

Unions push for worker access in 'respect at work' campaign

ANDY PRENDERGAST

A new campaign set up by four trade unions, FSU, CWU, SIPTU and Mandate, wants new protections for trade unions and their representatives, including access to workplaces and the use of public funds to promote collective bargaining.

The campaign, launched last week, lists demands it wants brought about through legislation, in the context of the transposition of the Adequate Minimum Wage Directive and its requirement to promote collective bargaining.

The campaign further shows trade unions' embrace of the law as a means to gain influence.

The 'respect at work' campaign makes "six asks" as follows:

1. "Ban union-busting once and for all.
2. Protect union members so that they cannot be victimised, discriminated against or dismissed for their union activity.
3. Provide the right to join a union for workers that positively encourages union membership and protects them from victimisation.
4. Introduce legally protected facilities for union representatives so that they have the means to discharge their functions for their members.
5. Provide the right of workers to access trade unions so they can know their rights, talk and ask questions of their relevant trade union in their workplace.
6. Public funding should promote collective bargaining, as per the EU Directive. Include collective bargaining as a positive attribute in all public tendering processes."

While the Unfair Dismissals Acts covers dismissals for trade union activity (without the normal 12 months' service to apply) the union campaign says that, "at that stage, the damage is already done and the union busting has already occurred."

This means unions would like new powers to prevent a dismissal before it would occur.

Access to non-union workplaces is a key demand of trade unions and the ICTU and one which will meet strong resistance by some employers and lobby groups.