

**4th May 2008 – Country’s largest craft union urges 45,000 members to vote No  
in the referendum on the Lisbon Treaty**

The national executive of the Technical Engineering and Electrical Union is advising members to vote ‘No’ in the referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. General Secretary Designate Eamon Devoy says, “The TEEU favours a social Europe but unfortunately recent key judgments by the European Court of Justice show that the pendulum has swung against workers’ rights and in favour of big business. In the circumstances it would be foolish to provide the institutions of the European Union with more power.

“The judgments in the Laval and Viking disputes accepted workers had the right to organise in unions only to negate its value by saying they could not undertake industrial action where it conflicted with the provision of goods and services, regardless of the social consequences. In the recent Ruffert case the Court found that a Polish subcontractor operating in Germany was entitled to pay his workers less than half the agreed minimum wage for the construction sector, because the right to provide unrestricted services took priority over collective wage agreements.

“This struck a particular chord with TEEU members. Twice in recent times we have found Polish workers at Money point being grossly exploited by German contractors and paid as little as €5 an hour. In another instance we discovered Serbian electricians being paid as little as \$3.81c an hour. We were only able to ensure proper rates were paid to these workers after strong pressure, including the prospect of industrial action, was exerted on the companies concerned.

“The Ruffert judgement, in particular, raises the spectre of similar abuses of vulnerable migrant workers in future. If this were to happen, not alone workers but Irish companies could find it all but impossible to compete for tenders, public or private. We do not want to surrender even more of our sovereignty to institutions that prize the ‘race to the bottom’ over people’s aspirations to a living wage and decent working conditions.

“The TEEU favors a social Europe and many of the gains made by Irish workers in the past, in areas such as equality, can be attributed in large part to reforms agreed at EU level. However in recent times governments of various member states, including Ireland, have blocked major reforms such as the draft directives on agency workers and the proposed ferries directive.

“Until such time as EU member states are prepared to recognise the right of workers to take industrial action in defence of their living standards, the TEEU will not support institutional reforms that only strengthen big business. If the Irish

Government and the European Commission want popular support for the Lisbon Treaty they must strengthen the Social Charter and enshrine its provisions in EU law.”

The TEEU is the country’s largest craft union with 45,000 members and the largest such union in manufacturing, construction, energy, engineering and electrical contracting.