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To ALL workers – A message from construction worker Gus McDonald

By now it is crystal clear that we are on the cusp of yet another global recession.

This will impact on investment, which will in turn impact on the construction industry and on jobs, as once again we find ourselves totally reliant on the private sector.

The decline in union density since the last recession saw the unions take a stance geared towards preservation.

Certainly, that was the case with the leadership. They exchanged compliance with the bosses for a guarantee of membership.

As this recession approaches, we cannot let the same union leadership make the same mistakes that drove many from the labour movement.

In fairness that looks less likely this time around - if we follow the examples of grassroots fightback that is brewing.

Grassroots members are organising and have had various degrees of success.

In the case of Unite the election of Sharon Graham was a huge victory for the grassroots members.

Forcing a change of direction in union policy, including an independent investigation into blacklisting involving officials.

Of course no union leader can transform the union movement from above, it has to be grassroots driven, but her election offers an opening, an opportunity.

In Ireland the shakeup in Unite has caused a changing of the guard amongst its officers and a more progressive and aggressive approach to member representation.

As we look through the rest of the unions, we can see that pressure from grassroots members is starting to bear fruit.

In Batu the grassroots forced the election of 2 new Committee members, in the process cranking up the pressure on an already hugely unpopular leadership.

Although there's a way to go to shake the old bureaucrats from their complacency.

In SIPTU the grassroots members have gone public calling out the leadership, even going so far as to publish a letter calling them out in the mainstream media.

The water workers have forced the union to call for a referendum on public ownership of our water and continue to shine a light on the union's shortcomings.

Across the board grassroots members are angry and their unions can be forced into actions that the leadership would not otherwise take.

Clearly there has been a disconnect between the membership and the leadership that's grown over the years, thanks to social partnership!

What is heartening is that as this recession approaches, the grassroots movements within some of our unions are no longer prepared to accept the self-serving policy of a compromised leadership any longer.

More worrying is the fact that weak leadership and lack of democracy remain the main obstacles to the progress of workers' rights in Ireland.

As we gaze across the Irish Sea to the rebirth of the UK Labour movement. Clearly there is a change of attitude among union members.

The only worry is that with the same individuals desperately clinging to the levers of power, the Irish Trade Union movement may never recover if they fail to take a defiant and decisive stance alongside the grassroots.

But no bureaucrat is going to suddenly be inspired to fight unless we all organise the rank and file and light a fire under our union bosses.

This recession will not be like the last.

Either the unions fight, or they will not be around for what follows.

That's not to say that the labour movement will die with them!

Just the opposite.

The labour movement would have no more use for them and in time would replace them.

It's time that our union leadership and ICTU decided which side they are on?

Either they are with us, or against us! Socialists in the unions will continue to support the rank-and-file revolt.

The RED Network (incorporating Rebel Telly) are a network of radical socialists within the political party People Before Profit, a 32-county people power movement on the island of Ireland.

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