



#fsufuture

FRIDAY 11TH MAY

SPEECH BY DERMOT RYAN, GENERAL SECRETARY

TO FSU Delegate Conference, Limerick.

Delegates,

It is a privilege to address conference today as your General Secretary.

All my working life I have been a campaigner and a trade unionist.

I passionately believe in the power of the union to make a positive difference in the lives of working people, their families and the communities we live in.

This belief is central to who I am and it is a huge honour to bring these values to the work of this great Union.

Conference theme

The theme of our conference is Building, Growing, Winning.

This theme sums up the ambition I have for our union.

I hope it is one that will stimulate debate this weekend and beyond.

And I want us all to take inspiration from this theme in the important work we all have to undertake in the months and years ahead.

In this year, the centenary of our foundation, we proudly acknowledge the courage, sacrifice and commitment of those who founded our union and steered our course during our first 100 years.

This legacy also urges us to look to the future.

To the future of our sector - so important to the economy and social fabric of every community.

To the future of workers in our sector - who have sacrificed much to repair the damage wrought by others.

And to the future of our Union – resilient and innovative in a rapidly changing workplace.

I am determined to work with members and our staff team to ensure that our Union builds, grows and wins.

Building:

We need to build to be relevant and responsive to our members and the thousands of workers in the sector who should be our members.

That means building our capacity to innovate, to campaign and to communicate.

It will require change, new ways of working, new ways of reaching out and listening to our membership. Most of all it will require courage.

And I am confident that we will rise to the challenge.

I am determined to work with you, our activists on the ground, to ensure that we embed a culture of excellence and innovation in how our union does its business.

New initiatives are already underway.

We are developing a presence on third level campuses across the country to speak with the next generation of financial service workers.

We have also developed 'The Office Block' podcast – a new way to talk to people who currently don't have a union card.

But this is only the beginning.

I want to be part of a union that breaks new ground and isn't afraid to take risks.

And I am optimistic that together we can achieve that.

Growing:

We also need to grow our union.

In employments where we already have a strong presence we need to increase our density.

Our power, our authority in negotiations stems directly from our strength.

The stronger the union is the more power we have to deliver for workers.

To do this we need to enhance our organising ability in individual workplaces.

We need to tell our story better.

We need to show workers the benefits that union membership brings.

We also need to convince people that their union membership is an asset throughout their career.

Winning:

But building and growing aren't ends in themselves.

They must deliver wins for our members.

Too often our movement talks only in terms of what it has prevented.

This has been especially true during times of financial crisis and turmoil.

Now we need to change that script.

We need to proudly talk about what we have achieved, what we have won for workers.

We also need to have confidence in our ambition for the future.

That ambition will involve core issues such as pay, pensions and working time.

But our ambition needs to be broader.

We need to look at the new challenges facing workers.

Issues such as data privacy, the impact of technology on work/life balance for example.

What is more we need to lead that agenda and deliver for our members.

That is what I mean by winning.

I believe it is also appropriate for our Union to discuss wider social issues – such as equality, housing, and investment in public services.

Decisions in these areas impact our members and we need to be part of the debate. Because your Union membership doesn't end everyday when you leave your place of work.

Workers who should be our members:

Today I also want to speak to those people working in the sector who should be our members.

I was at home in Nenagh, County Tipperary in February shortly before taking up my post.

A neighbour of ours stopped me in the street to wish me well in my new role.

He, and his family, have strong rural trade union roots.

In passing he lamented the fact that his daughter, who now works in financial services in Dublin, hasn't joined the union.

Always keen to follow up on a recruitment opportunity I enquired why?

Well, he said, she's just starting her career and she'll probably think about joining when she is settled, in a few years.

He also mentioned she worked for one of those American outfits – where they'd hardly be rolling out the red carpet for your lot!

I want the message to go out loud and clear that we are the union that represents all workers in the financial services sector.

Yes, our traditional strength has been in the retail banking sector.

However, today the FSU represents workers in more than 50 companies across the island, and that includes those 'American outfits'.

Let the message go out from this hall today - There are no 'no-go-areas' for this union.

And to young workers in the sector in particular I say – your union membership is probably never more valuable than when you are starting your career.

That is when the power relationship between you and your employer is fixed.

That is when you establish that your labour has value, has an intrinsic worth.

For instance, working late or working weekends isn't a test of loyalty or something that just happens.

It is work, it is your personal time.

Its needs to be valued and rewarded, not taken for granted.

Navigating that power relationship is difficult on your own, particularly at the beginning of your career.

The FSU is here to help you.

We value work. We value rewarding careers.

But we also value your other meaningful roles in life outside of the office. Yes you are a finance worker but you are also a brother, a sister, a son, a daughter, a mother, a father.

Helping you striking the balance between work life and family life is at the heart of what we do.

Ensuring that you are treated with decency, fairness and equality in the workplace is central to our mission.

Join us.

And before you ask, yes, a membership form is on its way to my neighbour from Nenagh!

Work in the 21st Century

I am ambitious and optimistic about the future of trade unionism.

Ambition and optimism are qualities that are too often lacking in our movement.

Too often we speak of the changing workplace with trepidation and fear.

Too often we are perceived as the defenders of outdated practices, stubborn and resistant to change.

This union is different. This union needs to be different.

Our sector is at the cutting edge of technology and digital innovation.

Change is a part of the daily working life of our members.

However, the difference we make is to ensure that change does not come at the expense of core values we campaign for:

- Decent wages

- Rewarding careers

- Worklife balance

- Security in work and retirement

And let there be no doubt, those values we have fought for, those values we defend everyday on behalf of our members are under attack.

You know it well from

- the growth of insecure work

- efforts to offshore work to lower wage economies

- unfair performance management regimes

- lengthening of working hours – both formal and informal.

On a global level you may be aware of the draft World Bank report, due in autumn.

This will argue for lower minimum wages, increased power for employers to fire workers and other attacks on working people, dressed in the cloak of 'labour market' deregulation.

This is not the workplace of the 21st century that trade unionists will accept.

This is what I term 'the Americanisation of work'.

Where basic protections and standards of decency are stripped away.

Where workers are seen solely as a cost, not a valuable asset.

And this is not the workplace that the next generation of workers want to be part of.

And that, delegates, is why I am confident and optimistic about the future of our union and of our movement.

Yes, the challenges are immense, and the vested interests are powerful.

But we have a vision of work that is different.

We have an appreciation about the value work gives to women and men.

We want work to enhance people's lives, not make them unbearable.

And believe me our vision is shared by thousands of young workers.

By school children and college students on the cusp of their working lives.

There is a choice emerging about how the workplace of the 21st century develops.

It is our challenge, in this union and beyond, to articulate a clear vision of how we want work to develop.

And central to that development is trade union membership. We know the value of that membership and we have to be courageous in our mission to convince others to join us.

We must demonstrate that progressive, campaigning trade unions are not just here to stay, but will grow and will win.

We are proud of our past. Proud of the courageous women and men who have built our Union since 1918, and confident of our future as we look to our next 100 years..

Our message to employers:

My family ran a small business when I was growing up. A pub and restaurant.

As they say we kept the doors open through good times and bad.

And when things were bad, throughout the 1980s, for instance when I was a kid, I know that the relationship they had with their local bank kept us afloat.

I appreciate and value the role that banks play in our communities.

And I know it is our members who are at the heart of that relationship.

I also know it is our members who are most aggrieved at the damage that has been wrought on the sector through recklessness, negligence and greed.

Today I have spoken about how our union needs to change.

But we aren't the only ones. It is high time employers in our sector also took a long hard look in the mirror.

It is beyond belief that a bank, bailed out with public money, and only recently returned to good order, should propose, as a matter of priority, a bonus scheme for senior executives.

Do they really think that are worth that much?

I have a message to employers.

Get your house in order first before thinking you can party like it's 1999.

So, for your customers

put in a place a sustainable banking system that, while profitable, also values the social role of the sector.

When things go wrong or malpractice is identified – go fix the problem, don't spend months and years in denial and evasion. And don't blame your workers for things that do go wrong.

Acknowledge that home mortgages underwrite the dreams and ambitions of families. Our members have a proud record of working with families to realise their dream to own a family home. For our members, family mortgages aren't just chits to be sold to vulture funds.

And for your staff

Put in place a clear career and reward structure for employees, focused on those on low and middle incomes, before clambering for the return of bonuses.

Tackle the understaffing that continues across the branch network, frustrating customers and putting staff under enormous pressure.

Put an end now to future outsourcing and offshoring plans and ensure that customers can have trust that their data is handled professionally and competently by people they know and trust.

And to employers where the FSU is growing and making the voice of staff heard, often the first time, I say:

Don't make the mistake of battening down the hatches and think we will go away.

We are an ambitious, proud and progressive union.

We are committed to our members and that membership will grow.

Deal with us professionally now and it will be good for staff, good for customers, good for business and good for our communities.

But if you want a battle about our right to represent staff and be heard then we will take up that fight and we will win.

Conclusion:

Delegates,

I look forward to the debate and discussion we will have this weekend.

Those debates, and your views, will play a critical role in the development of our union.

I am honoured, excited and invigorated about the opportunities before us.

For our project to thrive our activists and our membership must share that ambition.

My promise to you today is that I will give it my all to build our union, grow our membership and win for workers in the sector and their families.

I will be clear about my ambition, the resources we need to achieve it and the way we have to change so that we can succeed.

And I will be accountable to you and the wider membership on delivering that agenda.

We won't achieve everything in one go, success doesn't come overnight.

But I want you to know that in terms of delivering change the buck stops here.

The general council has placed its trust in me to deliver for the Union and I'm determined to see that through.

But our project can't be achieved by one person.

We are trade unionists.

Ours is a collective endeavour.

This is your union.

Your ambition, your ideas, your courage and commitment are vital to this project.

We share a vision for our union.

We all need to commit to making that vision a reality.

Let us leave Limerick this weekend imbued with the spirit of the women and men who met in this city in September 1917 and started our Union.

We owe it to them build, grow and win and together we'll do it!

Thank you.

Ends.