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SIPTU's call for 'Yes' to Lisbon conflicts with its own concerns

The People's Movement has claimed that SIPTU's National Executive Council statement on the Lisbon Treaty, which accompanied their call yesterday for a 'Yes' vote, conflicts with that call. Former MEP and chairperson of the People's Movement, Patricia McKenna, said "the statement from SIPTU's NEC makes it clear that they share many of our views on the issue of workers' rights and are far from satisfied with the assurances from the 'Yes' side on this issue". In its statement SIPTU says, "The key finding on workers' rights has since been played down in Government and establishment circles. The reason is obvious. Recognising the issue would entail a requirement to act on it – and they are not prepared to do so." SIPTU's statement goes on to say "A 'social protocol' as distinct from a 'declaration' recognising the high priority of workers' rights is essential".

"If SIPTU believes this to be an 'essential' requirement, and I believe they are correct in doing so, why then are they ignoring this vital requirement to protect workers' rights and just calling for a 'Yes' to Lisbon?" asked McKenna. "This is an extremely reckless approach which is playing fast and loose with the rights of workers throughout the EU. SIPTU, as an Irish trade union, has a unique opportunity to defend the rights of workers across the EU but is squandering this opportunity because it seems to lack the courage to go against the EU's elite" said McKenna.

McKenna went on to say that "The 'free-market at any cost' direction of the EU has not gone unnoticed by SIPTU and they point out in their own statement that 'over the past few years, there has been a noticeable drift towards strident free-marketism. This has been reflected in a number of initiatives at the level of the EU Commission and judgements issued by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) on matters affecting workers' rights. Unless this trend is corrected it will sow division both between States and within them undermining the cohesion necessary for the continued success of the entire EU Project itself".

"SIPTU leaders speak of a 'social Europe that protects the rights of workers' but the extent to which free-market policies are embedded in the Lisbon treaty will ensure that the political rhetoric about a social Europe within the EU will remain just that – political rhetoric" she said.

"SIPTU's call for a 'Yes' vote seems to be based on fears of an even worse deal. They say 'It is not simply a case of saying "No" this time and waiting for a better outcome. We must also take account of the possibility of worse emerging'. This is a very defeatist attitude and if trade union leaders had adopted this approach down the years they would have achieved very little. It is clear that across the EU people are waiting for an

opportunity to have their say on the future direction of the EU. Irish Trade Unions could be pivotal in helping to make that happen” concluded McKenna.

The secretary of the People’s Movement, Frank Keoghan, said he “regretted the decision of SIPTU to support the Lisbon Treaty but notes the many reservations contained in the statement of ‘support’. These include the accurate description of the ‘Solemn Declaration on Workers’ Rights and Social Policy’ as of ‘little significance’ and ‘not legally binding’, dissatisfaction that there is no social progress protocol attached to the treaty as called for by the ETUC, and anger at the refusal of the government to legislate for an entitlement to collective bargaining.”

“Significantly SIPTU’s statement of support did not address the question as to how Lisbon’s provisions that halve this country’s influence in the EU could enable a government with a ‘strong Labour/left component’ – on which the union places such great hopes for fighting unemployment – to resolve the economic crisis and advance social progress in the country and throughout the EU” said Keoghan.

[ENDS]

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