

Submission from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to the Committee for Employment and Learning Call for Evidence on the Employment Bill

December 2015

Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU or Congress) is the single umbrella organisation for trade unions on the island of Ireland. Congress is the largest civil society organisation in Northern Ireland. The organisation is required, through its mission statement, to strive to achieve economic development, social cohesion and justice by upholding the values of solidarity, fairness and equality.

The Northern Ireland Committee (NIC) of the ICTU is the representative body for 34 trade unions with over 215,000 members across Northern Ireland. In membership terms, it is the largest civil society organisation in Northern Ireland. Information on the NIC is available on www.ictuni.org

Congress welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee for Employment and Learning on the Employment Bill and we look forward to addressing the Committee in January 2016.

Congress is broadly content with the substance of the Employment Bill which we accept is a compromise, appropriate to the Northern Ireland context, resulting from a significant review *'of employment law guided by better regulation principles, which has sought to identify opportunities to reduce regulatory and administrative burdens on businesses, whilst protecting the rights of individual employees.'*

However, Congress wish re-iterate that the main empirical evidence, quantified by various bodies such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank, does not support the assertions of some that relaxing employment protection laws will increase employment and economic growth.

Congress also wish to highlight that the OECD's latest indicators show that the UK has the lowest degree of employee protection in Europe and third lowest of all the countries examined by the OECD.

Congress notes with concern that this review of employment law did not consider the burdens on the trade union movement, which are genuine, not rhetorical, in Northern Ireland. A raft of legislation introduced from 1980 onwards has unjustly saddled trade unions with regulations that greatly restrict our ability to perform our function and impose significant costs.

Congress would emphasise that domestic and international evidence indicates that trade unions have no significant negative consequences for labour market outcomes, and have positive effects in promoting workplace cohesion, equality and social justice. The evidence also clearly demonstrates that countries with a higher amount of the labour force in unions have lower levels of inequality.

Congress would call for a similar review *‘to identify opportunities to reduce regulatory and administrative burdens on’* trade unions in Northern Ireland.

Nevertheless, while we believe that there are elements within the Employment Bill that we would have concerns around and opportunities missed within the review to improve workers’ rights, Congress accept the bona fides of its authors and would support the passage of the Bill.