

The fight for pay rises and the use of social media for union organising was to the fore of discussions at the SIPTU Manufacturing Biennial Conference.

Talks by international guests, lively debate on motions and musical performances were all packed into the one-day conference on Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> November. The event was attended by 200 delegates representing over 40,000 workers across all manufacturing industry sectors including pharmaceuticals, electronics, chemicals and agribusiness.

The conference opened on a musical note, with a rendition of the Christy Moore song, Ordinary Man, by Paul dePuis accompanied by Tony Murphy on guitar.

Introducing the Manufacturing Division Executive Review, Division Organiser, Gerry McCormack, said: “The Division’s pay strategy was firstly developed in the Pharmaceuticals, Chemicals and Medical Devices Sector and later extended to other sectors of the Division. It has secured over 234 pay agreements since 2011 of on average 2% per annum”.

He added: “SIPTU estimates that these pay increase have applied to over 50,000 workers across the manufacturing industry and the number of agreements is increasing on a weekly basis.

“A wage increase-led recovery coupled with a progressive tax regime is the best way to stimulate economic growth and generate domestic spending”.

Supporting Quality campaign director, Fabia Gavin, told the delegates that the initiative, which began in the Manufacturing Division two years ago, now has 57 brands involved endorsing it and is expected to expand further next year.

Delegates discussed five motions at the conference including a call for the introduction of a fairer PRSI system, the creation of a social media training course and the demand that retired members are afforded a secure retirement.

Among the several films outlining the union’s work shown to delegates, were “Organising for the Future” a film by the SIPTU Communications Department, which featured interviews with union activists from across the country and a video about organizing migrant workers produced by the manufacturing division.

Introducing the second film, SIPTU Organiser, Evelina Saduikyte, said: “From interaction with migrant workers in union organising campaigns we have come to the view that many still do not understand what unions are about. To help overcome this it was decided to produce this video”.

She added: “The video is for migrants and by migrants. Every person you will see in this video is a migrant worker”.

SIPTU Campaigns and Equality Organiser, Ethel Buckley, spoke to delegates of the union’s on-going work to ensure workplaces in Ireland are inclusive environments for all minority groups. SIPTU activist, Rachael Mathews McKay, of the SIPTU LBGTQ Network, informed delegates of the union’s work in support of the marriage

equality campaign which is focused on securing a 'Yes' vote in the upcoming referendum on this issue.

The conference also heard from Tony Murphy of the IDEAS institute on his work with SIPTU members and employers on finding innovative ways of working together.

Among the other speakers who addressed the conference were SIPTU General President, Jack O'Connor, SIPTU Vice-President, Patricia King, ICTU President, John Douglas and EFFAT Food, Drink and Tobacco Political Secretary, Estelle Brentnall.

### **Delegate views**

#### **Geraldine McDonald**

##### **Covidien**

##### **Athlone**

“The great thing about the conference is that everyone gets to interact with one another and meet people. There were a lot of issues discussed at the conference, including the service provided to members by union organisers and how this can be improved. It is great to have interaction with members in similar jobs as your own and find out how the union operates in their workplaces”.

#### **Tommy Ryan**

##### **Rexam Beverage Can Ireland Ltd**

##### **Waterford**

“The most important issue that was discussed at the conference was the structure of the union and how it has changed. Delegates were given an opportunity to review that and members could tell the organisers where they believe the transition to the new structure is falling down. I believe that the sector system is a better one but I believe where we are falling down is on communication. I believe that greater use of social media is needed so that people know nearly immediately when the union is getting wins”.

#### **Maggie Dembinska**

##### **Hollister**

**Ballina**

“It is very important that immigrants are encouraged to join SIPTU and I think it was great that this issue was raised at the conference. There is still a large amount of immigrants from many countries who do not know what SIPTU can do for them. They are afraid to join for the very simple reason that they believe that if they join the union they will lose their job. So what is needed is education about what we are doing, how we do it and that we can support and protect people in their jobs”.

**Christine O’Rahilly****Yves Rocher****Cork**

“At the forum I attended at the conference the discussion was on how SIPTU can improve in getting its message out there about pay rises on social media. People are now looking for information very quickly and the union has to keep up with that”.