

## **Public service pay talks: Unions to meet in January to prepare industrial action ballots**

*For immediate release, Wednesday 20th December 2023*

The 19 affiliate trade unions of the Public Services Committee (PSC) of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) will meet again on 11th January to sign-off on the wording of ballots for industrial action, in the event that the Government fails to conclude a new public service agreement in the meantime.

The PSC affiliates met this morning (Wednesday) for an update on public service pay talks, which stalled last night, ending inconclusively just days before the current agreement expires.

The process commenced on 27th November, and unions expressed disappointment that talks remain inconclusive, despite 11 meetings at the WRC (Workplace Relations Commission) in recent weeks.

Fórsa general secretary Kevin Callinan, who also chairs the PSC, said the WRC had made an assessment that it wasn't possible to conclude an agreement last night: "It's now unlikely talks will resume before Christmas, although we did express our willingness to meet over the next few days in order to conclude a deal.

"However, it remained clear last night that the Government can't or won't conclude a deal in that time, and has indicated it would prefer to resume negotiations in the new year.

"There's been no discussion so far in relation to pay. Nevertheless, we feel that if there had been a genuine push this week, it may have been possible to continue to close out the remaining issues and move onto the pay element of negotiations.

"We made it very clear that we remain available for discussions between the Christmas and New Year period, so it is very disappointing to have got to this stage with relatively little progress, and a tangible lack of enthusiasm on the part of Government to secure a successor to the current Building Momentum deal, which expires in 11 days time," he said.

INMO general secretary Phil Ni Sheaghdha said unions would now need to step up their campaign to secure cost-of-living pay rises: "We are facing an unprecedented situation where there will be no public service pay agreement on 1st January, so our unions will be organising their response. The first step will be to arrange ballots for all the affiliate unions. If members can't vote on a pay deal in January, they will instead need to vote for a course of appropriate action," she said.

SIPTU deputy general secretary John King said unions had a strong mandate from their members to secure a pay deal: "We went into this process with a view that it was time to roll up our sleeves and get the job done. The Government insists it welcomes the certainty and sustainability of having an agreement in place, but the slow pace of progress over the last few

weeks really doesn't reflect that. They are allowing a deal to lapse without a successor in place, so we will find ourselves in unusual industrial relations circumstances come the 1st of January."

INTO general secretary John Boyle said the new year will start with a high level of uncertainty both for unions and government: "In that instance we need to prepare the ground for a dispute, as the absence of a pay agreement creates uncertainty. That uncertainty could have been avoided, but there was a real lack of urgency on the Government side during these pay talks sessions, which will lead us into uncharted industrial relations territory in the new year," he said.

The officers of the PSC said that, despite the willingness of unions to meet with DPENDPR (Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform) officials again at the WRC before the deal expires, they did not expect any more talks to take place before the expiration of the current pay deal, *Building Momentum*, on 31st December.

The PSC affiliates are to meet again, to formulate an industrial relations strategy, including ballots for industrial action, on Thursday 11th January.

**ENDS**