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Prison Officers' Association's Annual Delegate Conference

Sligo (Ireland), 27.04.2022

Report



President Tony Power opens the session on behalf of the National Executive Council of the Prison Officers Association.

It is fitting that, after having to cancel our last two conferences due to the dreaded Global Pandemic, we can all gather here today without masks and social distancing to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the Prison Officers Association.

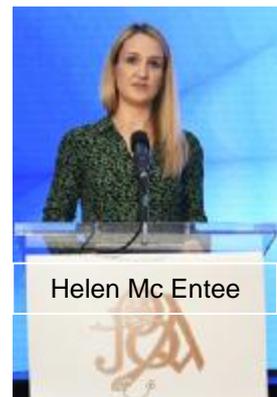
He wish to extend a warm welcome to the Cathaoirleach of Sligo County Council, Councillor Paul Taylor and thank him for his address here this morning. I would like to welcome the Minister for Justice, Ms. Helen Mc Entee, the Director General of the Irish Prison Service, Ms. Caron McCaffrey and her officials to our

conference.

Fraternal greetings go to our colleagues from Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and EUROFEDOP.

This is a proud year for our association as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of our foundation. The Prison Officers' Association was founded in 1947 by members who had had seen and experienced enough of the atrocious working conditions.

Despite the obstacles put in place and the opposition of both prison management and government the association continued to grow and, although slowly, managed to make progress on behalf of its members.



The President concludes his speech with:

A prison officer is a FIRST RESPONDER. Often having to give CPR to someone who has attempted to take their own life and summon help from the fantastic nursing teams in the prisons.

A prison officer is expected to POLICE a place that only contains people who have committed criminal offences and often violent ones. Keeping people safe on the inside and keeping them from getting back to the outside before the correct time.

A prison officer is a FIRE FIGHTER, often extinguishing fires and rescuing people from smoke filled cells or areas, putting their own health and safety at risk.

A prison officer is also an unofficial therapist and support worker helping people to get through the day. A prison officer is often a parent figure when someone has had little or no parental input in their lives.

A prison officer performs a service that never stops. The prisons can't just close. So, when there are health scares, social or civil unrest, even wars - prison officers will continue to go to work and continue to fulfil all these roles.

Please do not try to tell prison officers that they do not perform a front line or necessary service. It is the necessary role that no-one else would willingly perform!

To all my "Forgotten Front Line Service" colleagues... Stay Safe

During the debates were also discussed, CONTROL & RESTRAINT – and FALSE STATEMENTS

The Prison Officers Association will continue to support our members in these situations, but the day is fast approaching when we will have to advise our members when there is trouble in our prisons to step back and just call the Politic Gardai. This is something we would not wish to do, however, we have a duty to protect our members"



Power concluded by stressing to the Minister for Justice (in attendance) that "prison officers can no longer be asked intervene in disturbances if this puts their livelihood at risk"

Pay also came into the debate and decision-making: PAY A CRITICAL ISSUE FOR PRISON OFFICERS

At their annual delegate conference on Sligo this evening (Tuesday) the Prison Officers Association made it clear, "that the entire membership of the POA will fight vigorously for a fair pay increase for Prison Officers"

Addressing the conference Tony Power President POA said, "Inflation is clearly being driven by energy costs and transport fuel. Wage increases will not increase the cost of these items, because they are set by global markets outside the State. Over the last year inflation rose by 5½%. Energy and petrol costs rose by 30%."

Power addressed the Minister, "I must take the opportunity here today to address the issue of Public Sector Pay. POA members accepted the terms of Building Momentum in January 2021 given the economic circumstances that were in place at that time, viewing this short-term agreement as a sensible way forward taking into consideration the impact of the Global pandemic. However, now some fifteen months on there has been a huge economic shift from where we were back in January 2021.

It has now become very clear that the immediate issue our members face is the impact on living standards from rising inflation. This will not be temporary. The ESRI recently projected that inflation would rise by nearly 12% over this year and next and this could be an under-estimate. If this happens, it will be the largest two-year inflation growth since the 1980s.

A Minister coming to a Conference like this and praising our members for the work they do is of little comfort when we find ourselves in a cost-of-living crisis. Supermarkets or Petrol Stations do not accept praise as a form of payment.

Power concluded, "What is needed is the concern of workers to be heard and met. We are now in a very different space than we were in January 2021 and a pay increase is justifiably needed as inflation continues to spiral out of control. To put it simply - the terms of the 'Building Momentum' agreement will no longer suffice – a pay increase that deals adequately with the spiralling inflation is the only solution"

Bert Van Caelenberg, Secretary General of EUROFEDOP addressed the Conference:

He congratulates the POA, member of EUROFEDOP since 1982.

On this occasion he received a bronze statue for his many years of support and his presence at the annual conferences.

He brings greetings from his President, Norbert Schnedl, who sends his apologies for not being here today owing to other unavoidable national work engagements.

I am delighted to be back here with you today in Sligo. Thank goodness we can return to our normal in-person conferences.

During the corona period, the public services have once again shown their importance as service providers to the people of Europe.

However, it must also be said that the contacts between the members, trade union activists and union leaders have never been so difficult. And so, I am very pleased to see you here, the representatives, prison officers of all the prisons in Ireland.

The many online meetings marked a particular low point in more than the fifty years of EUROFEDOP's existence.

Dear colleagues here in Ireland: stay vigilant, because during the crisis period those who wanted to downsize, privatise and liberalise public services remained silent. They too have come to recognise that the government provided and provides the best guarantee for the smooth functioning of society in times of crisis.

Prisons are public institutions and must remain the competence of the public authorities. The government, the political system has also its obligations when it comes to its staff.

Pay and Allowances, Terms and Conditions of Employment, Recruitment, Pandemic recognition payment, Nursing Issues, COVID-19 updates, and so on, remain matters of concern for your members, for you as Conference Delegates.

After 2nd May 2019, I hope that today's conference will mark a new beginning!"

