

UN set to learn about West's unemployment

Sanctions will also be on the table for discussion

WEST Belfast man Bertie Atkinson will travel to the United Nations in Geneva this week to give evidence on the impact that unemployment and social security sanctions have on his local community.

Bertie is a member of the Right to Work: Right to Welfare group (R2W). The group is made up of unemployed people who organise outside social security offices including Andersonstown, Falls and Shankill and campaign on issues affecting them.

Bertie, from the Lower Shankill, will travel as part of a delegation from Participation and Practice of Rights (PPR), established by the internationally renowned trade unionist Inez McCormack.

Speaking ahead of the trip, Bertie said: "This is an opportunity to bring an international spotlight to the impact of unemployment and underinvestment in West Belfast.

"Welfare cuts are set to worsen under the Fresh Start People's Proposal" in March which outlines changes the Executive can make to protect people from benefit sanctions, which currently strip people's social security benefits for periods of up to 18 months."

R2W will remind the UN of the official statistics in relation to unemployment here, with long term and youth unemployment rates significantly higher.

According to the group the latest figures indicate that the overall unemployment rate stands at 6.3%, compared with a UK average of 5.1%. However, the long term unemployment rate is higher at 47.8%, than the UK average of 27.9%.

R2W will bring their own research to the UN. Since 2012 the group surveyed 388 unemployed people outside every social security office in



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REAL JOBS: The R2W group launch their People's Proposals before the Assembly elections this year

Agreement and we are going to Geneva to highlight the human rights abuses taking place."

As well as highlighting the problems, Bertie and the delegation will be bringing solutions to the UN's attention.

"We developed proposals such as the 'Real Jobs Now' policy, passed by a majority at Belfast City Council to guarantee jobs and apprenticeships for long term unemployed when tax payer's money is spent.

"We also launched the People's Proposal in March which outlines changes the Executive can make to protect people from benefit sanctions, which currently strip people's social security benefits for periods of up to 18 months."

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Spurious

"We also launched the Security Office to highlight the continuing 'soul destroying' government enforcement of job seeking under threat of sanctions. It is still there today, simply saying 'Why do they keep sending me to look for jobs that aren't there?'"

Bertie continued: "Since 2012, we have been monitoring the way the government gets people back to work and the way they are punishing people for being out of work. The Executive's figures don't add up and it isn't good enough to blame Westminster alone.

"There are actions that can be taken here to create employment for those who need it and protect people from sanctions. We hope the UN will respond to our evidence and the Executive will listen to what sick, disabled and unemployed people are saying and stop wasting money and resources on policies that don't work and drive people into poverty, homelessness and worse.

Niall lays down marker in the Seanad

TEAM: Niall Ó Donnghaile, back right, with some of the other Sinn Féin senators this week

THE Seanad must consider the rights of northern citizens - this was the message from Sinn Féin Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile.

Speaking at his first meeting of the Seanad in Dublin, the Short Strand man said that the "lazy, party-partitionist discrimination of thousands of other proud Irish citizens."

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