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Dr. Kevin Pelan
Committee Clerk
Social Development Committee
Room 412,
Parliament Buildings,
Stormont,
Belfast,
BT4 3XX

8th October 2012

Dear Dr. Pelan:

Re: Parliamentary Passage of the Welfare Reform Bill

We are writing to you, concerning the timetable of the parliamentary passage of the Welfare Reform Bill.

SIPTU supports an equality and human rights-based approach to the provision of social security which demonstrates an understanding of and focus on the needs and choices of all in receipt of benefits.

We understand that the Welfare Reform Bill will be referred to the Committee for its consideration stage from 10th October until 27th November, where scrutiny will take place two and a half days a week. Standing Orders allow 30 days for a Committee to consider a Bill, however, extensions can be sought.

We are seeking confirmation from the Committee that the commitment given to the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions for full line by line scrutiny will be honoured.

We are seeking reassurance the committee will request an extension to 90 days to allow for a full debate to occur on the practical consequences of any proposals within the Bill and to discuss potential options to mitigate impacts. It is vital that a real appraisal of the effect of

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these proposals locally is achieved. The welfare reform changes are likely to last a generation and any attempt to hasten the timetable will prove counter-productive.

SIPTU believes it is appropriate to tailor a Northern Ireland approach to issues presented by the Welfare Reform Bill. Given the wide range of reforms, the implementation of the changes will impact upon a significant percentage of the working age population in Northern Ireland. Different arrangements could be made and we argue that, in previous circumstances, different arrangements have been made that reflect the very different challenges that face society in Northern Ireland.

Furthermore, despite the legislation being passed in Britain, there remains a high level of uncertainty around the finer detail of Universal Credit. It is clear from the regulations that a number of important issues have yet to be decided, for example the level of the assumed minimum income floor which will be set of the self employed and the question of whether to pay monthly or fortnightly.

The challenge posed by these proposed reforms provides the NI Assembly with a unique opportunity to demonstrate the positive value of a devolved government and to impact on the formation of social security policy here for the next generation. We hope that this opportunity is seized and maximized and we look forward to working with the Committee on this important task.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Martin O'Rourke
Lead Organiser