

NIC-ICTU and the Fresh Start Agreement

2 December 2015

Today, the Northern Ireland Committee of ICTU agreed the following statement:

Given the critical role of the NI trade union movement in promoting and securing a peace process, Congress views it as essential that our devolved institutions remain intact. The challenge for those institutions is to share and develop with us a peaceful and stable democratic society with equality and human rights at its core.

1/ The NIC-ICTU welcomes the fact that the political institutions of the devolved administration are functioning once again and that Direct Rule has been averted as demanded by the majority of civil society.

2/ The imposition of Direct Rule would have unimagined consequences for the most marginalised in our society, as well as for trade unionists.

3/ Congress' welcome for the return of devolved government does not by implication extend to the Westminster imposed and locally administered austerity measures. A further reduction in the block grant will reduce public service delivery and employment across all sectors. This will also mean severe welfare cuts for the marginalised, which must be mitigated.

4/ Congress accepts the validity of the statements made by political parties that they pressed the UK Government for additional financial resources for NI to no avail. As the fifth richest economy in the world, Congress, along with our partners in civil society, deplores the UK Government's parsimonious attitude towards recognising the unique challenges of the NI economy.

5/ Congress, while noting the insertion of a clause in the Fresh Start Agreement which specifies that the cut in Corporation Tax can only occur if the NI Executive's finances are on a 'sustainable footing', will continue to oppose the cutting of CT in the unconditional method as advocated in the Agreement.

6/ Congress in this context recognises that our political parties are facing up to their responsibilities to ameliorate the negative impact of welfare reform and recognises their commitment to no compulsory redundancies in the Voluntary Exit Scheme. The use of £700 million under the Reinvestment & Reform Initiative should be for its original purposes, rather than exclusively for the VES.

7/ Congress pledges to continue its opposition to the UK government's policies of penalising the poor for the economic crisis. To this end Congress will continue a vibrant opposition to austerity in collaboration with its colleagues in the TUC, STUC and WTUC.

8/ Congress at all meetings with the NI political parties has set out its demands for a comprehensive engagement with the NI Executive and Assembly, such an engagement is designed to ensure that working people and citizens will see real advantage from our devolved administration through the following actions:

- a) The implementation of the 2-tier workforce agreement.
- b) The Programme for Government to have at its core an anti-poverty strategy
- c) That all NI public sector procurement utilises the provisions of the EU Procurement social and environmental clauses
- d) The Programme for Government to include a sustainable public health model
- e) The Programme for Government to seek to place education at the heart of social and economic policy
- f) That pay increases owed to those public sector workers be honoured and scheduled under the PfG
- g) A commitment to the non-privatisation of public service delivery
- h) The PfG to include a core element of equality centred on objective need in terms of employment and infrastructure policies
- i) The establishment of a manufacturing cross-departmental and stakeholder body to draft a sustainable and Northern Ireland-wide economic development and manufacturing strategy which maintains and grows skilled employment and develops the Green economy
- j) That an Economic & Social Council, comprising stakeholders and relevant Ministries, be established to develop a growing economy which aims to address the persistent social problems of Northern Ireland
- k) That the membership of the trade union movement, as the largest civil society organisation in NI, be reflected in the composition of public bodies proposed under the Fresh Start Agreement.

Congress notes with regret the failure of the Irish Government to contribute other than a paltry financial package as a part of this agreement. Congress expected more from a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement.

Congress has requested the Nevin Economic Research Institute to devise and compile a document outlining the means for the NI institutions to raise additional finances for the development of our economy.

Congress advises all of its members to note that the Fresh Start Agreement is not a trade union agreement but one reached by democratically elected political parties and both governments.

Wednesday 2nd December 2015