

uniteWORKS

May/June 2012
The magazine for Unite members

for Ireland

CONSTRUCTION

NO to pay cuts



A meeting in Dublin of around 500 angry Unite construction workers vowed to stand up against any employer seeking to cut their pay or dismantling national agreements.

Working in construction's mechanical section, members heard employers claiming they cannot win business because other employers are undercutting wage agreements.

Unite regional officer **Brian Gormley**, said, "It's down to employers to force compliance among their own. They cannot demand workers take lower wages while their profits remain stable and their managers keep driving fancy cars and living in fancy homes. Unite wants honest engagement and straightforward reward for skilled labour."

Paul Box /reportdigital.co.uk

ROAD TRANSPORT

Members 'robbed'

Unite is seeking legal redress after two of Northern Ireland largest hauliers Woodside Haulage and McBurney's Transport have failed to pay their drivers their full holiday pay entitlement.

Unite regional organiser **Sean Smyth** explained that Woodside Haulage and McBurney Transport have contravened the working time directive over many years by failing to pay drivers their average wage while on leave.

"Unite members have rejected Woodside's derisory single offer of £50 compensation and that full holiday pay will be honoured in future, while McBurney's has refused to talk to the union reps and ignored all of Unite's communications on the drivers grievance.

"What the companies have done is illegal and they have robbed our members of hundreds of pounds."



Stormont plans risk 600 jobs

Unite's fight to save the future of 12 Northern Ireland newspapers – and up to 580 jobs that could go with their closure – stepped up a gear in April as Unite went to Stormont to argue against the Executive's plan to stop public advertising in local newspapers.

Unite and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) are deeply concerned that cutbacks being discussed recommending a massive reduction in government advertising, could mean the closure of 12 of Northern Ireland's 60 newspapers, with an estimated loss of 362 jobs in newspapers and up to a further 217 in dependent sectors.

The proposed cut-backs, revealed by Detail.tv, arise from the Lavery review (2010), which showed that government departments spent £12.3m on media advertising in the last financial year, around 70 per cent of the recruitment revenues of some newspapers.

Unite believes Stormont Executive advertising is



© Joanne O'Brien/reportdigital.co.uk

necessary and plays a key role in disseminating important public information. Advertising is also vital for encouraging applications for government jobs – ensuring those most socially and economically excluded from the peace process and government institutions are given every possible opportunity to apply.

Unite believes that removing government advertising in the current climate could adversely impact on the economic viability of many newspapers, particularly local, so reducing diversity as well as costing jobs.

Unite added the proposal could be seen as a step towards political censorship. The campaign continues.

MANUFACTURING

Waterford settled



Former workers at Waterford Crystal will receive between €600 and €2,500 after settling a Unite-supported court case over the surplus in a disability fund at the time the company went into receivership.

The individual amounts are to be based on a pro rata calculation determined by the workers' length of service and the amount they had contributed to the fund during the time of their employment.

"The receiver was claiming that all the money in the surplus should stay in the company," said Unite's **Walter Cullen**. "The judgement ruled that the workers were entitled to the bulk of the money as it had accrued from their contributions. Unite has commenced the process of calculating the payment and is staying in communication with those who are entitled to a payment.

We must vote NO

The referendum on May 31, will, if passed, enshrine in our constitution the provisions of austerity for years to come. Unite, like many other unions, has recommended our members vote No vote.

We share the view of the broader European trade union movement that this treaty will weaken Europe by stifling growth, increasing the scourge of long term unemployment and undermining the faith of the people in the ability of the economic and political elite to fix the problems that beset us.

Government ministers are attempting to coerce the Irish public by claiming if we don't pass the Treaty we'll be left without any institutional funding in case we can't return to the markets. This is simply not true as we continue to meet all the criteria for continued funding from the IMF and the EFSE.

The Fiscal Treaty will lead to further austerity measures. Unite estimates

this could result in an additional €8bn in spending cuts and tax increases over the next few years. This will have a significant impact on living standards of those in work and an even harsher impact on the ability of those suffering unemployment having the opportunity to work again.

We know that austerity doesn't work. We know that the very premises of the Fiscal Treaty are counter-productive.

To date, Irish governments have introduced €25bn in spending cuts and tax increases and yet debt is still rising and the deficit remains unacceptably high.

Three-quarters of a million people are at risk of poverty with hundreds of thousands more living just marginally above the official at-risk poverty level. We have fallen back into recession with domestic demand falling at the fastest rate since the dark days of 2009.

Worth noting is the significant number of economists from across the

political spectrum who've criticised the Treaty and its provisions. Few believe it will work or that it constitutes a sound economic approach to the crisis we face. The debate should be open and honest.

It should not be undermined by scare tactics. Nor should the Irish people be insulted by sound-bite appeals to our desire for stability and recovery – something the Fiscal Treaty cannot deliver. We should be told the truth. The cost of the Treaty should be laid out to the people – the cost to Ireland and the Eurozone – in terms of austerity, unemployment, poverty, falling incomes and economic stagnation.

Only then can people make an informed choice. Without the cost being outlined, we must vote no.



Jimmy Kelly

Unite regional secretary



Calling Cuba



Philip Wolmuthy/reportdigital.co.uk

Hospital cleaner at Musgrave Park Hospital, Belfast

Unite has called on Stormont to look to Cuba to help resolve the current crisis in the NHS.

The union suggested in April that Cuban consultants, doctors and nurses should be employed on a temporary basis to get a grip of the A&E and operation backlog.

Unite regional organiser **Kevin McAdam**, said, “While politicians squabble and point the finger of blame the issue could be easily sorted out. What our NHS requires is a solution not point scoring between political parties.”

He explained the Cuban health service is a world-renowned operation and that for many years Cubans health workers have been employed throughout the world helping overstretched services.

“It’s a simple solution we are calling for. If our politicians say they cannot find consultants and doctors to fill NHS vacancies from within the UK then look outwards. They wouldn’t have to worry about fulfilling private sector roles and concentrate solely on the NHS.”

Protest

As we go to press Unite health service members are getting ready to protest against the government’s proposals by staging demonstrations outside hospitals and clinics across Northern Ireland on May 10.

Unite NHS members including health visitors, pharmacists and paramedics now face, on average, an extra £30-a-month to pay for their pensions, against a background of soaring household bills.

INTERNATIONAL

Unite for Colombia rights

Unite throughout Ireland has got involved with helping the courageous fight by brave union brothers and sisters for trade union rights in Colombia – the most dangerous country in the world to be a trade union member.

And Unite and other trade unions in Northern Ireland launched a Justice for Colombia campaign in March and are bidding to find cross-party support from MLAs and MPs.

The aim is for local political parties along with trade union organisations to pool their experience in the Northern Ireland peace process and offer it as way forward to the Colombians.

“We will be bringing a delegation from Colombia to Northern Ireland in May in order to meet our MLAs, trade unionists and peace activists. They will impress on us all to support their cause for peace. It is crucial for Stormont administration to play its role,” said Unite regional secretary **Jimmy Kelly**.

