

Speech of David Joyce, Irish Worker Delegate

International Labour Conference 2018

Esteemed President,

It is an honour to once again address the conference on behalf of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

I would like to welcome the report of the Director General: "The Women at Work initiative: The push for equality". As the report points out, we are still a long way from the goal of equality, and progress towards it is slow, uneven and uncertain. That is why we have put so much effort during this conference into the task of negotiating a much-needed international standard to guide the fight against violence and harassment in the world of work. This will be a major contribution to the broader push for equality. The last year has also uncovered several incidences of workplace sexual harassment and Congress has called on the Minister for Justice to strengthen current equality legislation to protect workers in such circumstances.

In Ireland, on average, women still earn almost 15% less than their male counterparts. The Gender Pay Gap has many causes and solutions, including more collective bargaining. It is also our view that pay transparency in individual organisations would encourage progress by shining a light on the causes of inequality and encouraging employers to address them. A growing consensus between Government, employers and trade unions has emerged on this issue and we hope that The Gender Pay Gap Information Bill 2017 will be enacted soon.

It has of course been a momentous time for women's rights in Ireland of late with 2018 marking the centenary of the suffragette movement. And of course many will be aware of the recent removal by referendum of the

issue of termination of pregnancy from our Constitution. The Government need to now legislate for the introduction of a regulated, comprehensive and quality healthcare service that is safe for women and girls, in line with international norms.

The Irish Government has been playing an active role since taking up a Titulaire seat on the Governing Body of this house. We welcome this commitment, as illustrated by the participation of the President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins in tomorrow's World of Work Conference and the commitment to ratify the ILO Forced Labour Protocol during 2018. We also look forward to marking the ILO centenary in Ireland during 2019.

However, despite a strengthening economy (assuming a relatively benign outcome to Brexit negotiations) and improved labour market conditions, there is still much to do in tackling decent work deficits in Ireland, including:

- The incidence of precarious work and the need for legislation that delivers improved employment rights for some of the most vulnerable and exploited workers in Ireland. (a point linked to the standard setting discussion at this conference)
- The extent of our 'Low Pay' problem;
- The urgent need to revise our pension system;
- Lack of implementation of a "Just Transition" towards a carbon free future;
- Lack of the right to representation;

These and other related issues arise directly as a result of the absence of a right to Collectively Bargain in our State. We did make some progress in the 2015 Industrial Relations Amendment Act but the decent work agenda will only truly be addressed when we achieve Collective Bargaining rights, where workers can bargain the value of their labour, without fear and where members of Trade Unions can exercise their right of access to be heard.

We will also be highlighting these and other issues as our Government reports on its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the High Level Political Forum in New York in July.

On the issue of Social Dialogue, we have been working with the Government and IBEC on the development of a formal social dialogue forum that can discuss public policy issues that affect workers and business, but which cannot be resolved at workplace level. The 'Labour-Employer Economic Forum (LEEF), involving government, business and unions has recently expanded to deal with issues like the cost of housing, the cost of childcare and eldercare, the pension crisis, collective bargaining, and employment rights. The context of Brexit highlights the compelling case for government, unions and employers to discuss and agree responses to this and other issues of concern.

On housing, a move from public provision of social housing towards a new conventional wisdom that the 'market' could provide these services more efficiently has resulted in thousands of people (including children) being either homeless or living in totally unsuitable accommodation. For a majority of workers rental costs have become unaffordable and most do not meet the criteria to successfully apply for a mortgage. This has led to increased pay demands to account for these cost of living factors. We have been seeking support from politicians on our Charter for Housing Rights and it is in all of our interests to find a solution to this problem. Social dialogue can be an important tool in this regard.

Finally, I want to note the report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories and the decent work deficits it outlines.

Unemployment in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has reached the highest level in the world. Job creation is at best anaemic. The report goes on to note how these cannot be tackled while the occupation continues. It also notes how Gaza is blocked to an extent that tests the limits of endurance. This is illustrated recently through recent events and the tragic killing and

injuring by Israeli forces of innocent protesters (and those seeking to assist the injured). Responses need to move beyond words of condemnation and so we have sought a meeting with our Minister for Foreign Affairs and have reiterated our view that Israel must face consequences for such actions if there is to be a real peace. To that end, the Government needs to support the Occupied Territories Bill currently in our Parliament and formally recognise the decision of the Parliament to finally recognise the state of Palestine.

Thankyou President.

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