

# uniteWORKS

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The magazine for Unite members

## for Ireland

PRINT

## Belfast Telegraph jobs fight goes on

Production department workers of Independent News and Media in Northern Ireland have rejected management demands for more redundancies at the *Belfast Telegraph*, resulting from plans to move the *Belfast Telegraph* printing process to Newry.

Unite members have declared total opposition to management's contention that the plan of publishing the paper in Newry is on economic grounds and that 24 workers in the day shift are to lose their jobs because of the switch over.

The company revealed, after union pressure, that it plans to save £1.1m each year with the proposed job cuts. Unite sought immediate talks with the company's managing director Michael Brophy to resolve the issue. Mr Brophy has since been elusive and difficult to pin down.

Stephen Macauley, Unite regional industrial organiser, said, "The production department members have decided unanimously, especially on the anniversary of the sinking of the



Defiant – Ireland regional secretary Jimmy Kelly with Unite members opposing job cuts outside *Belfast Telegraph*

Kevin Cooper

Titanic, they are not going to go down quietly.

"Since 2005 the company staffing levels have been reduced by nearly half, and a rolling programme of redundancies has been constantly ongoing – all this while receiving public cash in 2005 and 2009 to save jobs!"

A Unite delegation did meet with MD Michael Brophy and his senior management team to outline their immediate concerns and demand that no compulsory redundancies be enforced. But a second scheduled meeting broke up after management said Mr Brophy would not be attending.

The Unite delegation felt that since he was the figure orchestrating the job losses they would withdraw until a new meeting could be arranged.

Meanwhile, on March 3, a Unite-led demonstration was held outside the company's offices in Royal Avenue, Belfast. The dispute continues.

WOMEN

## Inspiring women's day

Unite members marched through the centre of Belfast on March 8 to celebrate International Women's Day with other trade unionists and groups.

Unite regional women's officer Taryn Trainor, said, "For the women of the world, International Women's Day is not only an occasion to review how far we have come in our fight for equality, peace and development, but also an occasion to mobilise for sustainable change.

"It's a celebration of the achievements and contributions of each to the collective objective of gender equality. We hope their commitment, determination and achievements set an inspiration for others."



Inspired – Unite women outside Belfast city hall

# EBS – industrial action over

In early February Unite formally withdrew its industrial action at the EBS Building Society. A ballot of more than 300 members voted by a margin of 94 per cent to accept an agreement brokered between Unite and the company at the Labour Relations Commission.

The agreement sees half of the disputed 13th month payment withheld in December being paid directly to the staff involved; a payment of €4.8m by the company into the staff pension fund; and undertakings that normal industrial relations procedures would be adhered to throughout the period of integration of EBS staff into the larger Allied Irish Bank.

“This was a dispute which our members were determined to undertake,” said Unite regional officer, **Colm Quinlan**. “Employers have too often used the difficult times in which we live to make changes to workers pay, terms and conditions that are unreasonable and based on opportunity rather than a genuine business case.

“It was important to fight back in this instance and workers who would never have known what it was like to

do so have been empowered by the reality that effective protest, on the right arguments can produce the fair result and the right result.”

“Unite has stood behind its members in the face of initial limited sympathy and has shown that agreement is possible when strong negotiation is undertaken.

“Unite membership at EBS among the grades we represent has jumped from a little under 90 per cent to just short of 100 per cent. The agreement reached last week, has meant a turnaround from 98 per cent in favour of strike in December to 94 per cent in favour of a return to normal work announced today. That is a testament to the determination of the workers involved, as well as their willingness to engage with a fair solution.”

“There is no doubt that we will have very significant challenges in the course of the coming year,” said national co-ordinator **Walter Cullen**, “but there will be little doubt in the minds of the decision makers that the workers, acting together and with the support of their union, are a force to be reckoned with. We are not willing to be pushed around.”

## CONSTRUCTION

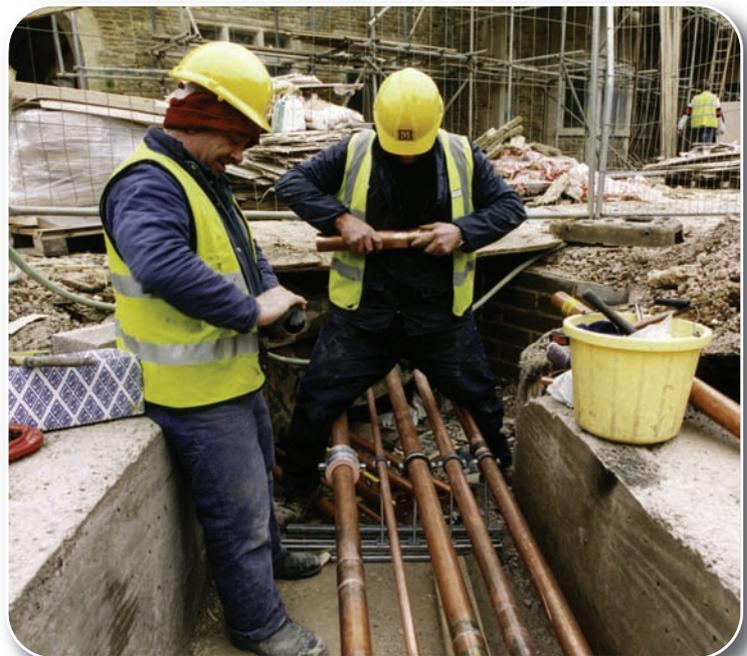
# Construction – strong stand

Mechanical workers in the Irish construction sector are shaping up for a battle with employers over suggested changes to rates of pay and conditions of work.

The sector has been hit hard in recent years and a reduction was agreed last year on the basis that this would go no lower. “Employers are whining about being undercut by other contractors and say there is no alternative but to reduce rates,” said Unite regional officer **Brian Gormley**.

“There is no more to give from our members and we are willing to make a strong and determined stand against this race to the bottom. Employers are doing little to enforce the registered employment agreement and have chosen instead to try to dismantle it. That won’t happen.”

Unite is organising a general meeting of members in the sector at the Red Cow Moran's Hotel in Dublin on Thursday March 29th at 5.30pm to show the strength of feeling against the proposed changes.



# We vow to fight ESB break up

Unite represents electricity workers across the island of Ireland and we have vowed to continue our opposition to the breakup of the ESB through the sale of any of its parts.

The value to Ireland of the ESB has been built up over generations. We have consulted over time with members and we are fundamentally opposed to the fire sale of state assets in

order to mistakenly right the wrongs of the banking disaster.

There has been no consistency in terms of either the last or the present government's stance on the issue and today's lack of any detail means that our members will remain uncertain of their future.

Just as importantly, Ireland remains uncertain about its energy security.

Mention has been made of the possible sale of non strategic energy assets but if that is the case, what can be their value and how can this be of benefit to Ireland?"

We will remain in consultation with our members but as things stand today any sale will be opposed using every means at our disposal. Once we know more detail we will, if needed, hold a ballot for industrial action."

Unite also has members in Bord Gais who are, at the time of writing balloting over potential industrial action on a range of issues. A larger part of the company is supposedly in line for a state sale with interested parties reported to be gathering from around the world.

At such a time of global economic downturn it's unlikely that any sale would return fair value for the state, and there has been debate over whether the sale was forced by the Troika



Jimmy Kelly

Unite regional secretary



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## PRINT

# Taoiseach brought into pay war

Six long serving workers at the *Connaught Telegraph* newspaper recently met with Taoiseach Enda Kenny in a bid to resolve a dispute with the local paper.

The six workers in Mayo were taken off the payroll last November when the newspaper outsourced its production. They were told to claim their statutory redundancy from the state, a process which can take up to a year but pressure from Unite saw that expedited to offer some relief.

The workers are still owed a collective €20,000 in unpaid wages and holiday entitlement. It was expected that this money would have been paid in December but the company bankers would not sanction the payment, and there has been an impasse since.

It is hoped the meeting with an Taoiseach, together with a request to all political representatives to boycott the paper until fair settlement has been made, will speed the process.

"This has been a terrible example of insult upon injury for workers who

had helped to build this paper within their local community," said Unite regional officer **Claire Keane**.

"The paper is trading away without a care in the world but has not shown any remorse for its treatment of our members and their families."



Connaught Telegraph Unite members meet Enda Kenny

# No to household charge

Unite has formally pledged its support to the *Campaign against the household charge*. It will urge its members not to register for the flat rate €100 charge and will support national and local protest movements where the union has a density of members around the country.

Unite regional secretary **Jimmy Kelly** said, "We are not against broadening the tax base on those who are rich enough to pay. We believe it's right there should be a tax based on

property as exists widely and generally fairly throughout Europe, but not on the family home of low to middle income earners and not at the scandalous flat rate we are being asked to pay in the short term.

"As of today, we are formally opposing the household charge that is being levied without care or thought for its impact on every household in this country. We will stand beside those who have not registered to pay the flat rate charge. We will urge our

members throughout the country not to register."

Jimmy added, "It should be focused on creating jobs and protecting the jobs we have instead of privatising and selling off public assets and taking 15,000 to 20,000 public sector jobs out of local economies."

Unite has participated in a number of public protests and will roll a campaign of encouraging members to stand up against the charge throughout the country over the coming weeks.

## WOMEN

# Painful cuts

Deep cuts – Unite's Geraldine Kelly



Kevin Cooper

"Cuts in our health services are having a devastating impact on women in our communities," declared Unite's Geraldine Kelly, attending the ICTU Women's Conference in Belfast, in March.

Moving Unite's motion on the effects of the austerity measures were having on women's health, Geraldine said, "Hospitals were making cuts in all areas with maternity ward operating on a six-hour turnaround for new mothers."

The motion called on ICTU to lobby both governments in Ireland to take steps to ensure that the economic downturn is not used as a justification to undermine a women's right to proper healthcare.

But the introduction of the UK coalition government's welfare reform bill she said will hit women the hardest.

She added, "Organisations dealing with domestic and sexual

violence are suffering because of the major cut-backs to their funding. This at a time when records show the highest numbers needs support and help in 25 years.

Meanwhile, cuts in provision for mental health, is affecting suicide support groups who have no cash to pay their workers."

Trade unions and communities, she said, needed to fight all cuts and austerity measures on the island of Ireland.