

No delegate count this time for deal backed by 13 of 17 unions

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Departing with what has been standard practice, the new public service agreement, Building Momentum, wasn't formally decided by the 'electoral college' system based on delegate strength, but by acclamation.

The result is the same, however, as it has been on all but one occasion since these bilateral collective bargaining pacts commenced in 2010.

The Public Services Committee of ICTU confirmed Building Momentum was backed by 13 unions out of 17.

When the last agreement (the PSSA) was backed by a similar number of unions in 2017, on that occasion the ASTI hadn't yet voted. The PSSA secured a union delegate vote margin of 2,170 in favour to 532 against.

This time, there is little doubt that were the delegate count completed by ICTU, the margin in favour would likely be even higher - because on this occasion the national teachers union, INTO, reverted to its usual position of strongly voting in favour of these national deals.

IRN requested delegate strengths from ICTU sources. No details were made available, a spokesman stating that "no vote was taken", a reference to the usual delegate vote.

FOR THE RECORD

While it is self-evident that a delegate count exercise would have produced the same result, arguably it is useful for the historical record and for industrial relations observers, or union activists, to be provided with a complete picture of the result.

It is also important for researchers, for academic text books on industrial relations and for bodies like the European Foundation, to have consistent information on voting over time.

The only significant change in delegate counts would have been factoring in the creation of Fórsa, through the merger of three former unions, IMPACT, CPSU and PSEU. But the weighting rules for delegate strengths would have meant a reduction in the combined vote of all three unions (in the event of all three voting 'yes').

INMO – KEY BACKER

Meanwhile, although the delegate strength issue made no difference on this occasion, it has been important in the past, for example, in the case of the defeated 'Croke Park Two' deal, which was quickly followed by agreement on what became known as Haddington Road, the last deal marked by retrenchment measures.

One of the most important features of the new deal is not just that the four unions headed up by their key negotiators have backed it, but that the INMO is one of those unions. A pact without the support of an industrially powerful union like the INMO would be a weaker agreement, especially given the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic.

It was the INMO that most observers agreed breached the PSSA – a view not shared by the union itself – and led to key players like Kevin Callinan, the Fórsa general secretary and chair of the PSC, to look towards a novel feature of this pact, namely the sectoral bargaining round.