

uniteWORKS

January/February 2012

The magazine for Unite members

for Ireland

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland 'closed' on N30



Press Eye

Congratulations to all our members in the public sector across Northern Ireland who participated in the N30 strike and attended rallies in support of protecting their pensions.

The tremendous support shown by our members in Translink meant there was no public transport operating on November 30 and this sealed the success of the strike...the biggest industrial action in Northern Ireland since the 1970s.

The biggest rally took place in Belfast where 15,000 strikers heard Unite's **Michael Dornan**, a bus driver with Metro Bus and chair of the union's transport committee speak. Defending the action, he said, "There are people standing out there, losing money, losing a day's pay, but it is for something that they believe they are entitled to."

Michael added, "No-one wants this. We didn't take this lightly. It is not just about pensions. It is about the economy, about the elderly, about jobs and benefits. We believe we have a right to fight for our pension, it is ours, we should not be robbed of it."

With rallies held in Derry, Downpatrick, Omagh, Ballymena, Portadown, Magherafelt, Cookstown and

Craigavon, Unite regional secretary **Jimmy Kelly** said Unite members had been brought to a situation across health, education, local government and transport where they are really declaring, enough is enough.

"Thousands of our members took to the streets throughout the whole of Northern Ireland, in towns and villages, showing their determination to fight for a more decent and more equal society.

"Our members are demanding the richest individuals in our society and the huge corporations pay their fair share so that we can ensure quality public services available to all," said Kelly.

"The principles shown by those who took action on N30 are in deep contrast to those who belong to the millionaire club in the UK Cabinet that is seeking to wreck public services and demanding that low and middle income workers must pay for the financial crisis. Unite calls upon the Northern Ireland Assembly to change tack, stop implementing the austerity programme and defend the welfare state."

Unite warns of damaging budget

The top one per cent of adults in Ireland own 28.6 per cent of the wealth; that is 35,000 people owning assets worth €190bn



The Republic of Ireland's budget introduced in December ignored all the sensible alternative proposals put forward to spark growth and emerged as one which will do little for the deficit but wreak further harm on an already badly damaged society.

"Measures like the VAT rise, flat-rate household charge, and carbon tax increases will hit those hardest who can least afford it," said Unite regional secretary **Jimmy Kelly**.

"Cutting spending and raising tax other than on the most wealthy will stunt any growth before it begins to take hold.

"Tax receipts will be lower, unemployment higher and recovery longer as a result of this latest austerity budget. It is a budget for the wealthy few. It will damage Ireland," he added.

Unite made a pre-budget submission outlining seven steps by which the government could and should have amended the 2012 budget to avoid further damaging the

social and economic fabric of society.

Unite will continue to press for these measures as the crisis deepens.

Every forecast published after the government plans were announced forecast lower growth than it needs just to stand still.

The Unite alternative budget would raise €2bn through progressive tax measures aimed at producing a more equitable tax base. These include the removal of property based tax reliefs, raising €450m; a reduction in the subsidies paid to high income pension pots raising €200m; and extending the universal Social Charge and PRSI to capital income, bringing in another €290m.

A wealth tax, essentially extending fair tax to stocks, bonds, cash and super pensions as well as property would mean a real difference to national well being and only a notional difference to real usable personal wealth. The top one per cent of adults in Ireland own 28.6 per cent of the wealth; that is 35,000 people

owning assets worth €190bn.

"The super rich may squeal," said Jimmy Kelly, "but for them it might be one less helicopter and that could mean square meals for 1,000 more children living on the poverty line only miles from their mansions."

Unite's budget outlines six investment programmes, all fully funded that will create thousands of jobs from day one.

"We cannot afford to just accept that slash and burn is the only option," added Jimmy. "Austerity is killing growth and more of the same will only see our economy stagnating as it has throughout this period.

"Society cannot bear that. We need to be brave and show imagination. The proposals which Unite will continue to press for are workable, affordable and would drive us back towards growth and employment."

• To download your copy of the Unite alternative budget submission visit www.unitebeunion.org/ireland

We won't stand back and watch

The growing economic crisis has seen employers attack and cut workers' pay and conditions of employment in the short to medium term.

Thousands more workers have lost their jobs with little prospect of securing alternative employment. The construction industry has seen the loss of 170,000 jobs in the past four years and employers seeking to cut workers pay at every opportunity.

Unite is not merely willing to stand back and watch. We have deployed new organisers into the mechanical section of the construction industry. The key to

protecting workers' pay and conditions of employment is to build workplace organisation with high union membership density. No employer is going to take any union seriously if they have low union membership density. It is only through the development of workplace organisation can the attack on pay and conditions by employers be resisted.

We are confident that we can build a strong lay activists/representatives led organisation within the construction sector. We can't do this from the top down; we need our members to develop

strong workplace and sectoral structures to advise and influence the policy direction of Unite in the construction sector.

We look forward to your continued support and commitment in defending all our members' interests.



Jimmy Kelly
Unite regional secretary



Unite members picketing Mater Hospital construction site, the largest industrial action in the first half of 2011

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Aviva: stay on redundancies

Workers at Aviva will still be looking with trepidation at what 2012 will bring, but at least their jobs were protected in the run up to Christmas after Unite and management at the company agreed there would be no redundancy notices served to any staff in Ireland until the final outline of the proposed company restructuring is clear.

Workers voted overwhelmingly to take industrial action should that not be the case and morale remains very damaged by the process of non communication which the company adopted throughout the saga that blighted 2011.

News of the loss of a potential 950 jobs from Ireland, as well as an additional 300 to be outsourced broke in October

but rumours had been rife since early in the summer. The company finally advised staff in late November of the broad areas where jobs were proposed to go.

"The process of analysis, engagement and negotiation is now under way," said Unite regional officer **Brian Gallagher**.

"Unite's priority is to ensure those who wish to remain with Aviva can do so and those who want to leave will be given fair and generous terms. The resolve of the membership at Aviva, the hard work of the committee, and the support of Unite has never wavered. We are hopeful an agreement will be reached to save as many jobs as are possible."

Bank staff feel insecure

A survey of Irish banking staff has revealed a chronic lack of confidence in management of the banks and just one in seven staff feels confident about their own job security.

The survey was carried out in November by Unite across nearly 5,000 members working in Irish Life and Permanent TSB, EBS Ltd, and Bank of Ireland incorporating New Ireland Assurance and ICS.

“There is a real lack of confidence among staff in the ability of current management to rescue the once proud Irish banking sector,” commented **Colm Quinlan**, Unite regional officer.

“That just one in seven should feel confident about what one generation ago was considered a stable and secure job is a real indictment of the damage wreaked within banking as well as within the wider community.”

The survey was taken to assess the general feeling of members. “We can now co-ordinate action to reverse the decline in sentiment and confidence among our members in banking,” added Unite Regional Co-ordinator, **Walter Cullen**.



300 members of UNITE took strike action during Christmas week in protest at the withholding of a 13th month payment which was made to management but stopped from pay packets of lower to middle earning workers

Our members said

Staff comments – anonymous for fear of reprisals, include

“I’m currently being paid under €26,000 per annum for the job I am in, while trying to pay a mortgage and bills. Not only am I earning less and less but my workload keeps increasing. The attitude I’m faced with is you are lucky to have a job and if you leave there is nowhere else for you to go. This is totally unfair as the lower paid workers are bearing the brunt of what the rich fat bankers have done to put us in this situation.”

“It is thoroughly depressing working for this company now I hate coming in everyday and wouldn’t if I could afford not to do so.”

Our survey said

Banking workers just don’t feel secure

- only 13 per cent had confidence in the management of their company – but 60 per cent did not
- only 29 per cent enjoyed their current working environment – but 58 per cent did not
- over three quarters of respondents in a customer facing role, felt uncomfortable taking actions management asked them to do over the last year
- around 64 per cent were not confident in their job’s security – one in seven
- a significant 83 per cent were concerned about their pensions
- and well over half would support industrial action in defence of jobs and conditions

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