

uniteWORKS

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UNEMPLOYMENT

NI youth jobless crisis



Philip Wolmut/reportdigital.co.uk

Latest figures show a further rise in unemployment. For the period April-June it stood at 7.6 per cent, up almost a full percentage point over the quarter and up 0.4 per cent over the year.

The July claimant count is a slightly different measure – and according to the department of enterprise, trade and investment, “on this measure NI has had the highest unemployment rate among the 12 UK regions for 28 consecutive months.”

Most worrying is the rise in youth unemployment and the growing duration of unemployment among the 16-24 age group. The claimant figures for July give a picture of the worst affected local authority districts in NI – including Derry, with 12.6 per cent of youth claiming unemployment benefits.

But if you look at the rate for those in the 18-24 year old group you get a more accurate picture of how difficult it is for young people in the labour market. The unemployment rate for this group is 22.3 per cent – up 5.3 per cent over the year.

“The longer young people are frozen out of the jobs market, the more difficult it will be for them to ever break into it, whenever the economic crisis recedes,” said Unite regional secretary, **Jimmy Kelly**. “Northern Ireland, like so many regions of Europe is in danger of creating a large permanent cohort of young people who have never worked and may never get the opportunity to work.”

PUBLIC SECTOR

Croke Park talks soon

Discussions on the next stage of agreements between public sector workers and the ROI government are likely to commence in the autumn and Unite is preparing to stand firm in support of members.

“We think it’s fair to warn the government that our members have nothing more to give in any proposed renegotiation of the Croke Park Agreement for public service workers,” said Unite national co-ordinator **Walter Cullen**.

“The idea of getting more for less can ultimately only go so far. We have been meeting with our reps in the public service sector to examine how best we can approach the next phase of any deal and how best we can protect the interests of our members.”



Banner out at Tolpuddle

For the third year running an unofficial Unite delegation from Ireland attended the rally, which during the weekend drew crowds in the thousands. Pictured carrying the new banner, are **Greg Sachno**, from the region’s education department and **Carolyn Sachno** a Unite health member, with **Jim Quinn** from the organising department. The new banner is on display in the education room in the Antrim Road Unite offices in Belfast.

Landmark ruling soon

It's expected the European Court of Justice will make a landmark decision in October in the pension case brought by 10 former workers at the Waterford Crystal Plant and supported by Unite.

The ruling is likely to have major repercussions for the way in which pension funds are protected in Ireland.

When Waterford Crystal and Wedgewood were effectively closed in 2009, British workers within the group had their pension entitlements secured by the UK's pension protection fund. Irish workers though were advised they would be getting only 20 to 35 per cent of their entitlements.

The different treatment arises from the Irish government continually refusing to implement an EU directive, insisting on pension protection facilities being made available in all member states.

The directive dates back over 30 years to 1980. It was continually opposed and delayed in Britain and Ireland by a case fought by the UK government, supported by Ireland, which sought to avoid its implementation.

The landmark 'Robins' case was finally decided in 2007 when the European Court of Justice found the British government was in breach of the directive by not ensuring pensioners received at least 50 per cent of entitlements in

the case of a company insolvency.

The Westminster parliament recognised it was wrong and introduced the Pension Protection Fund, securing the rights of Waterford Wedgewood workers and all others in a similar position in the UK.

The Irish government did no such thing and the 10 former Waterford Crystal workers at are being dragged through the Irish and then the European Courts in pursuit of justice.

The Waterford Crystal workers are facing a shortfall themselves alone of over €2.5m, the difference being that which they would receive between working in Britain and Ireland.

"The Irish government participated in the Robins case but has conceded it was wrong. At least the British government acted straight away once it knew it was in breach," said Unite regional secretary, **Jimmy Kelly**.

"Unite has helped this group of workers to bring the case because the government was clearly in breach of its obligations.

"The result though, when it comes, will be worth the fight and be of major importance to the way in which the government applies directives that are for the benefit of working people and their families."



Pride of Belfast

Pictured are Unite staff and reps working at the Belfast Pride Festival – (l-r) **Charlene Leah-Currans**, **Mellissa Leah**, **Sally Haggan** (LGBT committee member) and **Lucinda Townsley**. The festival attracted more than 35,000 people on August 4. Unite hopes to recruit new members after a number of community membership forms were taken up.

Urgent action needed now

The level of unemployment at 15 per cent and rising is a national crisis. The numbers at work are still falling. Long-term unemployment is the second highest in the EU-15. And 30 per cent of young people are unemployed.

We need an urgent and immediate response. We welcome all initiatives that can put people back to work and increase our productive capacity. But we're concerned that many of the projects that have been discussed – European Investment Bank and Project bond funding – won't come on stream for some time.

We need immediate action to reverse the increase in unemployment and give hope to people. Short-term measures can bridge the gap between the crisis today and medium-term solutions that will take time to develop.

Unemployment is not a natural phenomenon. It is created by policies. It can be resolved by policies. Ultimately, it is a political choice.

Unite is clear on this point – the most important political choice we can make is to put people back to work and prevent people, especially our youth, from falling into long-term unemployment. We can reverse the spectre of high unemployment. All it takes is political will.

There is no simple solution. It will require short and long-term strategies to increase investment and economic activity. But such is the gravity of the situation that urgent action is required to provide a temporary boost to job creation while medium-term solutions are being rolled out.

We will be sending the proposals to every member of the Oireachtas and are willing to engage with politicians and others from across the political spectrum to get things moving.

We have to act right now. These ideas could have 40,000 people back in work over the coming months. That's 40,000 homes with an income, 40,000 people pulled out of despair.



Jimmy Kelly

Unite regional secretary

Unite's response

This September Unite will highlight 16 projects in transport, health and justice infrastructure that could immediately commence using €2.3bn of public money, representing only 15 per cent of the liquid assets currently inactive in the state's control.

These projects would provide one year's worth of full employment for more than 20,000 people and deliver much needed improvements to the quality of life in Ireland.

We will also outline a youth job guarantee scheme. This will, if implemented, divert money currently wasted on inefficient measures to produce 20,000 jobs for young people presently in danger of chronic long term unemployment.

Unite proposes immediate implementation of

- a one-off €2bn additional capital investment programme that will directly employ 20,000
- a youth job guarantee to provide 20,000 job placement for young people at risk of long-term unemployment

The net benefit for society of this scheme is incalculable.



Fighting austerity – Unite has a plan

Coca Cola outsourcing threat

Unite reps were stunned when Coca Cola announced in August the possible loss of up to 90 jobs so soon after moving into their newly established £93m plant at Knockmore Hill, in Lisburn.

Unite has fought hard to keep the jobs in Lisburn after the company closed its plants in Lambeg and north Dublin in favour of one site for the

whole of Ireland. The job losses, it's understood, would affect mostly production, engineering and distribution.

The company told staff it would be using a third-party distribution company and hoped some employees would be transferred. Unite regional organiser **Sean McKeever** said, "Workers have been left in total

shock. It was less than two years ago that the Queen officially opened the visitors' centre yet now there are 90 jobs on the line.

"We believe the work is there within the plant, and if Coke looks at the outside contractors they're bringing in to do work at the plant, there's absolutely no reason for any job losses," he said.

Curate's egg summer

It was a bit of a 'curate's egg' summer – with mostly bad news for the finance sector. A serious blow came with the announced closure of 16 branches of Permanent TSB, but there was a boost from Aviva, with the creation of hundreds of jobs in Galway.

Unite reps at Permanent TSB met with members throughout the weeks following the announcement of the closures and the loss of between 195 and 250 full time equivalent positions.

Around 60 per cent of the losses will be from the branch network and the balance from head office.

Unite national co-ordinator **Walter Cullen**, said, "There was an undertaking the jobs lost would be on a voluntary basis but we've been working through a number of local issues involving the redeployment of those staff whose branch is down to close but who wish to stay within the group.

"Our members need to be convinced

by action and deed that the restructuring will secure the remaining 1,800 jobs, that management are capable of implementing effective change and that they will be accountable for their decisions."

A week before the closures announcement there had been some good news within the sector, when Aviva started recruitment of 220 new staff for the Knocknacarra facility in County Galway.



Cuban reflections

Unite sent a delegation, as part of a trip organised by Dublin Trades Council, to represent the union to commemorate Cuba's May Day celebrations. Delegate **Geraldine O'Neill**, Unite education co-ordinator from Belfast, said, "We could learn a lot from the Cubans – they put people before profit. I would encourage anyone to get out there and see for themselves."