

**WORKERS
DEMAND
Better!**



STRONGER TOGETHER
CONGRESS
Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Northern Ireland Committee





As we emerged from the Covid 19 pandemic, workers rightly expected better and fairer treatment from the government and their employers. After all those sacrifices made to maintain the economy and to keep us safe, despite years of pay restraint across our public and private sectors, working people demanded better.

We are now headlong into a cost-of-living crisis, where many of the same essential workers who a few months ago were lauded as heroes cannot survive or live in dignity. This is unacceptable and must change and change now. There are many causes for this crisis, but there are realistic solutions which can help working people and their families. These solutions are honest, fair and achievable.

NIC-ICTU, representing the hopes and interests of 200,000 people in Northern Ireland, have launched the **Workers Demand Better** campaign. The purpose of the campaign is to build and lead a progressive movement that demands immediate and urgent action to tackle the cost-of-living crisis that is likely to get only worse over the coming months.

This demands action from both the UK government and our devolved NI Executive, as the scale of the problem is simply too large for individual businesses or services to solve.

The core of the crisis we are faced with has political causes and can only be fixed by political solutions. Some of the problems lie firmly at the door of Westminster and 10 Downing Street. Some of the solutions are the responsibility of our devolved Stormont Assembly and the NI Executive. There is an alternative, but it can only come about by political choice and not chance.

The recent reprehensible and irresponsible 'mini' budget by the Truss government wants to reward wealthy people at the expense of everyone else. It proposes that we all pay for this handout to the least deserving by a menu of cuts to shrink the state's capacity to assist workers and their families through this crisis.

We need to see action on the following issues urgently.

- Government needs to target sufficient and appropriate resources to households, (prioritising those on fixed incomes and low to middle incomes) to support them when it comes to the cost of energy over the next number of months. We need to see the same urgent approach as we saw with the furlough scheme with the cost-of-living crisis.
- We need an urgent return to devolution and a Minister for Economy who will introduce a comprehensive NI Employment Bill which will promote collective bargaining, whereby unions and employers are encouraged to negotiate on pay and other matters.
- Along with pay improvements in each workplace, we need to see the state address the social wage. Services which can and should be regulated or delivered directly by government in order to support workers when it comes to the provision and resourcing of services. The state needs to make childcare, transport and other services more affordable to the public, particularly at this time of rising inflation.
- Governments need to engage with the trade union movement and start implementing progressive policies that support workers and their families. The trade union manifesto, *'No Going Back – A new deal towards a safe and secure future for all'*, has serious policies which must be advanced. Again, such social dialogue is long-established and normal practice in successful modern economies.

Positive change does not come about on its own. It only comes about with workers mobilising and fighting back. In the absence, and even hostility of a government that is not interested in the need and rights of workers in Westminster, and no government taking responsibility for Northern Ireland, what are workers to do?

Many of our unions and their members have quite rightly stood up and demanded better. They are taking industrial action and strike action to try and protect their members. This campaign will support and promote those actions and will work to complement it.

To that end we intend to engage in the following actions and activities over the next number of months.

- Set up townhall meetings right across Northern Ireland to bring together workers and other allies to build a movement to demand better.
- Hold rallies and protests at appropriate locations and appropriate times across Northern Ireland.
- Meet with political party leaders to advance our policies and demand urgent action on the cost-of-living crisis and that a robust NI Employment Bill that promotes workers' rights and stronger collective bargaining, leading to better pay, be a centrepiece in any Programme for Government of the NI Executive
- Meet and lobby directly relevant politicians in Westminster and HM Treasury to demand a fair deal for workers in Northern Ireland.
- Support our unions engaged in lawful industrial action in the interests of their members and workers.



Be part of the solution. Take part in this campaign. Strike a blow for fairer workplaces and a more just society.

Workers Demand Better.