

29/11/2013



MANDATE
TRADE UNION

M&S Update

M&S WORKERS VOTE FOR STRIKE ACTION

Workers in Marks & Spencer across the Republic of Ireland have today (Friday, 29th November 2013) voted overwhelmingly in favour of industrial action following the closure of the workers' pension scheme without agreement. The workers voted by a margin of 94 percent in favour of strike action.

Mandate trade union, which represents the vast majority of the 2,300 staff in the company, have written to management informing them that strike action will take place across 17 stores nationally on Saturday, December 7th 2013 with two further days planned before Christmas.

On October 31st, Marks & Spencer management closed the workers' defined benefit pension scheme without agreement – informing the workers that their retirement fund is a 'discretionary benefit'. Unlike many other defined benefit schemes, the Marks & Spencer scheme is a performing scheme and is in surplus to the tune of approximately €17m.

The company has also put forward proposals in relation to a whole range of cost saving measures including:

- A reduction in the number of Section Managers;
- A reduction in the Sunday and Public Holiday premium;
- The elimination of the Christmas bonus.

However, Mandate say that the company's plans are not justified and are an opportunistic attack on long established

terms and conditions of employment for their loyal workers.

Mandate Assistant General Secretary, Gerry Light, said:

"While we fully recognise that some employers in the retail sector are struggling and that Marks & Spencer, like many, are operating with reduced profits, the company have given their workers absolutely no satisfactory proof that the permanent withdrawal of terms and conditions of employment is necessary or justified.

"Mandate and our members have always worked responsibly with employers struggling financially and we will continue to do so, but what we will not do is allow companies to exploit and unilaterally remove their workers' terms and conditions of employment in the pursuit of even higher profits."

Mandate say their members are concerned for all terms and conditions of employment in the future as a result of the company's recent actions.

"Mandate has traditionally had a good relationship with Marks & Spencer, however, in recent months the company has made many decisions which are baffling and shocking to the union and our members and if implemented would impact negatively upon them and their families. Now they've implemented one of those changes without agreement. This is not how you conduct good industrial relations in 2013," said Mr Light.

"Our members feel there's been a fundamental breach of trust by senior management. We've been given limited access to the company's financial accounts and as Marks & Spencer are another multinational company which does not reveal accounts for their Irish business, we and our members are left at a distinct disadvantage whereby we cannot contextualise the viability of the cost saving proposals," he added.

"We're prepared, when necessary, to have discussions in relation to cost savings but it needs to be done in an open and transparent manner and without the unilateral implementation of company decisions which impact negatively on our members now and into the future."

Mandate and SIPTU will now place pickets on all Marks & Spencer stores in Ireland on the following dates:

- Saturday, 7 December 2013;
- Thursday, 12 December 2013; and
- Friday, 20 December 2013.

At the most recent Labour Relations Committee conciliation conference, the company put forward proposals to buy out existing terms and conditions of employment which has been described by the Marks & Spencer National Negotiating Committee as derisory. Significantly, however, the company have retained their position to unilaterally change the workers' pension scheme which is entirely unacceptable.

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