malagon added: "This spirit of solidarity gives us a lot of energy for our struggle in Colombia."



The Colombian delegation with Unite regional secretary Jimmy Kelly and Congress president Jack O'Connor

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**Campfield: 'Get organised & build strength'**

# SAVE SOCIETY FROM CLAWS OF NEOLIBERALISM

NIPSA general secretary Brian Campfield has called for the "re-claiming" of society "from the claws of neoliberalism".

He warned hundreds of branch reps at a special conference at the King's Hall in Belfast on January 14 that the Tory-led coalition was using the economic crisis as a "cover" to demolish the welfare state.

Mr Campfield said: "We are facing a further step in an overall neoliberal plan to force the free market into the remaining facets of the everyday life of ordinary people."

This involved an attack on social

security provision, pay, jobs and pensions – basically on everything that makes society "decent and civilised".

But he said NIPSA recognised privatisation was a threat to public services, democracy and accountability.

"We must oppose these developments and start to reclaim our society, our economy and our services from the claws of neoliberalism."

Mr Campfield predicted Stormont ministers will "protest" that they've been "dealt a poor hand" by the government and claim that they have no choice but to implement the cuts.

"They tell us they need our help and want our co-operation. Even if we were sympathetic to the Northern Ireland Executive's dilemma, we must ensure that we are not co-opted to the cuts agenda and its implementation."

Noting that the Stormont administration had no "fiscal powers" and was unable to tackle tax evasion and avoidance, he added that it was instead reduced to "begging" for a lower corporation tax.

Posing the question how NIPSA should respond, he claimed this was "fairly straightforward".

"The Northern Ireland Executive say they have a job to do. Well, we have a job to do as well. And that is standing up for our members' jobs and terms and conditions of employment standing up for public services."

He told delegates this meant "getting organised, building our strength, being clear about what we stand for".

Mr Campfield added: "Not being afraid to protest, to lobby, to picket and, if necessary, to prepare for industrial action in a planned and intelligent way."



**Fisher: Osborne policy rubbish**

## 'Chilling' look at the South

**IN his address, PCS policy officer Andrew Fisher delivered a scathing overview of Chancellor George Osborne's economic strategy.**

He detailed how working people were having to bear the brunt of "fiscal consolidation" – code for "cuts for you and me" – and noted that a public sector pay freeze over two years was, in effect, a 10% pay cut [as inflation in the UK is currently running at 5%].

Mr Fisher pointed out that Osborne's policy was based on the mistaken conviction that the private sector "will ride to the rescue and solve everything for us" and that, somehow, the public sector was responsible for the crisis.

Against a backdrop of unprecedented spending cuts, Mr Osborne had gifted big business with £24bn in corporate tax breaks in his budget in June last year.

He told his audience of 250 public servants

that, in the Chancellor's view, "your jobs caused the crisis – it was all down to you!"

Mr Fisher also referred to the example of the Irish Republic, where the government had already tried the Osborne approach – attacking public sector jobs, pay and pensions – with predictable results.

He said: "If you want to look at what's in store for the UK economy, just look south of the border – a chilling reminder of what this so-called economic theory can do."

Mr Fisher underlined how the value of wages as a percentage of UK GDP had fallen by 10% since the 1970s along with a rise from 13% to 21% GDP in corporate profits over the same period.

This had caused "a huge shift in the power of wealth from working people to big business." Concluding, Mr Fisher insisted that trade union rights "translated into higher wages... and that's good for the economy".

## BUDGET ANALYSIS LAYS BARE

DELEGATES heard a detailed analysis of the impact the December 15 budget will have on jobs and services in Northern Ireland.

In a wide-ranging speech, assistant general secretary Bumper Graham noted how the political parties at Stormont had buckled before Chancellor George Osborne's cuts agenda.

Initially they had issued a strongly worded letter expressing concern about the cuts before last October's Comprehensive Spending Review – only then to indulge in the usual "po-

litical point scoring" – before becoming embroiled, by December, in a "Dutch auction" over pay freezes.

He wondered if this change had been prompted by Finance Minister Sammy Wilson finding "some Svengali magic" to sprinkle over his fellow Stormont ministers.

Mr Graham then outlined the extent of the cuts faced by the public sector, listing these as:

- £4bn cut from Northern Ireland's bloc grant over four years up to 2015,

- £1bn cut from Annual Managed Expenditure, affecting social benefits in particular; and

- 40% slashing in the capital budget – some £600m – over four years.

He slammed the "utter nonsense" of selling off government land assets at a time when values were at rock bottom, and asked: "Who is going to buy the land when they can't even make use of the Maze and the various army barracks that are lying there for redevelopment?"

Mr Graham also criticised the

# Play to strengths at branch level



Millar: Pushed case for organisation

**DEPUTY** general secretary Alison Millar underlined the important role played by branch activists in reaching out to the wider membership of the union.

She said winning the “hearts and minds” of ordinary, less-involved members was vital and could not be achieved without “much hard work” on the part of those who shouldered branch responsibilities.

But Ms Millar emphasised to delegates that the union had never successfully fought a campaign in the past without such hard work.

She also conceded: “Perhaps one of the things we’re not always good at is publicising our own successes.”

And, of course, she reminded the audience that “membership grows with success”.

Ms Millar also flagged up the need for the union at all levels to keep its message simple – even though the issues that faced negotiators and activists were often complicated.

She called on those who took roles in the branch to use “any and every opportunity” to engage with other members.

While it was always necessary to keep a handle on what was important at branch level, it was also necessary to look at much wider issues affecting the union.

Ms Millar said the ideal was to have an “interested, well-informed and active” membership, and highlighted the leading role communications and training played in achieving this.

She added NIPSA was concentrating on giving branches the tools they needed to strengthen their organisation – and claimed the union’s rep training was “second to none”.

Ms Millar urged activists not to get disheartened if confronted with low attendance at union meetings but to keep plugging away.

She added: “You won’t win every battle but you certainly can win the war.”



Graham: Stormont buckled before George Osborne

## THE CUTS

“foolishness” involved in freezing the regional rates over the past three years and slammed the “idiots” pressing for a “go it alone” approach to corporation tax.

Describing the draft budget consultation document as “inadequate, ill-informed and ineffective”, he warned it would “extend poverty, embed further social disadvantage, reduce public services to the standards of many decades ago and cast tens of thousands of workers unto the scrap heap of unemployment”.

# Govt must call rip-off Ireland investigation

CONGRESS president Jack O’Connor has called on the government to appoint an independent expert to probe alleged profiteering across the Irish economy.

It follows the results of a recent Eurostat survey that revealed consumers in the Republic paid significantly more for goods and services than their counterparts elsewhere in the EU.

Mr O’Connor, who is also SIPTU general president, said: “These consumer prices are remaining persistently high against a background of falling incomes and a deliberate policy of allowing unemployment to fester in order to drive down wages.

“It is impossible to understand why home-produced items such as bread, meat, milk or eggs are costing between 20% and 40% more here than in other EU member states, including our nearest neighbour and biggest trading partner Britain.

“It is quite clear profit taking is continuing on a massive scale. While working people are being crucified with falling incomes and rising taxation, certain elements in business are continuing to cream it.”

Mr O’Connor called on ministers to appoint an expert from abroad “with no connections with business interests here” to report on the situation.

He added: “Such a measure would contribute far more to competitiveness across the economy than the government’s prurient preoccupation with cutting the wages of the poorest workers in the country.”



Picture: John Chaney

O’Connor: probe call

## WAL★MART

THE Congress of South African Trade Unions has threatened the “mother of all boycotts” if a £1.5bn/€1.8bn deal giving US giant Wal-Mart a controlling stake in local retailer Massmart goes ahead. COSATU has claimed Wal-Mart is anti-union and, according to the organisation president Sidumo Dlamini, “has never done anything for workers”. Wal-Mart claim they will work with local unions and respect all contracts.

## Regularising will generate €100m

UNDOCUMENTED migrants could contribute up to €100m a year in taxes, permit and immigration fees if they were legalised, the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland has claimed.

The organisation called for an “earned regularisation” scheme to be put in place allowing illegal immigrants to work and pay taxes before being given residency.

According to the MRCI, many of the 30,000 undocumented migrants in Ireland are at an increased risk of exploitation – working long shifts for low wages – because of their status.

Describing the regularisation scheme as a “thoughtful and responsible” reaction to the issue, Edel McGinley of the MRCI warned “the problem is not going to go away”.



## Cops union in call for ban on far-right group

GERMANY'S police union GdP has called on the German government to renew efforts to ban the far-right National Democratic Party.

A previous attempt in the Constitutional Court to ban the extremist political party in 2001 didn't succeed after it was revealed that several high-ranking members were secret service agents or informers.

The NDP currently holds seats in two of Germany's 16 state parliaments.

Though acknowledging that banning the group and driving it underground might make it more difficult to monitor, GdP chief Bernhard Witthaut said it was important to send out a clear signal in the fight against extremism.

He added: "I think it's terrible how they mock foreigners living in Germany, I think their concept of a state is terrible."



GdP leader Bernhard Witthaut

### WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

## 57% of NI teachers say they are victims

MORE than one in every two of Northern Ireland's teachers have suffered some form of violence or abuse, a new survey has revealed.

INTO senior official Terry Carlin claimed the results, involving 2,356 responses taken between May and June last year, made "dismal reading" and called for the issue to be prioritised by education chiefs.

The survey, jointly commissioned by management and teachers' side of the Joint Negotiating Committee, revealed 57% of teachers had been targets of offensive language, insults or undermining behaviour.

Another 30% had never received behaviour management training while 32% claimed their staff handbooks did not address the issue.

Mr Carlin said: "This reports clearly identifies problems and gaps in the systems and processes that are in place to ensure schools are safe and that the health and welfare of teachers is a priority."

He added: "People do not feel safe because of a lack of secure entrances to schools, aggressive behaviour, intimidation, bullying and threatening behaviour from parents and other family members."

## Hike in attacks on NHS workers

UNISON has slammed as "an absolute disgrace" figures that show a sharp increase in violent attacks on NHS workers over the past year.

The 2009/2010 data, compiled by NHS Security Management Services, showed staff working in mental health trusts were exposed to the highest levels of violence – with an assault rate of 191.7 per 1,000 employees.

In ambulance trusts, the assault rate was 32.9 while acute trusts recorded a rate of 16.9.

UNISON's head of health Karen Jennings claimed the statistics made "sad and shocking reading".

She said: "Nurses, paramedics and other health workers should not have to go into work fearing that they may be at risk of attack."

"It is appalling that some members of the public see NHS staff as soft targets for assault."

"UNISON would like to see tougher legal action against those people found guilty of assault"



## UNISON COMPO HAUL

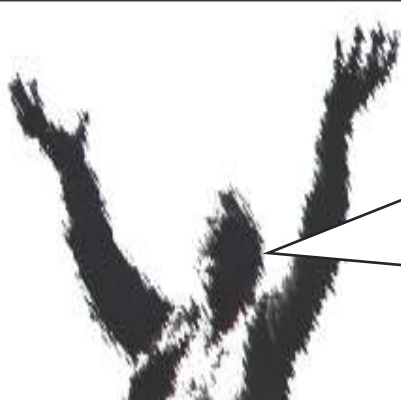
UNISON has secured more than half a million pounds in compensation payments for its members in Northern Ireland last year. The personal injuries payouts – involving 143 cases – totalled £559,509 in 2010.

Across the UK as a whole, £27,398,985 was paid out to members in settlements resulting from injuries suffered because of assaults, car crashes, back injuries and slips at work.

General secretary Dave Prentis said: "A lot of these injuries could and should have been prevented. These jobs are not dangerous – nursery workers, dental technicians and dinner ladies – but, because employers have been negligent, some UNISON members have lost their health, families, confidence and careers."

"Employers have a duty of care and where they fail, workers and their families deserve compensation for the pain and suffering caused by personal injuries."

Picture: UNISON



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# TUC: Banks 'pay LESS tax than rest of us'

CHANGES to VAT and corporation tax in the UK mean that banks could soon be paying a **LOWER** tax rate than consumers, basic rate taxpayers and small businesses, the TUC has claimed.

VAT in the North and across the UK increased from 17.5% to 20% on January 4.

While the headline rate of corporation tax is to fall from 28% to 27% in April, the TUC argues the effective rate for large multinationals fell to 21% in 2009, having dropped by a half percentage point in every year since 2000.

Thus multinationals could legally pay as little as 19% in 2011.

The fiscal changes will further

skew the UK tax system in favour of high profit industries such as banking over small businesses hit hard by the VAT rise.

It is claimed UK banks will also be able to offset the corporation tax rate cut against the £2.5 billion bank

levy outlined in the budget and actually cut their tax bill in 2011.

The TUC insists giving banks a tax cut makes a mockery of ministers' rhetoric about getting tough with banks for causing the global financial meltdown.

General secretary Brendan Barber said: "People will not be happy to learn banks have managed to earn themselves a tidy tax cut as a reward for their failure while the rest of us suffer from job losses, tax hikes and the wrecking of public services.

"It's about time the government stops being in thrall to them and implements some serious reform. Otherwise banks will make the same mistakes again and everyone else will be forced to pay the price.

"Consumer spending and growth are crucial. The last things we need are mass job losses and VAT hikes that will stifle growth and spread misery across the country."



**Commenting on Goldman Sachs plans to pay staff nearly £10bn (£11.8bn) in pay and bonuses for 2010, TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "These earnings would make Gordon Gekko blush. They have stuck two fingers up to austerity Britain while shelling out mega bonuses again. This government is overseeing a fast return to the worst excesses of the 1980s."**

## Bonuses for a few at top of BoI but rest face pay freeze



**Larry Broderick: Members shocked by move**

**THE IBOA has expressed shock that a small number of senior Bank of Ireland staff have pocketed substantial bonuses while their colleagues have had to stomach a pay freeze.**

The bulk of employees have also faced a deferral of outstanding pay awards, a cut in pension benefits and more than 2,500 redundancies to help secure the future viability of the bank.

**IBOA General Secretary, Larry Broderick: "To add insult to injury, quite literally, our members who have made these sacrifices have had to put up with abuse and derision from customers and the public at large in the mistaken belief that all Bank of Ireland staff have received these payments."**

He said the IBOA had made senior management aware of the

strong feelings felt by members over the move.

The IBOA has also written to the Republic's Finance Minister Brian Lenihan to seek engagement on reforming remuneration policies within the financial services sector.

Mr Broderick added: "It is long past time that we moved away from the reward practices introduced over the last decade or so, which have distorted the significance of performance-related pay in comparison to basic pay.

"These practices have also facilitated the shift in the culture of banking towards an excessive obsession with amassing super-profits – at the expense of ordinary customers and staff – and with devastating consequences for the wider economy."

## Don't let floods bill hit spending on services

THE Australian Council of Trade Unions has called on the Federal Government to rethink its plan to get the national Budget into surplus following the devastating Queensland floods.

President Ged Kearney insisted it was vital ministers reconsider the move after estimates that the flood damage bill could top \$20bn.

She said: "It would be detrimental to Australia's long-term prosperity for the extra costs of the floods to result in a re-prioritising of important government spending initiatives on infrastructure, or cuts to health, education and other services." Pointing out that the Aus-

tralian deficit projection of 0.8% GDP was low by international standards,

Ms Kearney added: "Australians understand that a modest deficit is an entirely reasonable way of funding nation-building infrastructure.



**Kearney: Budget call**

"No Australians would begrudge the government extending the deficit when the funds are to be used for rebuilding flood affected parts of Queensland."

Meanwhile, Australian unions and their members have already donated more than half a million dollars to the Queensland Premier's Flood Appeal.

[ozfloodhelp.org](http://ozfloodhelp.org)

## Staff of Superquinn store facing closure accept deal

**STAFF at Superquinn in Naas, Co Kildare, have voted to accept a deal on redeployment and redundancy negotiated by Mandate, SIPTU and BFAWU.**

The 103 employees – some with up to 30 years service – had been informed the firm intends to close the store on February 4.

Union officials were locked in talks for two days brokering a deal with management.

Mandate Assistant general secretary Gerry Light described the outcome as not an "ideal situation", adding: "The workers would much prefer for things to be continuing as they have for the past 30 years. Be that as it may, we had to deal with the situation as we found it and

try and get the very best deal for our members as we could under the circumstances." The deal includes:

- A three-month time-frame to switch between redeployment and voluntary redundancy options,

- Redundancy offer of five weeks pay per year of service, and

- A series of innovative arrangements including the retention of a right to a share of an agreed share pool, if and when available.

Mr Light added: "In the context of the current economic climate, we believe this represents a fair deal, which is why we were willing to recommend it and why we're pleased our members have accepted it."

## £2.50 per hour proposal 'will exploit interns'

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber has warned proposals to introduce a £2.50 hourly rate for interns will allow "unscrupulous employers to ignore the national minimum wage".

The proposals were put forward by the UK's Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development on January 10.

Mr Barber pointed out the government had abolished a special NMW development rate in 2006 after it was found to have been widely abused.

He added: "The TUC is strongly in favour of good training schemes, but we must always be on our guard against rogue bosses who want to use unpaid interns instead of paid workers."

"We urgently need more rigorous enforcement of the NMW to ensure that so-called interns are not exploited and abused."

## ASTI ballot on Croke Pk deal

THE ASTI is to ballot its members on the Croke Park Agreement.

It comes after clarification was given to the union following talks with officials at the Department of Education and Skills.

The ASTI's 180-member Central Executive Committee met on January 22 to discuss what had come out of those discussions.

General secretary Pat King said: "The CEC has always been adamant that frontline teachers would have the final say on the outcome of the talks between the ASTI and the Department of Education and Skills."

"This ballot is of utmost importance as it has major implications for the pay, working conditions and job security of second-level teachers."

It is understood a postal ballot of members will be held over the coming weeks.



Picture: Amnesty International

## Amnesty International REPORT Andrei Bondarenko

### Forced to undergo psych exams

A UKRAINIAN trade union activist is in hiding three months after a court ordered he should undergo a psychiatric examination.

In a judgment straight from the pages of George Orwell's 1984, prosecutors argued Andrei Bondarenko has an "excessive awareness of his own and others' rights and [an] uncontrollable readiness to defend these rights in unrealistic ways".

Amnesty International has urged authorities in Ukraine to stop the harassment of Bondarenko, who has no record of mental illness and has already undergone three psychiatric examinations – most recently last October – to prove he is sane.

Andrei Bondarenko has campaigned for employees' rights in Vinnytsya region since 2006 and his work has often exposed the unlawful and irresponsible behaviour of local officials.

He also appears to have angered authorities with his work on behalf of sugar factory workers.

These seasonal workers are employed

for only a few months each year following the sugar beet harvest – and it is claimed they are frequently not paid for their labours.

Many of these factories are officially owned by shadow companies, although it is rumoured the real owners are often well-connected locals.

Bondarenko started taking these firms to court to demand payment of wages.

The court ruling against Bondarenko comes after a number of incidents including the assault and harassment of Ukrainian activists.

On October 15, police in Vinnytsya searched the house and office of Dmytro Groysman, the chair of Vinnytsya Human Rights Group that supports asylum-seekers and campaigns against torture.

Andrei Fedosov, the chair of a mental disability rights organisation Uzer, was assaulted by unknown assailants last May, after receiving threatening phone calls the previous month. It was claimed local police took no action.

For more information visit [www.amnesty.org.uk/tradeunions](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/tradeunions)



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# How to stop oligarchies in their tracks



Picture: INMO

*“THEY started out idealistic and democratic but eventually became dominated by a self-serving group of people, who have achieved positions of power and responsibility. They became enthralled by their elite positions and more inclined to make decisions that protect their power, rather than represent the will of the group they are supposed to serve.”*

You could be forgiven for believing that this is a reference to the current government and the state which Ireland finds itself in.

However, these are words coined by the German sociologist Robert Michels in his 1911 publication *Political Parties, The Iron Law of Oligarchy*.

One hundred years ago, Michels recognised the inbuilt tendency of all complex social organisations to turn bureaucratic and highly undemocratic.

According to Michels, even left-wing parties of Western Europe in the pre-World War I era who were committed to mass democracy and equality tended to become de facto oligarchies.

## DECISIONS

He noted that even in his own fundamentally democratic organisation, The German Social Democratic Party (SDP), only a few people in executive positions actually held power and made all the important decisions.

Eventually, the SDP leaders gained real legislative power and public prestige, but instead of serving the collective will of the mass membership they were, in fact, dominating and directing it.

Over the past three decades, Ireland, it could be argued, has developed its own fine version of the ‘Iron Law of Oligarchy’.

The political oligarchy is the last one standing or, at least, the one in the public eye.

However, it is clear that there were also banking and business oligarchies, among others, who gained their own elites who cornered power for their own interests.

Consistent with the ‘Iron Law’, many of these oligarchies were controlled by even smaller elite groups within them rather than the larger body whom they purported to represent. Hence, widespread apathy evolved from the early 1990s on with consistently lower levels of participation in democratic organisations and in referenda and general elections.

The irony of the ‘Iron Law’ is that such apathy fosters even better conditions for the oligarchy and preserves their dominance for far longer than it would otherwise do.

The apathy that has existed for well over a decade now, has suddenly been arrested by the

## VIEWPOINT

INMO deputy general secretary

### Dave Hughes

shock of the disastrous outcome of the behaviour of some of those oligarchies – particularly the banking and political ones.

Hence a widespread alienation has emerged with all forms of establishment, and out of that alienation a growing tendency is evolving where economic and business commentators are being proffered as some form of super-intellectual, managerial elite who could sort out all our problems.

In most cases people suggest that these people should not even have to be elected but should come from some form of list or preferred system which would allow them not have to answer to the people.

In fact, almost all of the people calling for political reform are actually arguing for reduced democracy and not more, and are therefore, arguing for lesser accountability and even more extreme forms of oligarchy than we have experienced.

As citizens we must all take responsibility for taking an active role in our community locally and nationally.

The preoccupation with an economy has been indulged at the expense of our community and, particularly, our health system.

The spectre of hundreds of people waiting on trolleys is an annual event, both in the

**As citizens we must all take responsibility for taking an active role in our community both locally and nationally**

good times and now in the bad times.

It is a growing indication that society simply does not care until the problem comes to its own doorstep.

We will have an election soon and the only people who we can vote for are those who will put their names on the ballot paper.

There is every possibility that many new faces right across the existing political parties will emerge from this election and politics will change as a consequence.

To indulge in the folly of following those who concentrate only on the economy and offer apparently quick-fix solutions will be a bad mistake.

We must seek commitments from our political parties that wrong doing will be punished and that laws, such as our Offences Against the State Act, will be revised to encompass white collar crime and those who put the nation in peril.

We must demand of those canvassing us that our health service will be a priority and not an afterthought, and that the standard of education of our children is of high quality in terms of international comparison.

## BANK DEBT

We must demand that they prioritise work for our people and that instead of pouring money down the black hole of bank debt, they demand of the banks of the world that mortgages reflect the actual value of property now rather than the grossly-inflated and unjustified price that was demanded from the ordinary householder over the past decade.

These are indeed extraordinary times but it is important to note that the ‘Iron Law of Oligarchy’ suggests that people wishing to avoid oligarchy should take a number of precautionary steps.

They should make sure that the rank-and-file citizens remain active in the politics of their country and that leaders should not be granted absolute control of a centralised administration.

As long as there are open lines of communication and shared decision making between leaders and the people, an oligarchy cannot easily develop and sustain itself.

Money is still the root of all evil and power still corrupts.

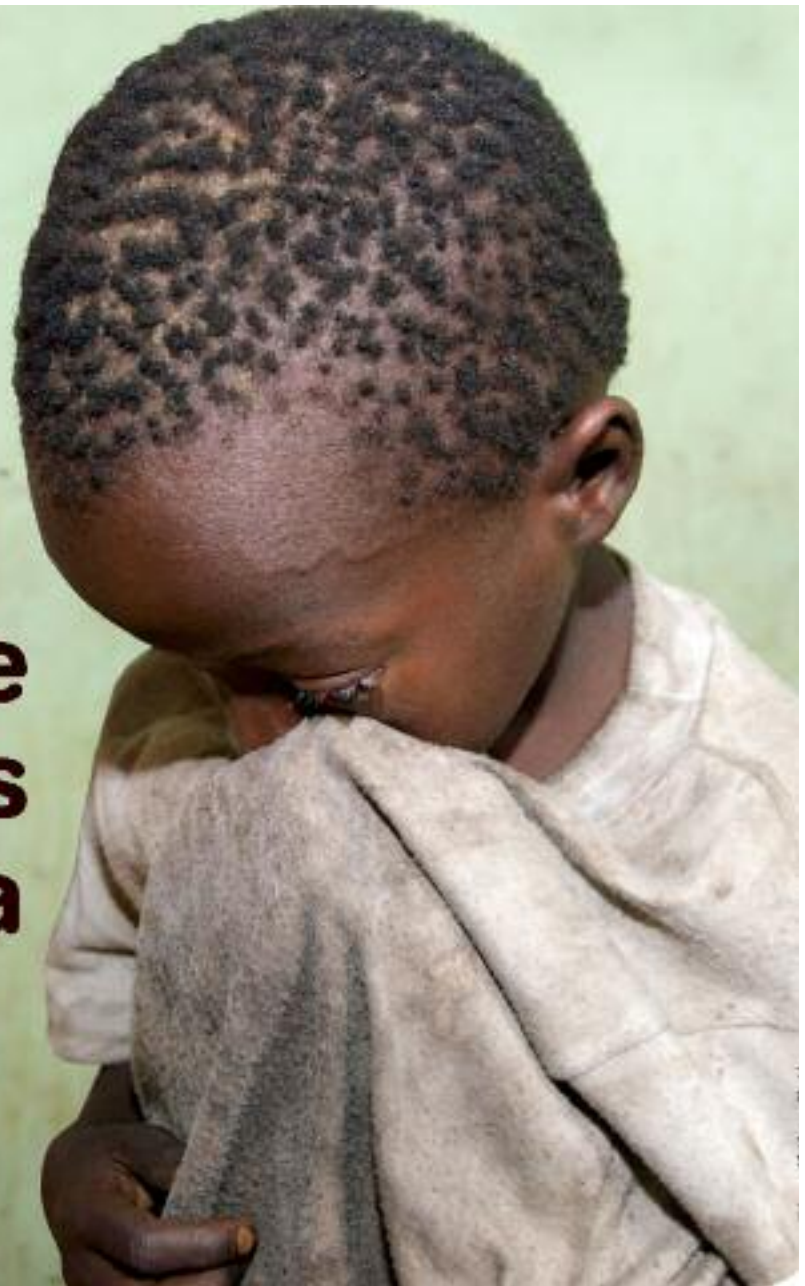
We must avoid allowing our frustration with what has happened lead us to the point of handing away our democracy to monosyllabic experts whose cure may be worse than the cause.

We can make a change and we can change politics by participating fully in the coming general election and making it clear that we will be there to judge those same people on the next occasion and every one thereafter.



Sightsavers

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of his eyes  
takes Talla  
closer to  
blindness**



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