

“The revelation that the UK government has a ‘principled opposition’ to the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund means that there is a Tory veto on the future prospects of those workers from FG Wilson who are already facing redundancy and unemployment. This is the local and all-too-human impact of the anti-European impulses of the Tory right. They say that they want to ‘repatriate’ powers and resources from Brussels, but in fact they are centralising powers and resources from the regions and nations of the UK, into Whitehall and the Treasury.

“There is a significant financial cost for devolved departments, such as DEL, to offer assistance and re-training to the hundreds of workers from FG Wilson and their local suppliers. If they could use the EGF, half of the funding would come from the EU Commission, with matching funds from the Treasury. There are no Barnett consequences, despite the fears flagged up by the DETI Minister, Arlene Foster. The EGF has been very successfully used in many EU states to assist workers facing the same threats as those at FG Wilson, most notably the workers at Dell in Limerick, who have benefitted greatly alongside more than 21,000 workers in 12 EU member states in 2011. It is specifically designed to assist the re-training and re-employment of workers in businesses affected by globalisation and outsourcing, as well as workers in smaller local firms in the supply chain.

“Since the closure of the Seagate factory in Limavady in 2007, the ICTU has been lobbying ministers and MLAs on the OFMDFM Committee, which scrutinises EU matters, to use the EGF to up-skill workers affected by ‘outsourcing’ and ‘downsizing’ as a result of globalisation and the ruthless pursuit of short-term profits by multi-national companies. Too many global corporations focus primarily on the short-term interests of their impatient and greedy shareholders. Unfortunately, we have a government in Westminster who focus on cheap headlines for the anti-European press and Tory voters who threaten to defect to UKIP.

“What is good for the Tory party in England is bad for Northern Ireland. We hear from the Prime Minister that they will veto any increases in the EU budget for 2014-20. If they get their way, this means less money coming to NI from the EU – less Structural Funds for our infrastructure, smaller amounts of Social Funds for education and inclusion, fewer resources for peace and reconciliation as PEACE IV is deprived of cash, and a real threat to farm subsidies under the Common Agricultural Policy. The EU has been generous to Northern Ireland, far more generous than the Tories under Thatcher who opposed NI being designated as a Priority One region back in the 1980s. That hurdle was overcome, and we were spared the worst of what the Tories could throw at us then.

“What the workers of FG Wilson in Larne and Belfast require now, is for our MLAs, MPs and MEPs to get over their political reservations about the EU and demand that those workers are given a chance to compete in this global marketplace. We missed the opportunity to help the workers at Seagate. This must not happen with FG Wilson, or future mass redundancies.

“This is the acid test. If we are failed by our local politicians and the uncaring little-Englanders of the Tory party, this region will lose hundreds of millions of Euros over the next seven years. “