

Together we can beat Irish Ferries

Today's demonstration is an opportunity for all Irish workers to show our support for and solidarity with Irish Ferries workers in their battle against job displacement and exploitation. Their fight is our fight because if the company is successful in defeating the workers' resistance it will open the floodgates for employers throughout the economy to slash wages and attack working conditions – a process which is already well under way.

Workers in Irish Ferries have shown the way in which employers' attacks can be resisted. Their response to the attempts at bullying by management and their hired thugs was immediate and direct. They didn't wait around but took immediate direct action to protect their livelihoods and force the management on the defensive. It was this action which forced the issue of job displacement on to the national political agenda and which forced the leadership of the trade union movement to take the issue seriously.

Industrial Relations Act must be smashed

Today's demonstration is a welcome opportunity for all workers to demonstrate our support for Irish Ferries workers. But it does not go far enough. The most effective way in which all workers could show the bosses and government we intend to do more than complain would be through a national work stoppage. This would involve challenging the 1990 Industrial Relations Act which makes solidarity action unlawful.

The leadership of the trade union movement have however shirked the opportunity to challenge this anti-trade union law. Instead of issuing a direct call for all workers to walk off the job to support today's demo, they have "requested" member unions to "maximise the participation of their members".

Instead of this shilly-shallying, Congress should directly challenge the Industrial Relations Act. It is the strength of our numbers which would allow us to do this. If all workers across all unions took simultaneous action, it would

render the law ineffective and would demonstrate clearly our potential power. If Congress are afraid to issue this call because of fears that the assets of the unions would be placed in jeopardy, why don't they ask us – the members – what we think. After all the unions belong to the members, we should be allowed to make that decision.



Legacy of "partnership"

It is clear however that the leadership of Congress do not want to challenge the Industrial Relations Act because ideologically they are unwilling to challenge the government. This is the legacy of 18 years of so-called "social partnership" – a "partnership" which is so meaningless that employers in Irish Ferries, An Post and elsewhere can simply tear up their side of the deal at will.

It should surely be clear to everyone now that the 'Race to the Bottom' will only be halted by a strong fighting trade union movement. Far from "social partnership" being a means of preventing exploitation and job displacement, it has actually provided the cover which is allowing this to happen. Agreement to contracting out

some work is actually part of 'Sustaining Progress'.

It is time now that "social partnership" be consigned to the dustbin of history. We need now more than ever a trade union movement which will make a reality of the slogan of an injury to one being the concern of all. We need a trade union movement which will set itself the task of organising the unorganised, of recruiting into membership workers across all sectors of the economy who are being ruthlessly exploited. Gama, nursing homes, meat factories and many more have shown this exploitation. "Outsourcing" and other forms of exploitation will be defeated by recruit-

ing the "outsourced" and exploited workers into the unions and fighting alongside them against that exploitation.

Seize control

All of us as trade union members must rally to this cause. We need to seize back control of our unions and we need to make those unions into fighting bodies which will stand up for the vulnerable and exploited and which will show clearly our strength in numbers.

The direct action of Irish Ferries workers has shown the way. The challenge to all of us is to ensure that their action is the spark which ignites a fight back and which demonstrates to government and employers that we will no longer tolerate the exploitation of our fellow workers



*Workers Solidarity
Movement*

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