

# NIC ICTU rally for a Better and Fairer Northern Ireland



On the 6th of November the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions organised rallies in Armagh, Ballymena, Belfast, Coleraine, Craigavon, Derry, Enniskillen, Magherafelt, Newry and Omagh to demand a "Better and fairer deal for Northern Ireland". The demonstrations were organised in order to demonstrate opposition to cuts in public services and for fair treatment of all workers.

Organise! attended the Belfast rally, marching with workers, Trade Unionists, socialists and other anarchists into the city centre from the City Hospital to join hundreds more outside Belfast City Hall.

John Corey, chairperson of the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU opened by welcoming workers and Trade Unionists to the rally and commended the stand taken by postal workers against Royal Mail management. Telling those present they were part of a movement of working people rallying in 10 centres in the north and in 8 cities and towns in the south he stated:

"We are all out today to deliver the message to government, north and south... That the trade union movement is going to stand up against attacks on our public services. That's a message that we are delivering loud and clear... We are going to stand up for the rights of working people and their families and that we're going to stand up for fairness in this society".

"This government, the British government, had no problem finding 85 billion last year to save

banks and the financial world from its own self destruction and reckless action. This week its reported that the government has managed to find another 29 million for so-called financial stability, and who's being asked to pay for this? Its certainly not the bank bosses and those who run the so-called free market that we have to live with... it is working people and their families who are being asked to pay, with cuts in their public services, cuts to beds in hospitals, closures of old peoples homes and the kind of news that you heard this morning that working people are to be left with choices between treatment for swine flu and screening for cancer. We are saying its a shame and disgrace that that is happening and we are out to stop that happening!"

He went on to say that the rally was not just about opposing cuts but was also about how our society was going to treat working people, twenty thousand of whom have lost their jobs in the last year in Northern Ireland.

"The Trade Union movement is saying no, working people are not going to pay for the expenditure cuts that you are demanding. We're not going to pay to bail out the banks".

"We will fight cuts in public services and fight for a better and fairer society" announced Corey, who closed by restating opposition to the introduction of household water charges in Northern Ireland.

Peter Bunting then spoke:

"Fellow workers, friends, comrades, we are here today to expose bloat, waste and time-

serving at the heart of the public sector. I am talking about, of course, the people who rule us, who write the laws, frame the budgets, those who serve in the Assembly and in Westminster. The people we elect who have fiddled while the economy burns. Just as many have been fiddling their expenses. The public has been short-changed and it is time for pay-back". Criticising government and questioning whether our politicians lived in the real world Bunting stated that almost 23,000 jobs have gone in the last year, 53,000 are unemployed while almost 30% of our working age population are "cast aside in the ranks of what's termed the economically inactive".

As a solution Bunting demanded the Assembly "get with a new program" that places at the centre of our politics "the daily lives of its citizens".

"We need to understand that the best solution to poverty and social exclusion is work. Work in well paid, humanely rewarding and unionised careers" going on Bunting demanded a re-think on "who our economy is supposed to serve... We need to challenge the consensus that cuts are inevitable in our public services because we have to keep the bankers in the luxury, and the bonuses, to which they have become accustomed".

In closing Bunting called for an alternative vision of a Northern Ireland that is "fit for purpose for all its inhabitants".

Bunting was followed by Patricia McKeown, Regional Secretary of Unison, Kevin McAdam from Unite and Lawrence Huston of the CWU. While Patricia fostered some illusions that our 'representatives' in Stormont may act on demands to end attacks on our public services she did threaten strike action if they refused to listen to the unions and public sector workers. We at the Leveller will not be endorsing her invite to politicians to work on 'our' side - such a move would be like inviting foxes into a chicken coop.

Kevin McAdam promised that this would be the start of a campaign to fight cuts and attacks on workers and public services while

Lawrence Huston, perhaps wrong-footed by the recent suspension of industrial action by the CWU, floundered as he excused the role of the CWU 'leadership' while promising that the resolve of postal workers in this struggle remained strong.

In closing Corey promised that if politicians failed to listen that the campaign would go forward and include a campaign of industrial action across the north.

Industrial action should be built to defend public services, but hard lessons need to be acknowledged and workers need to organise themselves. We need to build links among all workers to take control of this struggle ourselves and ensure that it is not sold short by Trade Union bureaucrats as happened to our postal workers. Workers inside and outside the Trades Unions need to be involved in this struggle. It is encouraging that industrial action has been threatened but what is it that the Trade Union leaders will be happy with from 'our' politicians?

The NIC ICTU campaign for 'A better and fairer deal for Northern Ireland' demands "social solidarity" between the Trade Unions and government. It is a demand for a form of social partnership that has restricted and hampered the labour movement in the south for years. We are opposed to cuts and job losses but we cannot support demands for social partnership with government and the bosses. Giving the union bosses a seat round a table at Stormont will not serve the interests of workers. We need to organise and take control of our own struggles. We need to show the bosses and politicians that we will not sit back and accept attack after attack. We have no problem with pointing out that we are expected to pay with cuts and job losses for the current recession while bankers are bailed out and private consultants are paid a fortune. However the problem is not their 'bad' decisions. The problem was, and remains, fundamental to the functioning of capitalism. A system based on exploitation of working people in pursuit of profits for the few. With the will and organisation to see this struggle through we could see an important short-term victory. Real victory will not be ours until the system that produces booms and busts is scrapped and replaced by a libertarian communist society based on the needs and abilities of all.