

**Race to bottom can only be defeated with new EU Treaty that
recognises workers rights to organise and be represented by unions
says TEEU leader**

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The General Secretary Designate of the Technical Engineering and Electrical Union, Eamon Devoy, said at a debate between trade unionists this evening on the Lisbon Treaty that workers across Europe must demand a new draft that enshrines their right to trade union organisation and representation. A new Treaty must include a Social Progress Protocol that “takes precedence over the other so-called ‘freedoms’ that guarantee the ‘right’ of employers to continue their ‘race to the bottom’ with impunity, jeopardising the gains made for ordinary working people by the Labour movement over the past half century”.

He was speaking at the Desmond Greaves School in Dublin in a debate with the General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions David Begg on the theme ‘The Race to the Bottom in an EU Context’. The debate was chaired by SIPTU and ICTU General President Jack O’Connor.

Mr Devoy said that the 45,000 strong TEEU had recommended a ‘No’ vote because members were “extremely concerned that employment standards in this country are being relentlessly driven down by those whose only goal is to accumulate more wealth to the exclusion of everything and everybody else.”

He added that, “in the wake of the European Court of Justice decisions in the Viking, Laval, Ruffert and Luxembourg judgements, the last thing we need is to consolidate the existing European Institutions any further without at least making an effort to balance workers’ rights with the rights of business moguls who currently do what they want, whenever they want to, to the detriment of their employees. It is for this reason that the TEEU is opposed to a Lisbon Treaty without a Social Progress Protocol as a key constituent.”

Every attempt by the trade union movement in Ireland to secure Collective Bargaining as a ‘Fundamental Right’ had been frustrated. The Millward Brown IMS Survey commissioned by the Government to find out why the Lisbon Treaty Mark I was rejected found a majority of Irish citizens cited concern for protection of workers rights as a ‘very important’ factor influencing how they voted, but the Government did nothing to address the problem.

The Labour Party and Irish Congress of Trade Unions also failed to campaign for inclusion of a Social Progress Protocol in Lisbon Mark II. However it was not too late for workers to seize the initiative, as they did in the last referendum and reject any Treaty that failed to include a Social Progress Protocol.

Supporters of the Treaty within the trade union movement claimed that workers should vote for Lisbon on the basis that the Charter of Fundamental Rights might be adopted at EU level, but the Charter had been in existence since 1966 “and there will be no greater obligation on member states to implement it after the vote on the Treaty than there has been in the past. Why should we expect the Irish Government to behave any differently after the Lisbon referendum than before? The only thing that will change the Irish Government’s attitude to the Charter of Fundamental Rights will be if the Government itself is changed in an election and that has nothing to do with Lisbon.”

Mr Devoy said workers should “take a different tack and ensure that the Lisbon Treaty Mark III, or whatever else might follow if Mark II is rejected, is grasped as an opportunity to once and for all establish a Social Progress Protocol that puts workers’ rights at the heart of Europe”.