**Address to TUI Annual Congress, 22nd April 2014**

**Mr. Gerard Craughwell, President, TUI.**

Céad mile fáilte chuig Comhdháil Bhliaintiúil Aontas Múinteoirí Éireann.

Good afternoon, colleagues. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you all to this, our 2014 Annual Congress. I extend a particularly warm welcome to those delegates among you who have not attended a TUI Congress before. I hope that you feel able to come to the podium (on behalf of your Branch, of course!) on motions to which you feel you can contribute, and to make your voice heard. No doubt you will hear many stirring and impressive speeches: no doubt, too, you will hear some appalling efforts; so there’s nothing to fear. Come to the podium (on your Branch’s behalf!) and express your (Branch’s!) views. And enjoy Congress. It is, after all, the zenith of our calendar year. And, sometimes, it can be great craic!

To those delegates amongst you who are TUI representatives, I express my deep admiration. I recognise the tireless and selfless work you undertake as TUI representatives, often in difficult circumstances and contexts. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to you, our representatives – at all levels - for the generous support you offer your trade union colleagues in our schools and colleges, as good trade union women and men. I hope you feel that you have been adequately supported in the last year, both by your voluntary colleagues and by Head Office staff and officials. For my part, I want to express my sincere thanks to the staff and officials who have supported me so generously in my work.

To those delegates amongst you who have not yet become workplace representatives and branch officers, I ask you to consider doing so. Independent research has shown that trade union representation is rewarding, both in professional and personal terms. I believe that all our members should aspire to a representative position in TUI, whether at local or national level. As a delegate, a representative is the next logical step for you.

I hope we will have an enjoyable and productive Congress. I look forward to hearing open and, no doubt, robust, debate on the motions you have submitted. I would ask that our debates are conducted in the best respectful traditions of the TUI.

Colleagues a lot has happened since our last Congress. Last Easter, we arrived in Galway, buoyed by the massive rejection, by ballot of our members, of Government attempts to re-negotiate the Croke Park Agreement. That ballot, as we all know, led the rest of the trade union movement to follow our lead and reject the Croke Park 2 proposals. We were warned that government was plotting to introduce legislation to cut our pay - with or without our consent; with or without any care for Social Partnership; and with or without negotiation. Did we think the current Fine Gael/Labour coalition government would introduce such legislation? Many trade union leaders believed that the Labour Party – the party of Connolly, Larkin and O’Brien – was committed to protecting workers. How could we conceive that Labour Party TDs, many of whom commenced their careers within the trade union movement, would support such proposed legislation in 2013, one hundred years after the Lock-Out?

We had placed our faith in the Labour Party, a party we perceived as committed to the core principles of social justice and solidarity. How naïve we were! When the time came, in Dáil Éireann, to vote through the FEMPI legislation, the Labour Party TDs rushed willingly through the lobbies, to support Fine Gael. Was their unseemly haste the haste of those in fear of being exposed for selling out their own supporters? Or was it that they had sold their souls for a chance at power? Who knows? What we do know, is that the main political parties of this country have made workers pay for their failure to control and monitor an economy that spiralled out of control.

As regards the FEMPI legislation itself, it is the vehicle which has changed everything for public sector workers in Ireland. It has destroyed Social Partnership and trust in industrial relations. It is a weapon which was used to threaten workers. Some members of TUI believed, and still believe, our union should challenge the FEMPI legislation in the courts. There are over 700,000 trade unionists in this country, and this odious law is an attack on us all. Challenging the FEMPI legislation is a task for the entire trade union movement, not solely TUI. At its Biennial Congress last year, the ICTU resolved to challenge the legislation.

This policy position was adopted, with almost every significant union supporting the motion. To date, however, I have seen little by way of public action or comment to indicate any challenge presently. I can only hope there is action behind the scenes!

The entire trade union movement must use every available means to bring about the repeal of this draconian legislation. This must be a defining moment for the trade union movement, if we are to retain our reason to exist. It is time to revive the core principle of trade unionism, that an injury to one is an injury to all. The FEMPI legislation is, most definitely, an injury to all of us.

Colleagues, the days of social partnership public service agreements, won or lost on aggregate votes, are over; and good riddance to them, in many respects. Agreements where other sectors of the workforce can vote to change the terms and conditions of our work, or our pay, simply don’t work, and will never work, where sectorial interests are at play which undermines their very being.

Unless and until the trade union movement speaks and acts with one voice, I do not believe that we should ever again allow any negotiations on our pay and terms of employment by people with their own constituency demands to meet.

We have seen that some utilitarian unions have been willing, and quick, to reach so-called sweetheart deals, at the expense of other unionised workers. It is not social solidarity which mattered, but, rather, leverage and self-interest. Public sector agreements have been undermined in large measure because public sector trade unions have lost the ability to stand together in solidarity with other unions.

There is a problem with the leadership of the trade union movement in Ireland. It is rooted in an ever-decreasing commitment to trade union politics. How many of us can name the elected president of any trade union, other than our own? How many Executive Committee members of this union can you name right now, without looking them up? Who are the presidents of the ASTI, the INTO and IFUT? I recently heard the President of ICTU – whoever he is (oh yeah, Mr. John Douglas), call for a revival of trade union politics. I want to add my voice to that call.

Elected trade unionists are all too often left in the wings by a bureaucracy that, in some cases, is far removed from the membership of unions it has been employed to serve. We must restore the supremacy of those elected to representative positions. The official spokesperson for every trade union must be an elected representative, and we should never again relinquish that role. I fought hard last year – with the help of a General Secretary that respected and supported my role – to ensure that, as President of this Union, I would be in attendance for every minute of any negotiations on our pay and our conditions of employment. I hope future presidents will never allow what I fought for to be lost, and that presidents of other unions take upon themselves the responsibility conferred on them by the electoral process. TUI must also, in future, insist that all negotiations are carried out during the normal working day. All-night negotiations are a piece of theatre, designed to depict a difficult and protracted struggle. My experience during the Croke Park 2 negotiations exposed them for what they are – a sham, and an insult to those relying on their outcomes. The trade union movement must never again succumb to this trickery.

Colleagues, speaking of the politics of the trade union movement, and the importance of having a mandate to lead our union, I wish to applaud Mr. Martin Marjoram and Ms. Joanne Irwin, who recently stood for election to the position of Vice-President of TUI. It is not easy to face any electorate, let alone an electorate as diverse and as distributed as ours; and both nominees travelled the country to face the electorate in person. To place oneself before the electorate and to do so actively shows true leadership potential. I want every member of TUI to hold elected office, whether at the workplace, branch or national level. As I said earlier, it is your right, and your responsibility as a member of this union, to participate in leading the TUI.

On the matter of representation, let me turn to the issue of gender balance. Our membership consists of 70% female and 30% male members, while our Executive Committee is the exact opposite - 25% female and 75% male; and that ratio will worsen after this Congress. This is an issue that must be addressed by the TUI.

I do not now, and never have, supported any form of quota system or positive discrimination measures when it comes to gender balance. Gender quotas are, by their very nature, discriminatory. I, in common with all of you here, want the best people to lead the TUI; not because of their gender but because they have convinced their electorate that they are the right person for the job at the time it arises. I do agree that we must investigate how we might ensure a better gender balance at national level and I support Motion No. 222 in that regard. It is heartening and inspiring to see women in leadership roles in this Union. I want to pay tribute to those women who took up the challenge and led the TUI, such as our first woman Vice-President, Ms. Patricia Hurley (who died in tragic circumstances), our first woman president, Ms. Alice Prendergast, our outgoing Past-President, Ms. Bernie Ruane and Ms. Joanne Irwin, our Vice-President Elect.

Colleagues, as you know, the local and European elections are about to swing into top gear. As educators, we must ignore the promises we will hear in the coming weeks: we have heard them all before. Instead, we must ask those coming to our doors to explain their position on a number of educational issues.

We must ask them if they support the implementation of the proposed changes to the Junior Cycle next September, despite the opposition of 27,000 teachers. We must ask them their position on the appointment of teachers and lecturers to boards such as SOLAS, the HEA and ETBs. In constituencies in which there are IOTs, intending to merge or make the transition to technological university status, we must ask aspiring public representatives to set out their position on issues such as our lecturers’ workload, class sizes, academic freedom, apprenticeship and security of tenure. In short, we must place education at the top of any agenda, for any candidate, running for election to local or European government. Over 60,000 teachers and lecturers, together with their extended families, have significant power. This time, we must use it.

On the wider political front, all trade unionists must work together in solidarity to elect only those who will protect the weakest in our society and those who will defend the terms and conditions of all workers of this country. Those seeking public office must learn that if they fail the trade union movement, there is a heavy price to be paid. I call on teachers and lecturers to visit on the political class, through the ballot box, some of the misery they have visited on us.

Let me now address the Public Services Stability Agreement, 2010 – 2014, more commonly hated as the Haddington Road Agreement. It is an “agreement” only insofar as it was Hobson’s choice. It was regarded by our members as the lesser of two evils. The question which arises is this: could TUI members have resisted the Haddington Road Agreement? Many serving and, indeed, retired members called for a stand to be made by our members. They criticised the Executive Committee for its decision not to recommend to members to reject the Haddington Road proposals in the ballot conducted amongst members. Many of these commentators had pensions far in excess of the meagre income of many of new entrants to the profession. Some of them are ideologues, who see any resistance to government, however doomed, as the spark to ignite the revolt of the working class.

Should TUI have made a grand stand against the Haddington Road Agreement? Should TUI members have courted the government into using the draconian powers it arrogated to itself through the FEMPI Act? What would our members have gained? Many have said that at least TUI would have made a stand; TUI would have made a point.

However, should TUI members have been asked to be a party to the redundancies which would have followed - just to make a point? Were struggling TUI members prepared to reject the slight improvement in pay for new entrants to teaching, and restoration of increments achieved through the HRA, – just to make a point? Were TUI members prepared to reject the 3-year CID provision negotiated through the HRA, just to make a point? Did TUI members want to reject the establishment, under the Haddington Road Agreement, of the expert groups to redress casualization at second and third level? Should the leadership of TUI have led our members into open warfare with government, isolated and alone; and without any army of trade union allies behind us? It is argued by some that there was, and is, an absence of leadership of our membership; that the Executive Committee should have led our member to a No vote against the Haddington Road Agreement. The assumption inherent in this thinking is that, notwithstanding the overwhelming odds against us, we would have won. This is the kind of naïve leadership that led to the catastrophic defeats of the Spartans at the Gap of Thermopylae, Crockett at the Alamo and Custer at the Battle of the Little Bighorn.

The truth is that imprudent and capricious leadership can lead to defeat. In the circumstances that prevailed at the time, I believe that, in recognising that the odds were stacked so high against us, the Executive Committee steered a prudent course of action and avoided the sacrificing of our membership for the protection of other unions which had no interest in challenging the government. The truth is that, in the absence of an effective alliance amongst all public sector unions, defeat was the inevitable outcome. And, however noble and righteous is the fight, defeat is still defeat. Why should we ever sacrifice our members for the sake of those unwilling to fight for themselves?

As a direct result of face-to-face negotiations with the Department of Education and Skills some modest improvements were secured for teachers and lecturers, which were not available under Croke Park 2. Yes, the Haddington Road Agreement is lousy in every way, but who would have denied those of our members – the most marginalised and the poorest – the miserly gains they got?

Colleagues, it is also important, over the coming days of debate, that we remember that however distasteful and unfair the Haddington Road Agreement is, our members answered these questions for themselves and voted, through a democratic process, to accept it – however reluctantly.

Kofi Annan once said that “when economic conditions are difficult, people tend to be less generous and protect themselves; the question of solidarity doesn’t mean much to them at that time”. This is the principle which underpinned the approach of the government to the Haddington Road Agreement. Those TDs who sit with the current government should remember when next they seek election, that TUI members took a democratic decision not to accept the HRA but, rather, to reject the outrageous FEMPI legislation the government enacted. It was a vote of protest against the FEMPI Act and the government that introduced it. I believe that the government will pay for forcing that decision on us. I am confident that the evidence of our members’ vit·ri·ol will become apparent in the forthcoming elections.

Despite different timeframes, the TUI and the ASTI have, with the same measure of contempt, arrived at the same conclusion regarding the Haddington Road Agreement. In my heart of hearts, I do not believe that both unions together would have defeated the government on the issue but both unions need to be together, at all times, and on all issues. Nothing could be clearer to me. Colleagues, the time has come for both unions to set aside whatever historical differences there were between us and move, as quickly as possible, to establish a single, strong union. God knows, it’s almost impossible to identify any significant differences. A new union would encompass all sectors. It would be a union of over 33,000 members; its organisational structure would be flexible enough to provide for sectoral interests, including – importantly – key guarantees for the further education and third level sectors, on matters of vital interest to them. It would allow for vetos on such issues. Colleagues, most importantly, this new union would have real muscle, both within ICTU and against government.

I know that in Wexford, President Sally Maguire and General Secretary Pat King of the ASTI will call for the same unity. It should be possible to move to a single union, with little difficulty and in a short time. I know that over the coming days there are motions dealing with this very issue – motion 193 and 194. I ask you to respond positively to these motions.

Finally, colleagues, this is your opportunity, as delegates representing the membership of our Union, to set the agenda for the coming year; to set us new homework for the coming year. In accepting a position as a delegate to Congress, you have accepted responsibility as a leader in this Union. With that responsibility comes the duty to lead in the right direction and adopt sustainable policy positions. As Peter Drucker famously stated: “Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things”. Colleagues, my Executive, General Secretary and I look to you humbly for the kind of leadership that will lead TUI to “doing the right things”.

Delegates, I wish us all the very best of luck as we determine our agenda for the coming year and renew our collective vocation. I hope you will all enjoy a positive, re-invigorating and productive Congress. Thank you.