

Ireland, Dublin, More on the Huge protests against Irish economy - 120, 000 workers march through Dublin - National strike now!

WSM reports and images from the ICTU demonstration ---- featured image The WSM on the demonstration

<http://www.wsm.ie/attachments/feb2009/wsmonmarch.gif>

On Saturday 120,000 workers marched through Dublin demanding the the public sector pay cut ('pension levy') be withdrawn, that jobs cuts be opposed and that all the other attacks on the working class be ended. Over the last couple of weeks there have been dozens of local union meetings of workers in the public sector demanding strike action to halt the cuts.

The march was a chance not only to put pressure on the government but also to demand that our unions do the only thing that can halt the cuts, call a national strike.

The WSM met up to leaflet the march at 1.30 at the Parnell monument, and then joined the demonstration with a banner demanding a National Strike. Here we present reports, interviews with and photos from WSM members who took part on the demonstration and the leafletting as well as background articles on the nature of the crisis

From late morning yesterday (Sat. 21st February) it was clear that the Irish Congress of Trade Unions' National Demonstration was going to be huge. It was also clear that those marching were from all over the country and from all types of employment – both public and private sector.

Audio and images from the ICTU march <http://www.wsm.ie/story/5213>

An interview with Dermot who was at the demonstration leafletting for the WSM

<http://www.indymedia.ie/attachments/feb2009/ictumarchinterview.mp3> on the atmosphere of the demonstration and what is to come along with images from Saturday's ICTU demonstration against the pay cuts & job losses

ICTU march - No recovery on the back of the workers --- Report from Cork WSM member on the ICTU demonstration

These are a selection from the many shots I took on a day when our class re-discovered a little something of its old combative spirit, and the numbers marching are more comfort to ordinary working folk than to those who would misinterpret this monster attendance as endorsement of their strategy of appeasement towards IBEC and the government. I saw David Begg walk up Parnell Sq. East towards the Garden of Remembrance a half-hour or more before the march started. He was alone and he looked downcast

Background material on the demonstration

Below is the text of the leaflet we distributed, personal opinion pieces from members on the growing resistance to the cuts and background articles and education video on the crisis.

Pay cuts, job losses - Organise the Fightback - <http://www.wsm.ie/story/5183>
WSM leaflet distributed on Saturdays march ----- As soon as possible we need a unified day of strike action across the entire public sector to demand withdrawal of this pay cut. One day of strike action is unlikely to be enough to force a change of government policy. So this needs to be followed up with an ongoing campaign of strike action.

Was ICTU behind the pensions levy? <http://www.wsm.ie/story/5182>

Report from the national meeting of public sector workers the previous Saturday. Did the idea of the so called 'Pensions Levy' come from some of the very Irish Congress of Trade Unions leadership who are supposed to negotiate on behalf of workers. This is one revelation that emerged on Saturday morning at a meeting of over 100 public sector trade unionists and two delegates from the Waterford Glass occupation.

Fight cuts in the private sector - all workers must stand together

Thoughts on the crash and the alternatives - Based around a review of the SIPTU alternative plan <http://www.wsm.ie/story/5135>

Our government has become more and more open about their plans for us. Cowen wants to drive down our living standards by 12% and has already cut all our wages through the tax levy and slashed the wages of workers in the public sector further through the so called 'pensions levy'.

Support Industrial Action by the Bus Workers!
http://www.wsm.ie/news_viewer/5125

Dublin Bus is slated to see huge cuts in both staff and services. As many as 290 workers and 100 buses will be cut. This means fewer routes and less frequent service. If the Dublin Bus workers go on strike, it will mean an inconvenience for a few days. However, if they take action and force the company to back down, it will in the long run save us all time and money and will help the environment.

Audio: Waterford Crystal Workers Speak Out http://www.wsm.ie/news_viewer/5148

Noel Atkins and Pat Phelan, Waterford Crystal workers and Unite Shop Stewards, travelled to Cork last night to speak out against the attempted closure of the plant. They spoke from the heart as workers tossed on the scrap heap after decades of service.



Support workers occupying Waterford Glass <http://www.wsm.ie/story/5108>
Workers occupied the Waterford Glass factory in Kilbarry after the receiver was unable to borrow further funds to keep the plant operating. At the start of the month as 150 workers continued the occupation members of the Cork WSM visited the plant and interviewed Joe Kelly

Forthcoming events

Dublin meeting of grassroots education workers - Feb 28

http://www.wsm.ie/news_viewer/5131

The savage cuts already announced at primary and second level appear to be just the first steps in what will be a sustained attack on the public sector in general and education in particular – both from the point of view of the provision of the service and the wages and working conditions of those employed in it. 2pm Teachers Club, Parnell square, Feb 28th

Recessions and Cutbacks - how do we fight back?

<http://www.wsm.ie/blogs/bookfair09/> -

March 6th

As part of the 4th annual Dublin Anarchist Bookfair, WSM hosts a discussion on how workers should respond to the government attacks on us. Speakers will include a Waterford Crystal worker, Denis Keane (Executive member Civil and Public Services Union), Julian Brophy (Free Education for Everyone) - all in personal capacity - and a speaker from Workers Solidarity Movement. Liberty Hall, Dublin, 3p.m. Saturday 7th March

Momentum Builds for National Strike by Gregor Kerr - 1st May Branch WSM (pers cap)

From late morning yesterday (Sat. 21st February) it was clear that the Irish Congress of Trade Unions' National Demonstration was going to be huge. It was also clear that those marching were from all over the country and from all types of employment – both public and private sector.

Along with a number of other members of Workers Solidarity Movement, I was at the top of O'Connell Street from late morning where we distributed thousands of copies of our leaflet which stated "Marching Is Not Enough - Strike Action Now"

"As soon as possible we need a unified day of strike action across the entire public sector to demand withdrawal of this pay cut." the leaflet said. "One day of strike action is unlikely to be enough to force a change of government policy. So this needs to be followed up with an ongoing campaign of strike action. For instance this could consist of one day's action across the public sector one week, followed by two days the following week, three days the week after."(see full text of leaflet at <http://www.wsm.ie/story/5183>)

Private and public sector workers unite

From our interaction with marchers as they made their way to Parnell Square for the start of the protest it was obvious that this was a view shared by large numbers of people. If further proof were needed that the economic crisis was caused by the greed of the wealthy in Irish society it had been provided by that morning's front page headline in the 'Irish Independent' "PWC report shows Anglo gave 15 loans over €500m".

Private sector workers who had recently lost their jobs or who had been put on short time working and public sector workers who face a cut in wages in the form of a 'pension levy' all made their way to Parnell Square and many reacted favourably to our banner which read "Marching is Not Enough. National Strike Now" and to our slogan "Organise Now for a National Strike. Make the rich pay for the crisis."

When a couple of hundred strong group of Waterford Crystal workers marched up O'Connell Street behind a banner which stated 'The workers united will never be defeated' the point was being made that despite the best efforts of politicians and commentators the artificial divide between public and private sector workers was not going to be allowed to fester. Their chant was taken up by all those present and they received a huge ovation from watchers and passers by as they made their way up to lead the march.

Workers Solidarity Movement members maintained our presence at the top of O'Connell Street while the march passed us by. We distributed our leaflet to marchers and we involved marchers in the chant 'Next Stop National Strike'. Again it was clear that the need for a national strike to make the government realise we are serious was obvious to a great number of people.

Don't trust ICTU

When the entire march had passed us by, we joined in at the end and made our way to Merrion Square. Being at the end we missed all the speeches but having heard the lily-livered weak comments of David Begg and his ilk many times over the past couple of weeks this was probably a blessing.

The ICTU leadership cannot be trusted. They are only interested in getting us back into so-called 'social partnership'. However the momentum is now behind the drive for a National Strike. Members of the Civil and Public Service Union (CPSU) will show the way on Thursday next. Bus workers will be next to take up the flag with the NBRU set for a one-day stoppage on Saturday and SIPTU busworkers set to take all-out ongoing strike action from 1st March.

Meanwhile teacher unions are currently balloting members for industrial action, and other public sector unions are coming under pressure from their members

to do likewise. The organisation of a one-day national strike by all public sector workers is becoming inevitable. This strike will provide the platform for organising a strike across the entire private and public sector which will build a sense of solidarity and partnership between all workers and will show the politicians that we are not willing to accept the pain caused by the greed and corruption of property developers and bankers.

Make the strike a reality

But while a momentum is definitely building towards a national strike, it will only become a reality if every one of us in our own unions take up the call. If your union is one of those already balloting, make sure you do everything you can to encourage your friends and workmates to deliver a resounding Yes. If your union has not yet announced a ballot, get together with your fellow trade unionists and demand a special emergency meeting of your branch. At that meeting put down a motion demanding that your union hold a ballot for industrial action and join with other trade unions in opposition to the government attacks on our living standards.

Getting the ballot passed will only be step one. After that we need to keep the pressure on our union leaderships to actually call strike action. We also need to discuss and work out a strategy to win. A one day strike won't make the government back down but it will be step one in letting them know we're serious. We need to work out a strategy of industrial action which is designed not alone to register a protest but to win – to make the government back down and to make the rich pay for the crisis.

The momentum is with us. Let's keep it going.

Join the demonstration on Saturday - demand a public sector strike

We didn't cause the Crisis. We shouldn't have to pay for it. Workers in Ireland are under attack. We are told by politicians that we have to 'share the pain'. But during the years of the Celtic Tiger, they didn't suggest that we should 'share the wealth'. Obscene amounts of money have been made by property developers and bankers in recent years. But now we're being made to pay for the crisis.

Marching Is Not Enough - Strike Action Now

We don't have to accept this. We have the power to force a change of policy. A campaign of strike action when we use our trade union muscle to shut down our workplaces will show our strength and show that we mean business.

As soon as possible we need a unified day of strike action across the entire public sector to demand withdrawal of this pay cut. One day of strike action is unlikely to be enough to force a change of government policy. So this needs to be followed up with an ongoing campaign of strike action. For instance this could consist of one day's action across the public sector one week, followed by

two days the following week, three days the week after.

Whatever we choose to do, we need to discuss and work out a strategy to win. Trade union leaders have sold us the myth of 'social partnership' for more than 20 years. But we need to build a new sense of partnership and solidarity whereby workers across all unions support each other to build this successful action.

The government will be happy enough if all we do is have protest marches and issue angry press statements. Let's take the next step. We can win.

Where can the money come from?

They say there is no money, how about the following:

The richest 1% own €100 billion(1)

€8 billion given in property tax incentives

€103 million given to private schools every year

€8 billion in tax breaks for building private hospitals

€9.5 billion of potential gas reserves given to Shell in Rosport

Fighting Back

Strike action is the way for us to show the government we are serious. That strike action needs to be built across the public sector and in solidarity with private sector workers whose jobs and conditions are under attack.

That solidarity needs to be built at grassroots level. We cannot trust the leadership of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. When they went into talks with the government on the 'Framework Agreement', they accepted the need for cuts. At a meeting of public service trade unionists last weekend it emerged that it was ICTU themselves who proposed the 'pension levy'. When the government proposed a pay cut of 10%, the ICTU delegation proposed the 'pension levy' as being more sellable. (2)

These people cannot be trusted. Taking back control of OUR unions is part and parcel of the fight to protect what we have won over the years.