

PEOPLE'S VOICE

NO TO JOB CUTS! PROTECT PUBLIC SERVICES! SAVE THE NHS!

THE purpose of this special newspaper is to inform the reader of the damage the cuts have inflicted and will continue to inflict on our people, our economy and Northern Ireland.

Over the past four years, £1.5 billion has been taken out of Northern Ireland through cuts in education, health, housing and transport provision to the people. This means lost jobs in both private and public sectors and the loss of career opportunities

for school leavers. The current cuts arising out of the budget set out under the Stormont House Agreement will pile more misery on the working poor as well as the unemployed and those who cannot work.

These cuts are already damaging our schools and colleges, with jobs lost and fewer places for young people to gain the skills they need to get decent work.

Older people are being afflicted by cuts to health and social care services

and the public transport to access these entitlements. Trade unions in Northern Ireland urge you to read the articles in *People's Voice*, discuss with your friends and workmates and family and then use this to challenge those politicians who will be knocking on your doors seeking votes both at this General Election and the NI Assembly election in 2016.

Austerity has not worked. Society should be served by an economy not impoverished by an economy.

There is a better and fairer way to govern. Challenge our public representatives to resist the cuts, the stupidity of borrowing £700m to lay off up to 20,000 workers and the gamble of giving business £400m of our money by slashing Corporation Tax on their profits.

If you are concerned about the future for your family and friends, then please read People's Voice and support our campaign.



OUR VOICE WILL BE HEARD

POLLING DAY
MAY
7



The Tory keynote policy of the Parliament which has just ended was Welfare Reform – and they haven't finished yet.

Although the *Welfare Reform Bill* is still delayed at the Northern Ireland Assembly, a resolution of some sort will emerge after the general election. Then, we are told by both of the men who could become the next Prime Minister, more changes are on the way.

While the Stormont House Agreement makes explicitly clear that the Northern Ireland Assembly must adapt the changes made to Welfare in England, Wales and Scotland, it is certainly implied that further changes across the Irish Sea will also be followed here – or the Assembly will face sanctions, in the shape of punitive fines from the Treasury in London.

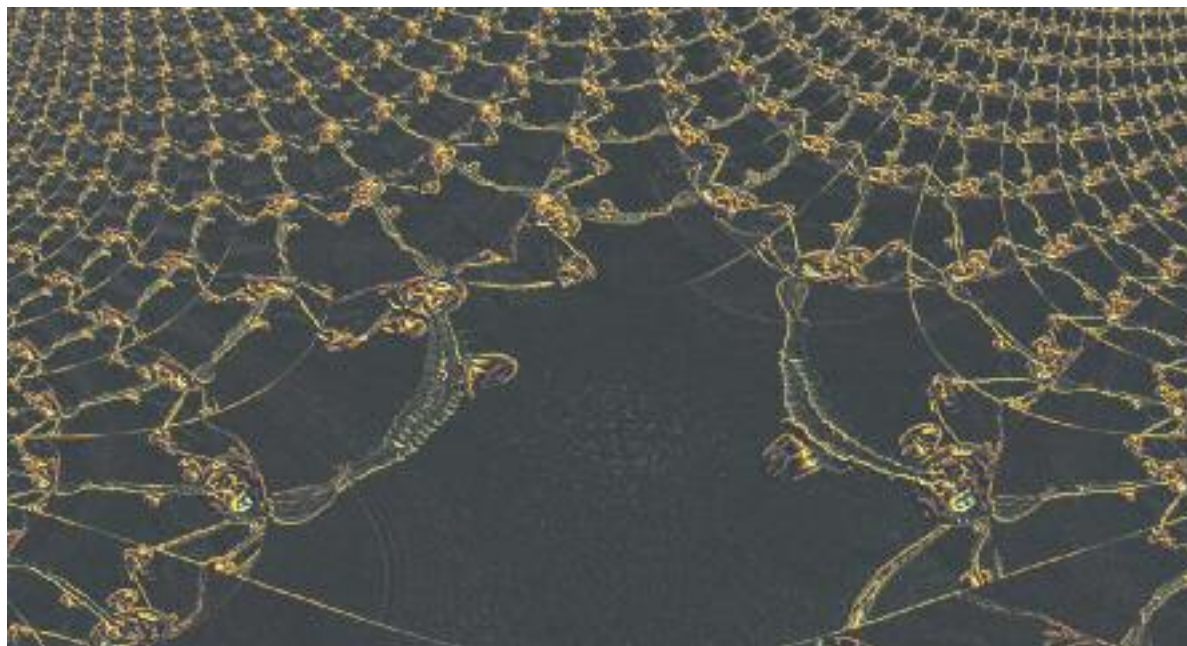
Leaner & meaner

Whoever forms the biggest party in the incoming Westminster coalition government, Labour or Conservative, have pledged radical changes to make the Welfare State leaner and meaner. The difference is in the scale of the cuts and the enthusiasm of the Ministers making the cuts.

Labour has been quiet on what they'll cut. They 'only' need to cut £7 billion to meet targets. They've already hinted at tax increases to meet some of this.

The Conservatives have made it clear that they expect people on benefits to carry the entire burden of austerity over the next five years. George Osborne is using the figure of a further £12 billion which can be 'saved' (i.e. cut) from the welfare budget. However, despite being asked hundreds of times, the Tories have refused to give any details of what benefits will be cut or even abol-

MORE HOLES FOR THE SAFETY NET



Picture: AWA (CC BY-SA 2.0)

ished. Most political observers believe that pensioner benefits are safe, despite being the biggest part of the welfare budget. The cynical press reporting of welfare in the UK has corrupted the public debate so much that most people think that most benefits go to the stereotype of a 'lazy scrounger with too many kids and a huge TV.'

In fact, pensioners get the biggest slice of the welfare budget (and quite right too). However, pensioners vote in far larger numbers than the long-term un-

employed, lone parents, economically inactive and people with mental and physical disabilities. Guess which groups of people are being targeted by the Tories for the £12 billion in cuts? People with few friends in high places, people who are socially isolated, people with 'problems' and people who have been demonised by a hostile media as undeserving scroungers.

A leaked email from the Conservatives suggest the sorts of welfare claimants who will be sacrificed. The cuts suggested by

officials include restricting child benefit so it is payable only for the first two children, and a regional benefits cap, taxing disability benefits and reducing eligibility for the carers' allowance.

David Cameron has already discussed cutting the maximum amount in benefits a household can receive from the current £26,000 to £23,000.

These measures are not about addressing people's needs. They are intended to save money which can be used to pay for tax cuts, such as that which will allow

the transfer through inheritance of £1 million mansions tax free.

A proposal to restrict the carers' allowance to Universal Credit claimants could save the UK government £1 billion, with 40% of existing claimants losing out. The taxing of disability benefits could save up to £1.5 billion a year.

Rosanna Trudgian, policy officer at the charity Mencap, has flagged up the unfairness of the proposed changes.

She said: "Disabled people don't choose to have their disability. They don't choose to pay for these

These measures are intended to save money which can be used to pay for tax cuts, such as allowing the transfer through inheritance of £1m mansions tax free

additional costs related to that disability. For example, if you have to go to hospital on a regular basis and you are paying for those huge car parking fees. Therefore, it's just unfair if this is treated as taxable income."

This is the face of welfare after the next election. It will be leaner under Labour, and a lot meaner under the Tories. These cuts target families, carers and people with disabilities, including victims of the conflict.

This ought to be a 'red line' issue for the 18 MPs we elect.

Women and children first – for the chop...

Savage cuts to the public sector will lead to the loss of thousands of jobs. As women make up two-thirds of the public sector workforce, this will inevitably have a disproportionate effect upon women...

Women will lose out from the changes to welfare...

Changes to the welfare system have a disproportionate impact on women. As women remain the primary carers for children, they have been particularly vulnerable to cuts in tax credits.

● Of the total savings planned by the Tories up to 2018/19, women will bare 80% of the re-

duction in tax credits and 75% of the reduction in benefits

● Child tax credits have been frozen since 2010 – the vast majority of recipients are women

● So far lone parents have been most affected by changes to welfare and tax credits since 2010 – 90% of lone parents are female

Women are more likely to be in low-paid work...

● Almost two-thirds of public sector employees are women. Women who work in the public sector are more likely to have equal pay and have fairer chances for promotion.

● In comparison, women in the private sector earn 20% less than men.

Women will lose out from a 're-balanced' job market...

● Food Services, Accommodation, Retail, Residential Care and Social Services have the highest number of workers below the Living Wage – Women account for two-thirds of employment in these sectors

Our public services now face their greatest threat ever and THOUSANDS of jobs will be lost. No community will be left untouched.

In health and social care, we have already lost more than 1,000 beds, our A&Es are in crisis, homecare and residential care is being slashed and privatised, staffing levels are unsafe and more cuts and closures are planned.

The Minister has refused to pay the Pay Review Body recommendation for health workers. Our schools have already been hit with four years of radical budget cuts and are now facing a further four years of cuts.

Thousands of teaching and non-teaching jobs are still at risk despite last-minute statements by the Minister that some more money has been found.

All at risk

School meals workers, school cleaners, classroom assistants, nursery nurses and school admin and technical staff are all at risk. We are all entitled to ask why the most vulnerable people in this society are being targeted by our government? Why are the young and the old, the vulnerable and the sick being stripped of vital services? Why is our government in Northern Ireland following the same right-wing policies which are destroying services in England and which are being challenged in Scotland and Wales?

Why are public service employers who have a duty of care to the people making deeply damaging cuts right across our society? None of this needs to happen. The unions have continuously called for existing public money to be spent properly and in an open and transparent way which the people understand. We have continuously demonstrated that there is more money to be raised if corporations and the very rich behaved with honour and paid



Illustration: opensource.com (CC BY-SA 2.0)

IT'S CRITICAL!

their dues. Instead of listening to these sound arguments, which would make life better for the majority of people here, our government intends to cut even more jobs and services to give companies and corporations a tax break.

There is something fundamentally wrong with a government and a set of public sector employers who are also pushing a privatisation agenda to make money out of 90 year olds in need of homecare, vulnerable residents in homes, vital ambulance services and on the backs of the lowest paid women who cook and clean. For all of these reasons, and more, trade union members stood to-

Why is our NI government following the same right-wing policies that are destroying services in England and are being challenged in Scotland & Wales?

gether across the public sector to take strike action on March 13. On that day the buses and trains stopped running, school closed, health and social services were reduced to emergency only. The Civil Service was also effectively shut down.

We have made all the arguments on equality and human rights to protect the people and the workers. They have fallen on deaf ears. Between April 27 and May 10, UNISON are calling on health workers to take further action short of strike.

Other health sector unions will be taking similar industrial action.

VOICES ON THE FRONTLINE



EVELYN GRAHAM
Hospital Domestic

I am a domestic in the Ulster Hospital. As a result of the cuts we are severely short-staffed – but no new people are being started. I work in A&E but am constantly moved to a different department. The standards in my section then fall. Everyone is doing the equivalent of work of two people – it's exhausting. We are being given more work to do but the overtime has been stopped. It will get to a point where quality control will fail and that puts a lot of pressure on us. We all feel the same way. We are all at the end of our tether. I love my job but with the increasing cuts, it's getting too much to cope.



VERONICA BALDWIN
Homecare Worker

I am a homecare worker in the Newry and Mourne Trust. I look after the personal care of patients washing and taking them to the toilet, making sure they get their medication and preparing them a meal. My workload has definitely increased with the cuts. I am expected to carry out the same amount of work in under half of the time I used to have. My calls have been cut down from 25 minutes to 10 minutes, it's almost impossible to carry out all the work in this time. Most of the people I visit have no family support, I might be the only person they see that day. It's a constant struggle trying to find the balance between being quick, carrying out the job properly and protecting the dignity of the patient. If you sit back, people will walk all over you. This is not acceptable and we will not stand for it.

PAT NEESON
Hospital Porter

I'm a Band 1 worker meaning I'm the lowest paid. I'm also a part-time worker so I can't afford to go on strike but I will because I have seen the damage the cuts are doing to our patients and staff. Elderly, frail and lonely people lying on trolleys for hours on end waiting for beds that don't exist. Their dignity and self-respect gets stripped away. Staff stress levels are through the roof as pressure is constantly put on them to continue to do more with fewer resources and fewer staff for wages that are well below the cost of living. It breaks my heart to see a place like the Royal Hospital (a one-time



leader in healthcare) become nothing more than a cattle market. I am supporting industrial action to save our health service and I hope people who care about the NHS will join me.

SARAH SAVAGE
Staff Nurse

I work in the 24-hour nursing team out in the community but I have previously also worked in the A&E department in the Mater Hospital. I have seen how the cuts are affecting staff and patients. We are put under constant pressure to get patients home early to free up hospital beds as there are not enough in the hospitals. Stress levels are up and morale is low. We are getting more and sicker patients through the door and there is not enough staff to treat them. Responsibilities for staff are upped and we are constantly asked to do more and more. It's the patients who will suffer and staff feel guilty that they do not



have the same amount of time to spend with them because of the increased workloads. It has got so bad that we took strike to put an end to the cuts and avoid a crisis in our NHS.

The right to a decent home and somewhere to call home is something that many of us take for granted, yet there are still almost 40,000 households in Northern Ireland on the social housing waiting list.

This list, which is operated by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, has 22,000 households in housing stress including more than 9,500 households deemed statutorily homeless.

The reason for the continual growth in people looking for a social home is not straightforward but there are many and complex reasons such as the Right to Buy Scheme, introduced during the Thatcher years, which reduced the NIHE housing stock by some 100,000.

Trade unions were opposed to this scheme for a number of reasons including the fact that the 'house sales' money was not reinvested in building more social homes but was in effect redirected back into the coffers of Westminster.

Hedge funds

In 1996, the Housing Executive's power to build new homes was removed and instead that function was transferred to the Housing Association movement.

The Housing Association movement was able to obtain a Housing Association Grant (HAG) and then borrow the money from banks and other sources of finance, including hedge funds.

Unfortunately for a number of reasons – including the difficulty in borrowing, lack of available government funding as well as the sell-off of public housing stock – this has led to the crisis we see today in housing and homelessness.

A March for the Homeless took place on Saturday, March 18 at Assistant General Secretary Peter Bunting spoke of how homeless made people feel "guilty and scared".

He told marchers: "We want to avoid that, so we cross the road and look away instead at the shiny baubles of a consumer society. We are encouraged to see homelessness as not a political issue. We are encouraged to blame the victims.

"We are told that there is nothing we can do. Oh yes there is and, yes, we should do something – something political..."

Mr Bunting continued: "What can be done? We need more



Picture: Elmira College (CC BY 2.0)

SOLVING ISSUE OF HOMELESSNESS BRICK BY BRICK

homes, houses fit for the people, operated by the people and owned by the people. We need more social housing. Therefore we must keep the Housing Executive as a single public body. We need more affordable homes for working families. Therefore we must resist the Tory pledge to privatise the properties managed by Housing Associations.

"We need more starter homes. The young are saddled with debt when they leave education and stranded in jobs that pay below the Living Wage. We need rent controls and enforced housing regulations, to protect students, migrants and other poor tenants from rapacious landlords. We must abolish the modern rack-rent market."

The Social Development Minister also set up a Taskforce for a Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland which, in the view of the trade union movement, is not really about getting more people into suitable accommodation but will potentially grow the private

rented sector. This private rented sector is burgeoning out of control with many tenants and prospective tenants fearing crippling rents, sub-standard accommodation and, in some cases, unscrupulous landlords.

While it is accepted that part of the Taskforce is to root out unscrupulous landlords, that cannot

be guaranteed. NIPSA Deputy General Secretary Alison Millar has queried the proposal to split up the Housing Executive into separate bodies – one to deal with strategy and the other to deal with the landlord side of the business.

The Housing Executive has already effectively separated these elements of the business internally with the landlord functions having to be self-financing from this financial year.

This is because the previous Minister had indicated his intention to change Housing Executive radically with the effective transfer of 88,000 housing stock units to one or a number of Housing Associations.

Trade unions are fundamentally opposed to this proposal which would result in rent convergence to economic-based rents rather than affordable rents which the Housing Executive has put in place since its inception.

Unions recognise and appreciate that there is a role for Hous-

ing Associations. However, the dogma with which the current Federation of Housing Associations is pressing forward supporting the transfer of the Housing Executive stock to the Housing Association movement is not a substitute for a central, publicly-funded housing body. There have already been two voluntary stock transfers in Northern Ireland – in the Creggan and in Bangor.

Unless the shackles are removed from the Housing Executive and they are allowed to upgrade their own stock by performing multiple element improvements [new kitchens, bathrooms, heating etc in one go] then the growth of the Housing Association stock and the rents that go with them will become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The NI Housing Federation is opposed to statutory rent setting – one reason is that they will need to set rents at a level which will ensure they can repay their loans [and it is likely that the HAG will be phased out].

Affordable

The unions advocate statutory rent setting to ensure that the rents for tenants are set at an affordable level and not left to the vagaries of the market, loan charges and repayment schedules.

Many will say there are no alternatives but if we look at the Stormont House Agreement, it is clear there certainly are alternatives. Rather than borrowing £700m to cut 20,000 public sector jobs, that money could be used instead to build many thousands of public homes.

New homes, built to house our families, our singles, our elderly and our disabled are more than a human right – they are an economic necessity. There is good work for thousands of people, that should be carried out as a vital public investment. It is hard to believe that our Assembly and our Executive are about to borrow £700 million to lay off 20,000 workers, in health, in education, in the arts, in the community sector and in the civil service, but we cannot find money to provide shelter to the homeless.

There is certainly an alternative and we must press our political representatives to examine their consciences and ask them to ensure that they invest in the future of the society we all live in to ensure everyone has a place to call home which is of a decent standard and homelessness is finally cast into the abyss.

New homes, built to house our families, our singles, our elderly and our disabled are more than a human right – they are an economic necessity...

SERVICES HIT THE BUFFERS

Translink, the management company with responsibility for Northern Ireland's public transport system, had its public funding for 2015-16 cut by £13 million.

The consequences were an immediate, inflation-busting 4.5% fare increase pushing passengers into private transport at a time when fuel costs have collapsed.

Management made great public play of a minor restructuring of senior staffing and held a series of unpublicised, public information events to provide a fig-leaf of justification for undisclosed cuts to bus and rail services.

Unite the union estimates that the total saving from cuts to front-line services in the coming year will amount to no more than £5.5 million but the impact on bus and rail services is very sharp.

Fare increase

Given anticipated budgetary cuts, the difficulty in imposing another hefty fare increase and the lack of interest in restructuring the tiers of unnecessary management, it is likely that at least two times more service cuts will be needed in the following year.

In 2015-16, 37 Ulsterbus services, 14 Metro line services and two NI Rail routes (Bangor to Newry and Larne to Belfast) are being targeted for cuts. There are also undisclosed proposals for station closures and removal of rural bus stops – all of which will undermine the cohesion and coverage of our public transport infrastructure. Taken in parallel to



Picture: Courtesy of Unite the union



Picture: Gillette's Crossing (CC BY 2.0)

the brutal cuts to funding for roads maintenance [see below], these cuts are total indefensible and will have a potentially devastating impact on the most vulnerable, the elderly, the sick, those with children, those on low in-

comes and those in rural areas who are dependent on our bus and rail services.

There is also a strong likelihood that engineering works will be 'rationalised' forcing further reliance on external private sector

providers who always end up costing more in the long-run.

Transport unions recognise that there is room for improved efficiencies and removing waste – particularly at senior management level – but 'service optimisation' initiatives exclusively focussed on reducing costs will only undermine the integrity and the interconnections that lie at the heart of a successful, modern public transport system.

We are also deeply concerned at parallel moves to bring in legislation enabling services to be contracted to private sector providers. Cutting 'uneconomic' routes and timetables makes the remaining services more attractive for such vulture operators who would desperately compete

Cuts will have a devastating impact on the most vulnerable, the elderly, the sick, those with children, those on low incomes and those in rural areas dependent on services

to grab profit-making routes but have no interest in the 85% of routes which are not profitable but serve a vital social purpose.

In Translink, the profitable routes subsidise the non-profitable ones – enabling us to retain exceptionally high connectivity and coverage rates by comparison to the UK where bus and rail were privatised by Thatcher.

Privatisation also poses a serious threat to workers' terms and conditions with private sector operators paying staff little more than a bare Living Wage.

All of the public transport unions are fully committed to defending Northern Ireland's bus and rail services as well as our members who maintain the service. Unite members have agreed a second day of strike action ahead of the election on May 6, with the aim of forcing our political leaders to find the small sums necessary to maintain a world-class public transport system.

Skeleton roads maintenance service is simply potty!

Two days into the new fiscal year, some roads maintenance workers working for Transport NI (formerly the Roads Service) were confined to depots as there wasn't enough money in the budget to pay for tar and concrete to patch potholes.

Preventative maintenance work is to be rationed through a £50 daily spending cap per depot – not even enough to buy in tar or concrete supplies!

As a result, roads maintenance will be cut back to a 'skeleton' serv-



Picture: Michael Gil (CC BY 2.0)

ice over the next year. This will mean that only the very worst potholes on the main routes will be patched, street lights won't be repaired and hedges will only be

trimmed once a year (leaving the branches and trimmings in the hedge as there's not enough money to recycle them). This will leave many roads, particularly those servicing rural areas, falling into a state of wanton disrepair.

Other measures such as discontinuing periodic drainage clearing will result in an increase in unforeseen flood events and ending regular checks of traffic lights will mean a sharp increase in signal failures.

These events, coupled with a gen-

eral degradation of the quality of our roads, will undermine economic growth, threaten basic road safety and inevitably result in injury or death.

Cuts to our roads maintenance budget are a false economy and completely unjustifiable. Roads Service unions will agree a common campaign strategy to build upon the success of the March 13 strike action and ensure adequate funding is provided for our roads infrastructure.

When the purse is light, as individuals make certain changes to our lives to make ends meet, to keep the lights on and food on the table. We tighten our belts, brace ourselves for winter in the hope that with spring will come new hope.

When the purse is light as a society, we face difficult choices. We do what we have to so the lights stay on; we tend our sick, we keep roofs over our heads, keep food on our shelves. We tighten our belts, brace ourselves for winter in the hope that with spring will come new hope.

As departmental budgets are slashed and public funds become ever and ever more stretched, we as a society suffer. The yearly allocation to the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure has been squeezed year on year so that currently they receive less than 0.01% of the overall budget.

The amount of money allocated by DCAL to the Arts Council NI (the funding and development agency for the arts in Northern Ireland) has as a result suffered so much that while in 2010 it was £27.4 million, today it has slumped to £13.5 million.

Lack of investment

This continuing lack of investment is somehow coupled with an increasing expectation of the potential return of these funds. It is worth repeating the arts receive less than 0.01% of the overall budget.

The *Draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020* highlights a number of points of action which it deems necessary in achieving its goal of growing visitor revenue to £1 billion by 2020 and visitor numbers to 4.5 million.

In achieving this DETI asserts that DCAL take responsibility for a “commitment to collaborating on cultural and arts festivals to support an events strategy”.

Belfast City Council has recently unveiled a consultation of their new *Integrated Tourism Strategy* which cites events and festivals as a key priority in their effort to double tourism in the city by 2020. In a purely economic sense both these organisations place arts and culture at the heart of their initiatives to develop the economy through tourism.

The reality of the situation is that the city’s cultural life does not, cannot and will not simply



Picture: Ken Teegardin (CC BY-SA 2.0)

MAKING A REAL PIG'S EAR OF ARTS FUNDING

pop into existence in order to fulfil economic targets. It is unfeasible to assume that world class arts and culture are something that can be thrown together at a moment's notice especially when in the last four years alone governmental funding to this sector has been more than halved.

World class indigenous artistic and cultural product can only come from a solid bedrock of individuals and organisations working within that field who can develop the specific skills and knowledge that is required to create the experiences and events which not only bring visitors to Northern Ireland but more, importantly, benefits everyone already living here.

It can be said that working in the arts sector is a luxury and that those fortunate enough to find employment in this line of work should deem themselves lucky.

It is a wonderful thing to work in an industry that you have a

passion for. It's a wonderful thing to feel like you are contributing to the society in which you live. It is a wonderful thing to work towards to growth and wellbeing of our nation. But feeling lucky and feeling valued are very different

We will lose the 33,500 people employed in the creative sector so important in making NI a culturally-vibrant place to live & an attractive tourist destination

things. Would we ask the same sacrifices of other professions?

Would we say to our teachers, you're so lucky that you work in education, or to our nurses, you're so lucky you have the opportunity to tend to the sick, and then feel assured that because they work in vocational sectors that they will be willing to do so for well below a living wage and in such an environment of uncertainty that year by year, and indeed month by month, they have no sense of security?

The last large-scale research into the actual living and working conditions of artists in Northern Ireland was undertaken in 2010, at a time when funding to the arts through central government was over double than it is today, at that time:

- 25% of artists had total personal incomes of £7,000 or less;
- 50% of artists (as stated) had total personal incomes of £11,746 or less;

● 75% of artists had total personal incomes of £19,346 or less.

Things haven't improved since then...

How can we reconcile the fact that central and local government have placed so much stock in the future potential of increased tourism and hinge the success of these initiatives on the cultural landscape; yet ask that this is delivered by a work force that is undervalued, under represented and undermined at every turn?

We will lose our creative work force if this mentality is sustained. We will lose the 33,500 people currently employed in the creative sector whose work is so important in making Northern Ireland a culturally-vibrant place to live and an attractive tourist destination.

We will jeopardise the £756 million we currently benefit from in tourist spend, never mind any hope of increasing this to £1 billion in four years. We will put at risk the 43,000 employed in the tourism sector and there is the very real possibility that along with the exodus of anyone employed in the creative sector, with a significant loss of cultural life, we will continue to haemorrhage residents.

We risk our burgeoning film industry as there will be no indigenous skilled labour. We risk losing investment from companies whose employees refuse to relocate to a cultural vacuum.

Sacrificed

Do we sacrifice our economic future? Do we sacrifice our creative work force? Do we sacrifice our opportunity to explore our identity through culture?

Or do we make other sacrifices in other areas which would allow us to retain dedicated funding to the sector of which we ask so much?

Traditionally DCAL has received less than 0.01% of the Executive's budget yet the creative and cultural industries account for 8% of the our overall GDP.

To relate back to my opening comment, and to intentionally play on some relevant popular culture phrases, the stark truth of the matter is that winter is not coming, winter is here.

Unless we act to change the political and attitudinal obstacles to supporting the industries that have the potential to benefit the overall economy and quality of life here, then winter will be staying. Unlike most of us who will be emigrating. Now is the winter of our discontent.

ZERO-HOURS, SHORT-HOURS AND UNDEREMPLOYMENT...

The UK Coalition Government states the recession is over and has been quick to point to a small rise in employment figures. But they have not acknowledged that there is a serious problem of underemployment.

Underemployment is where the people in work don't get the working hours they need to support themselves and their families. The number of people in Northern Ireland looking for extra hours to make ends meet has surged since 2010.

Northern Ireland has seen a bigger jump in underemployment than anywhere else across the UK. Approximately 70,000 people in Northern Ireland are working part-time only because they cannot get full-time work.

Tough times

During the recent tough economic times, we have seen people in work lose many of the additional hours they were previously working. Many shopworkers have contracts for a small number of guaranteed hours but, before the recession, were often able to get as many additional hours as they wanted. When the recession hit, these additional hours dried up. We have seen workers lose



Picture: Alisdair (CC BY 2.0)

their jobs when shops have closed their doors and ceased trading. However, many other workers, fortunate enough to keep their jobs, have lost a significant part of their income when the additional hours disappeared.

Alongside short-hours and underemployment, there has been the massive growth of zero-hours contracts. Where Usdaw and other unions in the retail have agreements – for example, with major retailers such as Tesco, Sainsbury's and Asda – the unions have negotiated to ensure that there are no zero-hours contracts. In contrast, in a range of non-union friendly companies – such as Sports Direct, McDonalds, Burger King and Domino's Pizza – zero-hours contracts are commonplace.

The growth of zero-hours contracts is clear evidence of employ-

ers taking advantage of the tough economic times to employ their workforce on insecure vulnerable contracts.

Employers talk about the need for flexible labour markets and, during the recent tough times in the economy, workers have shown flexibility. We have seen workers willing to change shifts, move around the business and accept reduced staffing levels especially in businesses that are struggling. But employers have taken advantage of workers willingness to be flexible. The widespread misuse of zero-hour contracts is evidence of how some unscrupulous employers have exploited the situation.

Often workers on zero-hour contracts are working normal hours week in, week out, but with no guarantees over these hours. The overwhelming majority of

people on zero-hour contracts are regularly working a significant number of hours each week. There are only a very small number of workers on these contracts who are involved in genuinely seasonal or occasional work.

These working patterns show there is no legitimate business need for many zero-hour contracts. The only explanation is that employers are using the shortage of jobs to pressure workers into signing up to insecure contracts.

The trade union movement believes that the exploitation of workers through the widespread misuse of zero-hours needs to be tackled. We believe that employers should be under a legal obligation to offer workers contracts reflecting their normal hours.

The starting point for assessing the normal regular hours could

be the pattern of hours worked in the previous 12 weeks. If the employer does not believe this working pattern is representative, they would have the opportunity to make this case and identify what is likely to be the working/business pattern going forward.

Whatever way it is done, the exploitation of workers through the widespread abuse of zero-hour contracts must be effectively tackled.

Workers on short-hours contracts should also have a right to guaranteed hours that more accurately reflect their usual normal working pattern. Employers should not be able to flex hours up and down with no consideration as to how this impacts on the worker and their family.

Recovery

We keep being told that we are seeing an economic recovery. If that is the case we should all be sharing in that recovery. Instead, across Northern Ireland too many workers are expected to survive on a zero-hour or short-hours contracts.

Underemployment and insecure employment are serious problems affecting large numbers of workers across Northern Ireland. The source of many of the austerity problems faced by workers in Northern Ireland can be traced back to decisions taken in Westminster but the Northern Ireland politicians can be doing more to support workers.

Northern Ireland has devolved powers to take decisions on employment matters. Banning the use of exploitative zero-hour contracts and more rights for workers on short-hours contracts is within the power and gift of the Northern Ireland Executive.

The Northern Ireland trade union movement is committed to campaigning to highlight the problem of underemployment, to eradicate the exploitative use of zero-hour contracts and for workers on short-hours contracts to get the hours they need.

No legitimate business need for many zero-hour contracts... employers are using shortage of jobs to pressure workers into signing up to insecure contracts

THIS HOME

OPPOSES

THE CUTS

WE DEMAND

WELSH ALL POLITICAL PARTIES

STOP THE CUTS

POLLING DAY
MAY
7



Please place this poster in your front window



DON'T PRESS DELETE ON...

Why staff are angry...

Education is poorly understood by the Ministers of the Executive who simply consider it as another service to be funded from the public purse when it is in fact an investment in society's future.

To view education simply as a recurrent cost, as they clearly do, highlights a catastrophic intellectual and political deficit at heart of the body politic.

The austerity budget forced upon the entire public service and in particular, education will generate a series of challenges for society and the economy that will take years to overcome. Unfortunately for those employed in the service – be they teachers, lecturers or their colleagues who fulfil the non-teaching but equally important support roles – they will be faced with an immediate impact.

Endured cuts

The education service in NI has already endured year-on-year cuts from the 2010/11 year up to the 2014/15 year. Over this period DE incurred a total cash terms reduction in its Resource budget of £125m compared to the opening 2010-11 baseline or a 13.6% real terms Resource Budget reduction.

For workers across the education sector this translated into job losses and continual demands to do more with less. For our young people class sizes crept up over the same period and service provision was reduced. This was es-



Picture: GotCredit (CC BY 2.0)

pecially evident as those services provided by the Education and Library Boards were reduced to deliver cost savings.

Those young people who required specialised support – be that those with special educational needs or those who sought other specialised services such as music tuition – found those services increasingly difficult to access as relentless cost-saving was

forced upon the Boards.

The result for many schools has been to plunge them into debt and force them into further staff reductions.

This vicious circle has become an outright race to the bottom with the education budget for the 2105/16 year. While £125 million was cut from the budget over the four years from 2101/11 to 2014/15, the current budget will see a further £97 million cut in one year.

Intervention

Initially it was proposed by DE to cut £162.5 million in the 2015/16 year. Thankfully, this was averted by the intervention of trade unions working in the education sector, representing teachers and support staff, who organised a campaign which saw DE receive 23,600 responses to their Draft Budget.

Nevertheless cutting £97 million in one year will see close to 1,000 teachers and 1,500 others employed in the service lose their jobs as employers scramble to

stay within strict DE spending limits. The cuts over the 2015/16 year stretch over the entire education cycle from the early years to higher and further education. This represents a serious threat to the futures of the young people currently passing through our education system and a potential threat to society in general.

It will also as the business community has been pointing out over recent weeks in the media seriously impact on our economy. The economy will suffer in a number of ways; very quickly skills shortages will develop condemning us to continue as a low-wage economy and the removal of wages from thousands of education workers will see local businesses in communities across the north starved of income and forced to close further feeding the race to the bottom.

If our politicians are serious about bringing meaningful change then they must realise that investing in education provides the most sustainable way to make that a reality.

If our politicians are serious about meaningful change then they must realise investing in education provides the most sustainable way to make that a reality

VOICES ON THE FRONTLINE

NUALA McGUICKIAN Classroom Assistant

I work as a primary behaviour assistant in a behavioural unit. I believe that this is a valuable service which we provide to children in numerous ways. I went on strike on March 13 because of the cuts to services in our area. There are proposed job losses for up to 1,500 support staff not to mention the cuts already made to special needs training. I am one of the local government workers who have been given a pay rise and a one-



off payment. However, as yet this has not been received here in Northern Ireland although this was agreed nationally following our strike action in July.

DEBBIE NOLAN School Caterer

I work in the school meals service and I have found that our workload has increased in recent years. You have to be so careful about what the children eat because of allergies. I'm really worried about what could happen to the service if the nutritional meals money is cut and how that will affect the children. I believe that some of them only get a hot meal at school and if the service goes, that will stop, particularly those from deprived areas. The loss of the retainer fee would have a big impact on me, I would struggle without it. I'm definitely worried about my job and I know teachers and classroom assistants are



under an awful lot of pressure too. I feel like everyone is fighting for their job right now. We need to strike now.

Whether you work in an Education Board, a school, a youth centre or as a peripatetic education worker, or have a child at school, you are feeling the strain of broken promises and a shattered budget.

We waited years for reorganisation. While we were waiting, many people left the service because of uncertainty about the future. Jobs were left vacant or covered on temporary contracts. Then the cuts really started to kick in. We have suffered four years of deep cuts to the schools budget.

The cuts have had a major impact on school-based staff. Both teaching and non-teaching staff in their thousands have faced redundancies and cuts. Cleaners, transport drivers, technicians and classroom assistants have been hardest hit.

In many cases the choice was stark – cut your hours or lose your job. Pupils, students and education workers alike have suffered. Key education services for our children have been cut back. Transport has been withdrawn in some areas, music therapy in others. Special programmes designed to give equality to children with special needs have been cut and cancelled.

The nutritional meals project negotiated by the unions with the first Education Minister was slashed. Once again school meals workers face a threat to retention payment. One-fifth of our children live below the poverty line. Between cuts to education services, health services and welfare benefits this figure is growing.

Over the past four years, we have lost £300 million needed for our vital services. Over the past four weeks, government has made it look as though extra money has been pumped in and problems have been solved. This is not true, this is a temporary injection of cash, this is a sticking plaster which will not heal the education budget deficit.

Education staff are angry – and rightly so. They care about the kids. They work hard. They sweat in kitchens and in cleaning our schools. They make a difference to the education of our children. They are all front-line workers.

For many years now 'Corporation Tax' has been bandied about as the solution to all Northern Ireland's economic problems. Our politicians tell us it will create tens of thousands of jobs, that it will boost wages and salaries and turn Northern Ireland into an economic powerhouse.

Better still, this can all be ours at the stroke of a pen. It all seems too good to be true, doesn't it? Well that's because it is.

Think about it for a second, what do they mean when they say "Corporation Tax will create thousands of jobs"? Well firstly they mean cutting Corporation Tax. You might say, "How does cutting a rate of tax create a single job?" That's a very good question, it won't.

We need to be very clear about the reality of this policy. To argue that cutting Corporation Tax would create jobs is like arguing that you don't need to go to work on Monday because you've bought a lottery ticket for this Saturday. Of course you may win the lottery, but how likely is it? A gambling metaphor may seem far-fetched, but that's exactly what this policy is, a gamble.

Intervention

The gamble is that if Northern Ireland sets a lower rate of Corporation Tax, companies COULD use the extra money they get to hire more employees or invest in new technologies. Furthermore companies from abroad MAY want to move here because they too could benefit from this. However, there is absolutely no way of knowing whether any of this WILL actually happen.

It is just as likely, if not more so, that firms who get this tax break may just pocket it. It was recently reported that top UK companies are sitting on a cash pile of some £53bn. This means they have £53bn they could spend on creating jobs and investment, but they won't. They won't because companies invest and create jobs when they see a new opportunity in the market or an improving economy, they won't invest the money simply because they have it.

It is even more unclear that we would attract significantly more foreign companies into Northern Ireland with low Corporation Tax. Why? Companies don't decide



Illustration: Rob Sheridan (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0); www.rob-sheridan.com

CORPO TAX

The ugly truth revealed...

where to create jobs based purely on how much tax they may end up paying. They look for a skilled workforce, good roads and transport, energy costs and connectivity. When big firms do move their companies for tax purposes it is usually big corporations moving to Caribbean islands so they can avoid paying their fair share. This type of company rarely brings any jobs, if it did the Cayman Islands

would be so overpopulated it would sink into the sea.

If this is a bet, what is our stake?

This is the most concerning aspect of this policy. We are gambling with up to £400m of our public services. Northern Ireland has to pay for each tax break that is given to each company in Northern Ireland. We will be taking money from our Health serv-

ice, from our schools, from our libraries and care services, all to write a cheque for big business in the hope that they will create jobs. When we see how ravaged our public services have already been by years of austerity can we really afford to contemplate such a gamble?

Even if it did work, there is no clear way of getting our money back. It there were thousands of

To argue cutting Corpo Tax would create jobs is like arguing that you don't need to go to work on Monday because you've bought a lottery ticket for this Saturday

jobs created by these companies, all of the income tax these new workers would pay, all the VAT they would pay and all their national insurance contributions, they all go back to the Treasury in London. We in NI won't see a penny. To cut Corporation Tax is to gamble away Northern Ireland's most precious assets on a risky bet that may not pay out - even if we win.

Five years on from the initial lie of “we’re all in this together”, it could not be clearer that a class war that calls itself “austerity”, led by a Cabinet of Millionaires has at its root a longer term ambition.

This is to reduce or withdraw public funding and create a US-style economy where services have to be bought, not provided freely as a duty to citizens.

That the Tories could go into a General Election still talking of a further £12 billion in “welfare cuts” shows there is no bottom line or end in sight for this savage agenda.

‘Dog eat dog’

The Westminster Coalition’s aim has been to shape an economy built on job insecurity (including zero-hour contracts) with a minimal or charity-based welfare system replacing any idea of genuine social security from the “cradle to the grave”.

This is the world these extremists want to create, the “dog eat dog” society with a disposable workforce – worked for as long as feasible, paid as little as legally required, then “pensioned” as cheaply as possible.

At a local level the detail of the Stormont Castle/Stormont House agreements shows what unchallenged austerity offers. As well as further pay freezes, increased workloads, pension cuts etc. for those still in work, the Executive Parties threaten 20,000-30,000

RESIST!

Don't let them do this to public services...



Illustration: Frits Ahlefeldt-Laurvig (CC BY-ND 2.0) hikingartist.com

job losses throughout the public sector with the inevitable knock-on effect this will have in the private sector. Sickeningly the same politicians are simultaneously arguing for a (corporation) tax cut for big business.

We should be clear that what we are currently facing has nothing to do with the non-implementation of welfare reform – this attack has been planned since 2010 and is shaped by the UK

Government’s removal of around £4bn to £5bn from the Northern Ireland block grant and the Northern Ireland Executive’s decision to implement but “backload” its cuts i.e. to enforce them at the end of their four year spending plan.

This is why members in every part of the public sector as well as those employed in voluntary organisations that rely on public funding, are beginning to feel the increased and acute impact of

cuts so dramatically at this time.

In 2010, the leaders of the devolved Assemblies and their Finance Ministers publicly issued a joint statement decrying the four-year public expenditure settlement for the UK and declared that it was bad for the devolved areas. Should the opportunity arise again in May 2015, this common approach involving Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales should be rekindled.

This time, however, seizing the opportunity that the political leverage of a hung parliament might offer, a much more robust and aggressive engagement is needed in order to capture a major prize for the whole community – an adequate public expenditure settlement.

NIPSA is very clear that there is no satisfactory Northern Ireland-specific solution to these public expenditure crises and reallocating funding from one public service to another – robbing Peter to pay Paul – simply transfers the problem rather than deals with it.

We must stop the debate being reduced to “which cut do you support?” and, rejecting the ideology of “austerity”, instead argue for investment in public services, a rejection of the “daylight robbery” of privatisation, genuine social security and decent public sector jobs.

Public services provide the spine of society, indeed they show there is such a thing as society. We will continue to defend the direct interests of our members, their families and the wider society against the economic extrem-

ism offered by both Westminster and the Northern Ireland Executive Budgets. The attack on all of us emphasises why we, together with our colleagues in the rest of the trade union movement, must continue to support and build our public service defence campaign. This is to protect members’ direct interests, to play our part in creating a better society, one with the values of community and solidarity at its heart.

We see the power, reach and

The aim has been to shape an economy built on job insecurity with a minimal welfare system replacing any idea of genuine social security from the ‘cradle to the grave’

universalism of the state as an asset to use, not strip. Austerity is the reverse – a programme written by and for the City of London, fuelled by massive corporate welfare, targeting the remaining free-at-the-point-of-use public services and aiming to turn them into for-profit services for private shareholders. We do not accept this anti-social programme. We must and will resist it.

Our members supported the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) and the political institutions because we genuinely believed that the political direction and the programmes for government would result in a better quality of life. Instead, since 2007 the equality and human rights obligations, in particular, have been consistently stripped out of programmes for government, budgets, and implementation plans.

The current budget proposals are a blatant attack on public services, the NHS and the Welfare State and as a result have a profoundly adverse impact on the quality of life of the people of Northern Ireland.

They are an attack on our social fabric; a broadside aimed at an already-ailing economy; and an attempt to deconstruct the social gains resulting from the post-war promise to safeguard the people from the “five giant evils” identified in the Beveridge Report. Consequently, the current Northern Ireland budget should be rejected. Our elected politicians should have the steel to stand up to threats from the UK Government and the

Going on the offensive to protect our fundamental human rights...

Treasury. The unions have placed on record substantive alternative economic strategies that should have been embraced by the NI Executive. By failing to address these models the Executive has, in effect, turned its back on the needs of the people.

Industrial action would not be necessary if our Government moved away from austerity, paid our members what they are due, and put public services at the heart of economic recovery. Unions continue on their mission to press for this change.

In particular the NI Government has collectively failed to consider the budget’s cumulative effect, the Stormont House deal and current public spending decisions on vulnerable groups and the fundamental rights of the people. Failures include:

- Broken promises on the development of a public health strategy and an anti-poverty strategy.

- A roll-back on its legal obligations on equality and human rights.

- A failure to deliver on a NI Bill of Rights as promised in the GFA.

- The denial of the right to work for those currently classed as economically inactive, who want to work but can’t get a job.

- Our right to health and social care is being denied to many because of the existing crises in service delivery caused by successive years of funding cuts and an ever-widening gap between what is available and what is needed.

- Our right to education is under threat for all our children, particularly those from working class families and those living in poverty. At least three government departments hold responsibility for protecting these rights. There is no evidence that they have co-operated at all to do so in these budget proposals.

- Our right to housing continues to be a long-term problem and is increasingly being challenged on the basis of religious and political discrimination in housing waiting lists in a range of areas of objective need.

- Our right to social security is under its greatest threat since the creation of the Welfare State. We are awaiting severe cuts to the benefits system with a disproportionate impact on people in Northern Ireland.

- Our fundamental right to an adequate standard of living is compromised by the major loss of jobs.

None of the budget proposals take account of the impact of pay freezes, zero-hour contracts, temporary work without rights, exclusivity clauses and the downward spiral on low pay on workers.

They are already suffering from in-work poverty and will suffer from any further welfare reform cuts. All of these rights are inter-dependent. They consequently require genuine co-operation across government departments and the Executive to secure them for the people.

So far, this work has not been done.

The Community and Voluntary Sector is viewed by Stormont as cannon fodder in the first round of cuts to public services.

The Belfast Trades Council hosted 12 meetings across Belfast in the run up to the initial strike on March 13. From the first meeting there was a growing realisation that not only were vital public services such as health, education and welfare protection under threat, but that the Community and Voluntary Sector was quickly becoming the first casualty of this anti-worker, anti-community and anti-public services agenda.

In meeting after meeting those present were told of the uncertainties of being employed in this sector.

In just one neighbourhood renewal area in West Belfast (there are 14 across the city), the notified job losses were identified as more than 120 workers. None of these would be voluntary redundancies.

Services hit

Important services such as bereavement counselling, suicide prevention services, disability support, advice for the elderly, welfare advice, alternative therapy, early years' assistance and young parents' support were all due to be hit in what can only be described as an attack on the community and voluntary sector.

Workers who had been notified of compulsory redundancy told their stories about how there was no question of leaving employment voluntarily (none of them wished to leave work as they couldn't afford to lose their jobs).

They questioned how politicians could repeatedly pretend that all job losses would be voluntary only. Some of the contributors had given more than 25 years' service to their local community and were being rewarded now with a compulsory redundancy notice but no redundancy payout.

They had been called upon to provide these services because of the gap in public service provision and now they are being disregarded. The valuable services they had offered to the most vulnerable in the community would no longer be available and the community would suffer once again, having experienced decades of multiple deprivation and neglect.

In another area in South Belfast, a relatively small Commu-

WHO WILL SPEAK UP FOR THE COMMUNITY?



Picture: Matt Schilder (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Some had given more than 25 years' service to local community and were being rewarded with a redundancy with no redundancy payout

nity Development Association in Ballynafeigh faced immediate job losses in April. Four workers went, with another two likely to go by June.

Not a penny of the much-heralded Together Building a United Community (TBUC) strategy managed to find its way to support this Community Association, which for 40 years has demonstrated how a shared community can actually exist and develop. As in the other areas, none of these workers will leave voluntarily

NICVA have recently started to

track where exactly the cuts from within their membership organisations will actually hit. Disgracefully, the vast majority of the impact will be experienced in areas dealing with children and young people, health and social care, education, poverty and disability and mental health, with more than 70% of NICVA-linked organisations facing significant job losses. These cuts will be compulsory.

By the end of these series of meetings across Belfast, the organiser were shocked by the

sheer scale of the attack on local community services, which have received little or no attention by the mainstream media or local politicians. It is clearly important to continue to highlight the issues covered elsewhere in *People's Voice*, such as cuts in public services and job losses in the Civil Service, Health, Education, Housing and Welfare.

However, the important services provided in the Community and Voluntary Sector and the scale of compulsory job losses also needs to be included in the union movement's considerations when highlighting the impact of the cuts alongside developing a long-term strategy of how workers and communities can come together to protect ordinary people, jobs and services.

Building links

The trade union movement through these meetings, have taken some initial steps in building links with the workers in this sector.

In the coming months it is our intention to develop those links, strengthen that relationship and assist in any way we can in providing support to a sector which has been sacrificed by the political classes in their insatiable desire to obtain the power from Westminster to offer corporate welfare handouts to big business by reducing Corporation Tax.

One thing is for sure in all of this. Not one of these job losses or the services provided will be replaced by the private sector or multinationals stepping in. These services will be lost for at least a generation in vulnerable communities.

Trades Councils across NI have committed themselves to work with others in the labour movement to build an alternative economic analysis and strategy to provide hope to communities and workers. There is an alternative. There is a better, fairer way...

For some months now the people of Northern Ireland have been told that there is no alternative to austerity. We are told that we must cut back on public services because this is the only way we can “balance the books”. This isn’t true. There is a positive and sustainable way to fix our public finances – it’s called economic growth.

Northern Ireland is a region that has suffered from years of under-investment that have held it back from reaching its full economic potential. If we want Northern Ireland to recover from the economic slump it is in, if we want Northern Ireland to become a prosperous and fair society we need to invest and build that growth.

Some economic aspects of the Stormont House Agreement, if implemented, would give extra borrowing power to the Northern Ireland Executive. At present the plan is to use this money to remove jobs from our public services. This plan is misguided, short-sighted and ultimately self-defeating.

We propose using all of Northern Ireland’s resources to build a



Picture: Infomatique (CC BY-SA 2.0)

lead the way in new technologies and new products in years to come.

Creating an ‘innovation fund’ will allow the state to provide long-term, committed and patient investment for the challenges facing Northern Ireland industry. It will also ensure that our new prosperity will be something that all citizens will share in. Investing in our resources and our industries is important, but we also need to invest in Northern Ireland’s greatest asset, its people. This means providing quality education and lifelong learning, but it also means ensuring that no person in Northern Ireland will

If we want well paid jobs in growing industries we need to be investing now so that we can lead the way in new technologies and new products in years to come



Picture: Hadyn (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

more stable and inclusive economy and these are just some brief examples of what that might look like. The construction sector in Northern Ireland has lost thousands of jobs since the crash almost seven years ago. But the crash happened for a reason and we don’t want to return to the days of sky-high house prices and profiteering developers. We should use our construction sector to build better, safer, warmer homes for families in Northern Ireland.

THERE IS ~~NO~~ ALTERNATIVE

The Stormont Executive could amend its rules and allow the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to borrow money in order to retro-fit homes and public buildings across Northern Ireland to make them more energy efficient. Retro-fitted homes require significantly less energy to heat during winter leading to a reduction in energy bills.

This reduction provides a small boost to the coffers of the household, but it also pays for the bor-

rowing made by the NIHE. In the long-term we will have significantly reduced our carbon footprint in Northern Ireland and built a sustainable climate friendly construction sector that may a world leader.

We also need to look carefully at the types of jobs we are creating in Northern Ireland and how that is affected by our investment. Too often we hear about companies receiving massive cheques from Invest NI to create jobs in Northern

Ireland. In many cases the jobs are poorly paid and short-lived. This is no way to build for the future. Instead of simply handing this money out we should use it to create the next wave of innovation here in Northern Ireland ourselves.

We know where the strength lies in Northern Ireland’s economy from Agri-food to the creative industries. If we want well paid jobs in growing industries we need to be investing now so that we can

ever work their way into poverty. Northern Ireland has a real problem of low paid jobs. At the very least we need to guarantee a Living Wage to every worker in Northern Ireland. Not only will this reduce poverty, it will boost household budgets which in turn will boost to spending in our local shops giving a boost to the health of our economy overall. More equal societies create more prosperous economies.

In the short term we could:

- Put a £1 tax on mid-week hotel rates to create a “tourism fund” to attract large conferences and events to our major cities.

- Abandon the cap on domestic rate and move toward a site-valuation tax which would lead to a more equitable and efficient use of land and property.

- Create and Northern Ireland Investment bond so investments made by people in Northern Ireland stay in Northern Ireland.

There is an alternative for Northern Ireland, but we have to invest in it.



Picture: Meriol Lehmann (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

MANUFACTURING A SUCCESS STORY

Northern Ireland's Manufacturing sector has finally emerged from a six-year long recession but this is a jobless recovery with no improvement in workers' incomes.

The slump in Northern Ireland's manufacturing sector did not begin in 2008. Like other regions of Britain and Ireland we have experienced a deindustrialisation process with tens of thousands of jobs going elsewhere where the wages are that much lower and the profits that much higher.

This is a problem that has afflicted every developed Western economy but some have responded more effectively than others. The absence of a dedicated manufacturing strategy for Northern Ireland, even under the Northern Ireland Executive has meant that we have been largely helpless in the face of this chal-

lenge. Manufacturing is a driver in value-added creation, R&D and downstream economic activity in the supply chain.

The future of this sector cannot be left to the free play of markets, where investment, innovation and enterprise start-ups and expansion must compete with short-term profits needs of speculative, finance capital.

Ideologically-driven

The unions are calling for the Northern Ireland Executive to ditch its ideologically-driven pursuit of an across-the-board lowering of Corporation Tax rates. Instead we are asking for the political parties to adopt an approach geared to delivering what matters most to business.

The idea of slashing funding for further and higher education and apprenticeships to pay for a tax break makes no sense from an economic perspective. We need to invest in our skills base not degrade it further. Similarly, build-

ing a thriving economy will require more rather than less investment in road and rail infrastructure and transport services.

Moves to outsource water treatment and a *laissez-faire* attitude to the development and pricing of the energy sector also result in higher costs to productive industries. In late 2014, Unite the un-

nion called for a new planning framework to drive growth – one that empowers workers and the wider communities.

This will identify and place an emphasis on key growth sectors within the manufacturing economy including Agri-Food and Food Processing, Renewable Energy Technologies and Energy Efficiency, Bio-Medical Technology and Precision and high-technology Engineering.

New opportunities

A state-led and stakeholder-led approach would identify and open the new opportunities for the Northern Ireland economy.

This would enhance our export potential and ability to compete in the domestic market through streamlined state support and targeted resources, comprising both direct and indirect assistance, R&D and research linkages and cooperative enterprise networks. Such an approach is compatible with moves to transition

to a Living Wage economy – where wage exploitation is no longer considered a legitimate business operation.

Wage-led growth driven from a regenerated manufacturing sector would stimulate a wider economic recovery. Such moves would require the increasing socialisation of the economy and a more proactive approach to Public Enterprise – critical if we are to make the most of opportunities in, for example, the green economy.

Northern Ireland has a proud industrial legacy: we have a highly skilled labour force, one of the world's best deep-water ports and a 'can-do' attitude to work.

The Executive needs to grab the opportunity to grow manufacturing through intervening where the market has failed to secure investment, building on our inherent strengths as opposed to chasing the rainbow of a race-to-the-bottom in global tax haven status.

Wage-led growth driven from a regenerated manufacturing sector would stimulate a wider economic recovery

It's time to challenge election candidates on cuts

The UK General Election under way will shape the lives of working people and their families for a generation.

A Conservative-led government backed by big money would make us an even more unequal society where not just the lowest paid, but the great working majority struggle to make ends meet. Where millions more are



Message from PATRICIA KING and FRANCES O'GRADY, leaders of the ICTU and the TUC

trapped in casual work, never knowing what they will earn each week; and where workers' rights and liberties are trampled on.



The trade unions in every corner of these islands stand united together against cuts and austerity. The fight of workers in Cork is the

same as workers in Cardiff or Carlisle or Coleraine.

As the leaders of the trade union confederations, we urge all readers of *People's Voice* to read the case it makes for a better and fairer society.

Challenge all of the candidates standing for the Westminster Parliament to answer the demands of working people from all communities – stop the cuts now!

MARCH AGAINST AUSTERITY

Annual May Day Rally and March

Saturday
2nd May 2015

March for People, Jobs and Services
March for Peace, Progress and Equality
March for a Better, Fairer Way

Guest Speakers including Mick Whelan, General Secretary ASLEF

Assemble College of Art Gardens, Belfast at 11.30am

Speeches at 11.45am; March off 12 noon.



All are welcome – bring friends and family!

Solidarity with those workers taking industrial action to defend jobs and public services