

# SHOPFLOOR

What's the best Christmas gift TDs and senators could give to retail workers..?

Security of hours  
and the security  
of a decent  
income



LEGISLATE NOW! WE'VE WAITED LONG ENOUGH!



**John Douglas** *General Secretary  
Mandate Trade Union*

# STRAIGHT TALKING

## We're united and strong... we can achieve great things in 2018

**IT'S THAT** time of year again, when we all reflect on the year that's gone and plan for the New Year, we take stock of our struggles and achievements and learn from our defeats and mistakes.

Again 2017 was an exceptional year for Mandate Trade Union, our activists, members and their families. Mandate and our membership in Tesco Ireland Ltd were propelled into a strike beginning on Saint Valentine's Day 14 February 2017.

While a strike is always a last resort, your union and our members in Tesco had very little option, forced as they were by an uncompromising attack on workers' terms and conditions of employment and a company that was not prepared to accept the democratic and legal decision of Tesco workers to reject a Labour Court Recommendation.

It should be recorded here the dignified manner in which all Mandate members on the picket line conducted themselves, their solidarity for each other, their belief in their just cause won overwhelming support from the shopping public. The repercussions of this dispute are still being felt by all sides involved, a situation which – if it persists – can only get worse.

We have now reached a crossroads in our relationship with Tesco. If the dispute was not about 'Project Black' – i.e. de-recognition of Mandate Trade Union and the silencing of a voice for workers in the workplace – then there needs to be clear confidence-building measures from both parties.

**Disputes are difficult by their very nature – things are done and said which would not be considered in normal circumstances. That is why disputes are a last resort – the blame game is futile, and reprisals only plant the seeds of future discontent. The true measure of a leader is the ability to work with those who have been his enemies in the past. As Nelson Mandela famously said: "If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner."**

Mandate's *Decency at Work* was centre stage during 2017. We continue to focus and commit resources to winning secure hours and certainty of income for all our members, and for all workers. Our *Decency for Dunnes Workers* campaign is central to achieving this objective.

Following on from the Dunnes Stores strike in 2015, Mandate launched a well-resourced campaign

for the introduction of legislation that would guarantee workers fixed working schedules and secure earnings. We have met with all political parties and were instrumental in supporting both Sinn Fein and the Labour Party when introducing Banded Hours Bills in the Dail and Seanad.

Unfortunately the present Government (Fine Gael supported by Fianna Fail) has forced both Bills into a legislative cul-de-sac, favouring instead the introduction of a Government Banded Hours Bill.

**Mandate Trade Union has had sight of the Government's proposed Heads of Bill and we are seriously concerned that, if passed in its current form, it will be all but useless in protecting vulnerable workers. The Government's Bill is so full of holes that it has the potential to make workers' hours less secure.**

That is why Mandate, our activists, members and families are maintaining a massive lobbying campaign to force the Government to repair the loopholes and give real effect to Decency and Respect at work.

**Our members and families – indeed, all workers – will not forget at election time those TDs and parties who played lip service to the Dunnes Workers on the picket line while deliberately failing to support effective legislation in the Dail.**

Our industrial agenda across all retailers continued throughout the year. Our national negotiating teams were successful in winning pay and benefits increases across nearly all retailers. While these increases are never enough, we will develop new tactics and strategies which will deliver for workers a living wage.

**There can be no doubt that retail workers are on the frontline when it comes to the industrial agenda. They were the first to be hit in the crash and they deserve to be first to see significant gains in their pay and conditions as the economic situation improves.**

It would be impossible to look back over 2017 without mentioning the housing emergency facing all our citizens. Each night more than 3,000 children are homeless – moved from pillar to post in emergency accommodation. Our shop fronts are filled by the homeless in sleeping bags – at 8pm each night, the GPO in O'Connell Street, Dublin, turns into a soup kitchen. Workers, such as retail workers, can no longer afford to buy or rent a home and our local authorities are refusing to build social housing.

**All this is no accident, it is policy – the land is there, the finances are there, what is lacking is the political will.**

So what does 2018 hold for workers and their families? No doubt more struggles, for that is the nature of the relationship between capital and labour. Workers (labour) are never given anything by bosses (capital), they must win all improvements by collective action and power as part of organised unions.

Mandate Trade Union and our members will continue the struggle for Decency and Respect for Retail Workers. We will defend the right of workers to have a voice at work. We will continue to campaign for certainty of income and decent jobs. We will fight for a living wage. But, we can only achieve all of these things if we organise, if we recruit new members and stand up as shop stewards and activists. The union is only as strong as its members and that is why your union, Mandate, is one of the strongest and most effective unions in Ireland – it's because of our members, they get it!

**UNITY IS STRENGTH.**

On behalf of the Mandate National Executive Council and all Mandate staff, we wish you, your family and your community a Very Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year.



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## NEWS

### LLOYDS PHARMACY

## A question of 'basic human dignity over corporate greed'

MANDATE members working in Lloyds Pharmacy lodged a claim with the Labour Court on November 9 to address a series of issues including a fair pay increase, security of hours and the elimination of zero-hour contracts, as well as the introduction of a sick pay scheme.

The pharmacy chain – Ireland's largest – employs about 1,000 staff across 94 branches along with its head office in City West, Dublin.

Mandate represents staff in roughly two-thirds of Lloyds Pharmacy outlets in the Republic.

Lloyds Pharmacy is owned by German healthcare corporation Celesio, which is in turn owned by one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world, McKesson Corporation. McKesson, which also owns the Irish pharmaceutical distribution business United Drug, had revenues of \$190 billion in 2016.

Mandate Assistant General Secretary Gerry Light told *Shopfloor*: "After ignoring our requests to address the issues of concern for Lloyds workers earlier this year, the company eventually agreed to attend talks at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC).

"However, after just one session at the WRC, management withdrew unilaterally from the

process. Unfortunately this means our members have been left with no option but to escalate the matter to the Labour Court."

Referring to the use of zero-hour contracts and lack of sick pay scheme in the Lloyds Pharmacy, Mr Light said: "It beggars belief that the largest pharmacy chain in Ireland, owned by one of the world's largest and most profitable healthcare corporations, is refusing to provide staff with secure working hours and a sick pay scheme."

He added: "The workers in Lloyds Pharmacy look after the healthcare needs of the people in their communities. Yet if they get sick, they have the added stress of dealing with the financial and personal implications associated with being unable to work."

"Of course, what this means is, many are forced to come into work sick because they simply can't afford to take time off to recover from their illness. That's not healthy for anyone."

Mr Light insisted that it was a question of "basic human decency over corporate greed".

"It is our hope the company will re-consider its position and engage positively in order to address our members' issues and concerns without delay."



### MARKS & SPENCER

## Performance related pay review

MANDATE is to meet with M&S management on January 24, 2018, to conduct an in-depth review into the long-established PDR pay reward system.

The discussions with the company have been initiated by members employed as Section Managers at various M&S stores throughout the country.

Following a survey of those mem-

bers it was determined that a review of the reward system was needed.

Assistant General Secretary Gerry Light told *Shopfloor*: "This is yet another good example of a trade union acting in a proactive way. Allowing members through the use of a survey to identify issues that are important to them and to establish how they best wish their union to deal with the matter."

### DEBENHAMS

## WRC referral for supervisors' claim

MEMBERS employed as Supervisors in Debenhams stores nationwide have referred their claim for a long service increment to the Workplace Relations Commission. They will argue that the absence of such a payment has eroded the long standing differential that previously existed between them and other grades.



# Banded hours successes at Tesco

IT'S A case of *Every Little Helps* as Mandate continues to deliver for its members in Tesco.

Recently members in Tesco Drumcondra and Tesco Artane raised a number of grievances about their bands.

These issues were highlighted in a number of letters written to management by Industrial Officer John Callan.

However, following no response

from the company, the members' grievances were referred to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC).

Under the terms of the 2006 Mandate/Tesco collective agreement, it states: "In the event that a staff member consistently works hours in excess of their band for four months or more (16 weeks) they are given the option to move up into the band which reflects the number of hours

the staff member has been working."

John Callan told *Shopfloor*: "On foot of Mandate lodging these grievances Tesco responded by arranging meetings locally with our members. And as a direct response to our members exercising their right to raise a grievance and subsequently referring their case to the WRC, the company responded by offering the members concerned the correct bands.

"The successful outcome to these

cases highlights the need for our members in Tesco to continually fight for the implementation of all collective agreements won by our members in Tesco down through the years."

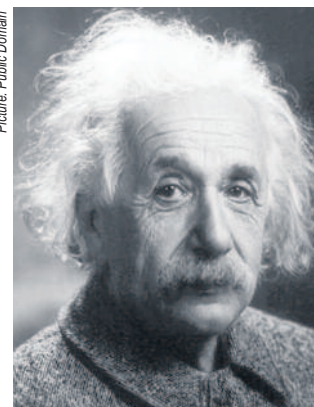
He added: "Unless members raise grievances at local level Tesco will continue to try and erode terms and conditions which Mandate members have fought so hard for down through the years."



John Callan: grievances call to members at Tesco



Picture: Public Domain



Perceptive genius Albert Einstein



Housing Minister Eoghan Murphy

## 'It's simple – build public housing!'

MANDATE banners were to the fore at a lunchtime public demo on November 22nd organised by the Campaign for Public Housing outside a wet and windy Aviva Stadium.

Mandate supported the action in protest at the holding of a 'Residential Property Summit' attended by Housing Minister Eoghan Murphy TD, along with, among others, various representatives of culture funds, financiers and speculators.

National Co-ordinator Brian Forbes, who himself braved the torrential rain outside the stadium on the day, told *Shopfloor*: "Einstein's often over-used cliché of insanity perhaps has never been more apt than when it's applied to this government's policy on housing.

"Neo-liberal hawks being asked to find solutions to the acute crisis of housing created in the first instance by neo-liberal hawks is Einstein's definition of insanity in a nutshell. And you don't have to be Einstein to come up with a simple solution to the acute housing crisis – build public housing!"

# Labour Court: sanction should be excised from records

A LABOUR Court has recommended that a disciplinary sanction taken against Mandate activist Denise Curran by Tesco Ireland Ltd be removed from her personnel records.

Ms Curran is a leading shop steward at Tesco and a member of the union's NEC.

Welcoming the move, Mandate North & West Divisional Organiser Ciaran Campbell claimed the decision sent a clear signal to employers that agreed procedures must be adhered to.

In the latter half of 2013, Ms Curran while on a long suspension from work on full pay received a final written warning from Tesco Ireland Ltd for alleged unofficial industrial action.

Mandate successfully appealed this disciplinary penalty to what was then the Rights Commissioner Service.

The Rights Commissioner found that "the sanction imposed upon her was disproportionate and unfair" and further stated that "the claimant has already suffered by virtue of the sus-



Ciaran Campbell: 'Difficult I.R. environment' at Tesco pension imposed upon her. In all of the circumstances I recommend in full and final settlement of this dispute that the final written warning be

withdrawn and expunged from her record".

Tesco Ireland Ltd later appealed the Rights Commissioner decision to the Labour Court. And this appeal was heard on October 16.

Mr Campbell explained to *Shopfloor*: "At the hearing the Labour Court immediately queried why the retailer had stepped away from its own disciplinary procedures by virtue of their corresponded position that not only would Ms Curran receive a final written warning, but it would also remain on her file after the 12 months period allowed for and as stated in the company's disciplinary procedures."

The Court found Tesco Ireland Ltd had a comprehensive written disciplinary procedure in place that had been agreed with the trade unions.

According to Stage 4: Final Written Warning as set out in the procedure "...a copy will remain on the staff member's personnel file for 12 months".

The Court further stated: "In pur-



porting to retain the letter of 13 November 2013 on the worker's personnel file beyond the period during which it was live – and, in fact, for an indefinite period – the company is clearly departing from the provisions of the agreed disciplinary procedure.

It continued: "The final written warning issued to the worker has long since expired. The Court recom-

mends that the letter conveying the imposition of that sanction on her should be fully expunged from the worker's personnel file and not referred to again by the company in the future."

Ciaran Campbell said: "The Labour Court decision is not only very important for the member concerned who has had to endure incredible stress on this matter for close on four years, but equally important is the Labour Court's related signal that agreed procedures must be adhered to."

He added: "We are living in a very difficult industrial relations environment with this particular employer, and it beggars belief that even when applying the agreed disciplinary procedures the company unilaterally made the conscious choice to put in writing a deviation above and beyond what was agreed in the procedures.

"It really begs the question, is the company exercising the disciplinary procedures as a corrective rather than a punitive process?"





**NO MORE WAITING**

**SECURE HOURS NOW**

- BAN ZERO HOUR CONTRACTS**
- GIVE WORKERS SECURITY OF INCOME**
- SUPPORT DECENCY AT WORK**

In April 2015, Dunnes Stores workers took industrial action to achieve secure hours and incomes. They wanted and needed Banded Hour Contracts - which would allow them the ability to plan their lives.

On the day of the strike, there were members of all political parties on the picket lines, including Fine Gael, Fianna Fail, Sinn Fein, Independents4Change, People Before Profit, Anti-Austerity Alliance and other Independents.

The Taoiseach stood up in the Dail and said:  
**"I support the workers in their right to have clarity about their working lives."**

2½ years later, Dunnes Stores workers and tens of thousands of other workers are still waiting for the government to pass legislation that would provide secure hours.

We're calling on all politicians to sign the Secure Hours, Better Future charter and legislate for secure hours now.

Workers on low hour contracts cannot get mortgages. They cannot plan their lives. They cannot guarantee they will be able to pay their bills. They need action.

We're asking you to support the demands of the Dunnes Stores workers and call on your local politician to sign the Secure Hours, Better Future charter by going to [www.Uplift.ie/SecureHoursNow](http://www.Uplift.ie/SecureHoursNow).

**WE'VE WAITED LONG ENOUGH**

**NO MORE DELAYS**

**LEGISLATE FOR SECURE HOURS**

**NOW!**

Support the Secure Hours, Better Future charter by going to: [uplift.ie/SecureHoursNow](http://uplift.ie/SecureHoursNow)

**DECENCY FOR DUNNES WORKERS**

**MANDATE TRADE UNION**

[/DecencyForDunnesWorkers](https://www.facebook.com/DecencyForDunnesWorkers)  
[/DunnesWorkers](https://www.twitter.com/DunnesWorkers)

**CAMPAIGN NEWS**



John Douglas: 'Government Bill must do what it is supposed to do'

# Security of income: we need action now

MANDATE has claimed workers at Dunnes Stores, along with tens of thousands of other workers across the country, do not know from week to week what hours and income they will have.

General Secretary John Douglas told *Shopfloor*: "We know that 85% of all Dunnes Stores workers say that hours are used as a method of control over them.

"If they lodge a grievance, make a complaint or even join a union, there is the potential to have your hours and income slashed from €400 per week to €160 per week.

"This can create huge problems in terms of paying essential bills or obtaining loans or mortgages."

Mr Douglas pointed out that retail workers were concerned that the forthcoming government Bill will contain loopholes to allow employers to avoid giving their workers security over their hours.

"Sinn Fein has a Bill, the Labour Party has a Bill and now the Government is drafting its own Bill," said Mr Douglas. "We need action on this now, but we need to make sure that the Government Bill does what it's supposed to do - give workers security over their incomes."

The Banded Hours Contracts Bill, moved by Sinn Fein TD David Cullinane, has already progressed through the Dail and the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation.

The Joint Oireachtas Committee made 23 recommendations but the Ceann Comhairle's office attached a "money message" to the Bill, meaning it cannot progress any further without the agreement of the Government.

"We're very concerned that the Government will water down the good work that has already taken place in the Oireachtas. The Joint Oireachtas Committee has already heard from all relevant parties; employers' groups; trade unions; legal experts; academics and more. What's needed now is action," said Mr Douglas.

He added: "There's no point bringing in bad legislation which will not achieve the minimum standards set out in our 'Secure Hours = Better Future' charter. Anything less than this will not serve the needs of low-paid and low-hour contract workers, so we are asking all TDs from all political parties to sign this charter and ensure our most vulnerable workers are protected."

## 'Lack of clarity' in current legislation

EMPLOYMENT Relations lecturer Dr Caroline Murphy and Dr Juliet McMahon, who lectures in Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations, addressed the launch of the *Secure Hours = Better Future* charter in Buswells Hotel, Dublin on November 14.

Drs Murphy and McMahon are the co-authors of a new University of Limerick report, titled *A Study on the Prevalence of Zero Hours Contracts among Irish Employers and their Impact on Employees*.

In their address, the academics explained how their research, which was conducted in 2015, had revealed the "significant negative implications"

for workers on 'if and when' contracts.

These negative implications included levels of apprehension related to the unpredictability of working hours (in terms of number of hours and scheduling), unstable income, difficulties in accessing finance and welfare benefits, as well as difficulties in managing work and family life.

They explained that they had also found instances where employment contracts did not accurately reflect the reality of the number of hours regularly worked by individuals.

Their research had "noted concerns that workers on such arrangements had insufficient

notice of working hours and were being sent home from work if not required".

Workers also feared being "penalised" by their employer "for not accepting work when offered".

Drs Murphy and McMahon said that their report emphasised the "lack of clarity" about the employment status of those working under this type of arrangement.

"Legislative/regulatory reforms" were needed they said "to bring clarity to this matter" and to address the "negative implications" for workers.

"Approaching 2018, a number of Bills have emerged but concrete changes have yet to be established."



# Politicians... get them to take the pledge!



MANDATE has called on members to lobby local political representatives – the TDs and senators who rely on their votes come election time – to support legislation that will address the scourge of precarious employment practices.

And mobilising and involving the union's grassroots will be a key part of Mandate's newly-launched *Secure Hours = Better Future* campaign.

National Coordinator Brian Forbes told *Shopfloor*: "We are organising and reinvigorating our Mandate local council structures and encouraging and assisting our members to actively lobby their local TDs and senators."

"We want these politicians to sign our pledge cards setting out the *Secure Hours = Better Future* charter. These cards have a simple message and list our basic demands."

The six-point charter calls for a ban of zero-hour practices, including 'if and when' contracts, and the provision of secure hour contracts reflecting the reality of average weekly hours worked.

It also calls for a maximum 'look-back' period of 12 months or less to calculate the average weekly hours and the subsequent 'band of hours' into which a worker is placed.



Politicians John Brady, Sean Crowe, Joan Burton and Joan Collins... hopefully the first of many to sign...



into which a worker is placed.

On this point Mr Forbes explained: "A band of hours provides a level of flexibility for employers but – crucially – it also provides a level of certainty over income for a worker. For instance, they will work between 20-25 hours or 30-35 hours, with no ceiling but a floor of hours worked will be in place which the worker cannot drop below."



Other points included in the charter are:

- Ensuring that the maximum width of all 'band of hours' is no greater than five hours a week.
- Protecting workers from victimisation for enforcing their rights under this legislation.
- Ensuring the legislation is implemented so that current workers can avail of its provisions for hours al-

ready completed.

Brian Forbes pointed out that TDs and senators relied on "the good will and votes" of constituents and insisted: "These very same constituents will be demanding urgent legislation be enacted to address exploitation and precarious employment practices."

"Make no mistake, they will be calling on all politicians to sign the *Secure Hours = Better Future* pledge cards and legislate for secure hours immediately.

"The fact of the matter is that workers on low hour contracts cannot get mortgages. They cannot guarantee they will be able to pay their bills. They need action from TDs and senators now."

He continued: "In April 2015, Dunnes Stores workers took industrial action to achieve secure hours and incomes. On the day of the strike, there were members of all political parties on the picket lines – including Fine Gael, Fianna Fail, Sinn Fein, Independents4Change, People Before Profit, Anti-Austerity Alliance and other Independents – who all gathered to have their photographs taken

with low paid and precarious workers.

"Well, now it's long past pay-back time and workers have waited long enough for legislative protections. It is now imperative that legislation is enacted by the Government as a priority."

Mr Forbes insisted that any new legislation on the issue had to be "fit for purpose".

He said: "Any future legislation must improve upon the hugely scrutinised cross-party work carried out on the Banded Hours Contract Bill sponsored by David Cullinane TD and now side-lined by the Government intent on implementing their own yet to be published Bill."

"It must take into account the demands of workers in precarious employment circumstances who need secure hour contracts today."

He warned that new legislation had to be "robust and comprehensive" and that all possible legislative loopholes plugged, adding, "This would restrict unscrupulous employers from taking advantage of poorly constructed and inadequate legislation on secure hour contracts."



Workers the length and breadth of Ireland demand **SECURE HOURS** and a **BETTER FUTURE** and through our campaign of local lobbying of TDs and senators as well as the launch of our online petition, we intend delivering that message **LOUD** and **CLEAR** to our legislators' home constituency offices and then to the steps of Leinster House...**PLAY YOUR PART – SIGN OUR ONLINE PETITION BELOW...**



## **COMMENT** Muireann Dalton We don't know from week to week if we can pay our bills...

**WORKERS like me need legislation that would give us secure hours and incomes.**

Politicians from every political party supported Dunnes Stores workers when we took a stand for secure hour contracts that would allow us to plan our lives from week to week.

Two-and-a-half years later and we're still waiting on the Government to pass legislation that would ban zero hour and 'if and when' contracts and allow all workers a secure income

**We are calling on all TDs and senators to support and sign our Secure Hours = Better Future charter.**

Why is this important? I've been working for Dunnes Stores for eight years now, and I still don't know what my wages will be from week to week. On any payday, a Dunnes workers' wages can be slashed by up to 60% (more than €200).

This makes it impossible for my family and I to plan our lives, and we're not alone.

There are almost 10,000 workers in Dunnes Stores who have the same worries I do. Most of us are low paid. Most of us are women. And most of us are on 15-hour contracts. So some weeks we will work 40 hours, but when a local manager takes a dislike to us, they can slash our hours to 15. And there are hundreds of thousands of workers across the country in a similar position.

We don't know from week to week whether we will be able to pay our bills. We can't get loans or mortgages because the banks look at the lowest hours on our con-

tracts and see how insecure our wages are. It's impossible to have peace of mind.

That's why in April 2015, two-and-a-half years ago, 6,000 of us went on strike to win secure hour contracts.

**After the strike, management targeted us. They sacked some of us, slashed the hours of others, changed our working patterns and generally made our lives hell. They use the allocation of hours as a control mechanism over us.**

So we now have to rely on politicians to legislate in order to make sure every worker in Ireland is protected from zero hour and 'if and when' contracts.

There have been several opportunities to pass legislation in recent years, which would have ended zero hour and 'if and when' contracts, but the Government has delayed and postponed and are now preparing their own legislation which we believe will not benefit low hour workers.

Our union, Mandate, believes the Government is going to leave loopholes open so that employers can still exploit workers like me.

**But if all TDs commit to support the Secure Hours = Better Future charter, we can make sure no worker is exploited and workers like us can plan our day-to-day lives, provide for our families and pay our bills.**

Please sign this petition and call on your local representatives to support the *Secure Hours = Better Future* charter today.

We will be hand delivering this petition to all TDs and Senators in December.

Support the Secure Hours = Better Future charter  
Sign online at...



<https://my.uplift.ie/petitions/secure-hours-now>



# We DON'T wish it could be Christmas every day and here's why...



Guantanamo Bay inmates in stress positions. The CIA also forces prisoners to listen to rock and pop tracks over and over again. Meanwhile, retail workers here endure repeated exposure to Xmas hits...

By David Gibney  
Mandate communications officer

DID you know the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has used prolonged exposure to the same songs over and over again as a method of torture in Guantanamo Bay?

It is reported that some of the songs used for the psychological torture are popular hits like *Raspberry Beret* by Prince, *Nothing Else Matters* by Metallica, *We Are The Champions* by Queen and *My Name Is* by Eminem.

On their own, many people enjoy these tunes, but when forced to listen to them repeatedly over a short period of time, they can cause enormous trauma to a person's mental health.

Now it's not exactly the same thing to be subjected to Christmas songs repeatedly, but there are some concerns being raised

by many retail workers about how prolonged the Christmas period is becoming.

Only a few decades ago, Christmas would have begun in December. The Christmas lights would have gone up around the first week and the Christmas songs would have begun at the same time.

### Horror story...

This year, on November 1st – one day after Halloween – some major retailers had already begun celebrating the Christmas spirit with Christmas songs blaring over the internal music system.

Most of these retailers are very far advanced in terms of marketing and analysis. For instance, they would have experts in conscious and subconscious behaviours and one would have to assume that there is some indication that people spend more

when Christmas music is playing, but for Jesus's sake, won't somebody think of the poor staff that have to listen to the *Little Drummer Boy*, *White Christmas* and *Jingle Bells* on repeat for two months?

The prisoners in Guantanamo Bay are only subjected to the repeated song for 24 hours – not 54 days!

There is a serious side to this. A number of complaints have come in from members who are aggrieved at how long they have to put up with the same songs over and over again. Many workers will have eight or 10-hour shifts listening to the same song up to five times per day. This going on for two months has negative consequences for those workers.

It's not too much to ask that Christmas should begin in December and with it, Christmas music should too...



Taoiseach Leo Varadkar



ICTU General Secretary Patricia King

## 'Insensitive' Leo slammed

THE Irish Congress of Trade Unions has criticised as 'highly insensitive' remarks from Taoiseach Leo Varadkar which claimed Ireland's rate of homelessness was low by international standards.

Responding to the Taoiseach's assertion, Congress General Secretary Patricia King said: "The Taoiseach's attempt to minimise our housing and homeless emergency was highly insensitive and entirely lacking in any sense of empathy for the plight of the 8,374 people who are currently homeless."

"They cannot be wished away, nor can this crisis be minimised by some meaningless statistical comparison. They are real people denied the fundamental human right to shelter."

"We are one of the richest countries in the world yet, to our shame, we have a housing and homeless emergency and instead of trying to minimise the problem, the Government should end their denial, declare a national emergency and bring forward urgent, workable solutions."

"All the indications are that the housing crisis will get worse rather than better and the Taoiseach should not seek any succour in misleading and meaningless statistical comparisons."



Picture: Courtesy Little Owl (CC BY 2.0)



## Union Representatives Introductory Course

The Union Representative Introductory Training Course is for new shop stewards/union representatives. The course aims to provide information, skills and knowledge to our shop stewards/union representatives to assist them in their role in the workplace.

- COURSE CONTENT:**
- Background to Mandate
  - The role and responsibilities of a Shop Steward/Union Representative
  - Examining disciplinary/grievance procedures
  - Developing negotiating skills
  - Representing members at local level
  - Communication skills/solving members' problems
  - Organising, Recruitment and Campaigns
  - Induction presentations.

### CERTIFICATION AND PROGRESSION:

Members who successfully complete this course will obtain a Mandate certificate. They may progress to a Union Representative Advanced Course and to other relevant training courses offered by Mandate.

If you are interested in this course, please contact your Mandate official or Mandate's Training Centre at **01-8369699**. Email: [mandateotc@mandate.ie](mailto:mandateotc@mandate.ie)



## STAFF NOTICES

### Eoin Griffin

Moves to Industrial Officer role



Eoin Griffin started working with Mandate in February 2014. He initially worked as the Organiser attached to the Midlands Division. More recently he has been working in both the Western and North and West Divisions.

He takes up the role of Industrial Official in the Dublin North West Division, working with Divisional Organiser Keith Polard and Organiser Sandra Stapleton.

### Brendan O'Hanlon

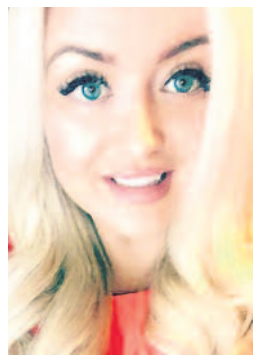
Leaving Mandate



Congratulations to Brendan O'Hanlon on his recent appointment to Assistant General Secretary, in IMPACT Trade Union. Brendan was a SIPTU shop steward in Marks and Spencer, Mary Street, Dublin before his appointment to Divisional Organiser in Mandate Trade Union 19 years ago. In Brendan's near two decades of service with Mandate Trade Union, he proved himself to be an excellent and diligent official and a very effective advocate on behalf of Mandate members. Brendan will be missed by all Mandate members and his colleagues and we wish him every success in his new role in IMPACT as he fights for and defends the rights of public service workers.

### Tara Keane

Moves to Divisional Organiser role



Congratulations to Tara Keane who has recently been promoted to the position of Divisional Organiser based in the Dublin office. Tara worked for the clothing store La Senza and on its closure joined Mandate for two years as an organiser before moving to an Industrial Officer position for a further two years in the Dublin North West Division. Tara told *Shopfloor*: "I think coming from retail and working through all grades in the union gives you a fantastic understanding of our members' needs. I'm truly excited about the future of Mandate and genuinely looking forward to working with our activists and members to advance this union even further."

### Jonathan Hogan

Moves to National Co-ordinator role



Jonathan Hogan has now been appointed as the new National Co-ordinator for Education and Training. Jonathan is another solid trade union activist, cutting his teeth as an effective shop steward in Superquinn (now SuperValu) before being appointed Division Organiser based in Dublin where he led one of Mandate's largest Divisions. There is no doubt that Jonathan has the commitment and ability to take the training centre to the next level and we all eagerly await the new 2018 training programme which will again offer free and relevant training to all Mandate members.

# THERE'S A NEW WAY TO JOIN OR PAY YOUR DUES

## [www.joinmandate.ie](http://www.joinmandate.ie)

**OUR NEW WEB PORTAL ALSO ALLOWS EXISTING MEMBERS TO SWITCH THEIR PAYMENT METHOD**



Illustration: Daniel Huntley (CC BY-SA 2.0)

## NEWS

# Have your say in Heatons/Sports Direct survey

THE current national agreement between Heatons/Sports Direct and Mandate expires at the end of February when talks are due on a follow-up deal.

In advance of these talks, a survey of all Heatons/Sports Direct Mandate members is planned and will be launched early in the New Year.

Divisional Organiser Bill Kelly told *Shopfloor*: "This survey is an important chance for all members in this company to have their say and tell the negotiating team which issues are most important to them in the forthcoming discussions. It's important that everyone takes part in the survey."

In the survey completed before the last discussions took place, the membership set as a priority – second only to pay – the lack of notice of rostered working hours.

Mr Kelly said: "Many complained that the lack of notice made it impossible to plan anything such as doctor appointments etc. Some progress was made in discussions and earlier this year the company started a pilot scheme for a fortnightly roster in two stores which was recently extended to a further five stores."

He continued: "Between the pay increases achieved, the clause that guarantees Mandate members the same

average hours on a year-on-year basis, the creation of additional roles and review of low hour contracts which has improved the contracts of more than 200 members, the union has through the current agreement succeeded in improving income levels of workers throughout the company."

It is understood the company has informed Mandate that they have paid out significantly more through the Sales Incentive Scheme than in the last 12 months of Heatons' ownership. However, Mandate has raised the issue that not all members have an equal chance to earn from the scheme due to a lack of non-sports Heatons products.

Mr Kelly said: "The guarantee that no store will earn less than the last 12 months of Heatons ownership continues until the end of February and we will continue to raise this issue with the company."

He added: "I would encourage all colleagues to join Mandate now so that they will have the right to express their views directly to us through the survey in the New Year. Application forms are available from your shop steward or at [JoinMandate.ie](http://JoinMandate.ie) is an easy, modern way to join which only takes a few minutes using your smartphone or computer."



# SHOP STEWARDS TRAINING PROGRAMME 2018

Course Title	Course Dates	Duration	Location	Closing date
Communications & Personal Development QQI Level 5	January 16 - April 17	14 weeks 1 night p/w	Dublin	15/12/2017
IT Skills QQI Level 5	January 16 - April 17	14 weeks 1 night p/w	Dublin	15/12/2017
IT Skills Advanced	January 17 - April 18	14 weeks 1 night p/w	Dublin	15/12/2017
Union Representative Introductory	February 5/6/7	3 days	Dublin	15/12/2017
Health and Safety Level 5	February 5/6/7/8/9	5 days	Dublin	15/12/2017
Union Representative Introductory	February 19/20/21	3 days	Newbridge	15/12/2017
Trade Union Representative QQI Level 5	March 12/13/14	3 days	Cork	15/12/2017
Union Representative Introductory	March 05/06/07	3 days	Dublin	15/12/2017
Trade Union Representative QQI Level 5	March 12/13/14	3 days	Dublin	15/12/2017
Equality	March 27	1 day	Dublin	15/12/2017
Occupational Health and Safety Awareness Training (Refresher)	April Tue 3/Wed 4/Thur 5	3 days	Dublin	19/02/2018
Training and Development Part 2	April 9/10/11/12/13	5 days	Dublin	19/02/2018
Union Representative Advanced Senior	April 16/17/18	3 days	Dublin	19/02/2018
Negotiation Skills Level 1	April 23	1 day	Dublin	19/02/2018
Union Representative Introductory	April 30-May 1/2	3 days	Waterford	19/02/2018
Employment Law Level 1	May 9	1 day	Dublin	19/02/2018
Union Representative Introductory	May 14/15/16	3 days	Cork	19/02/2018
Union Representative Introductory	May 21/22/23	3 days	Dublin	19/02/2018
Negotiation Skills Level 2	June 5	1 day	Dublin	19/02/2018
Trade Union Representative QQ Level 5	June 11/12/13	3 days	Dublin	19/02/2018
Occupational Health and Safety Awareness Training (Refresher)	June 18/19/20	3 days	Dublin	19/02/2018
Employment Law Level 2	Sept 3	1 day	Dublin	23/07/2018
Communications & Personal Development QQI Level 5	Sept 11 - Dec 4	14 weeks 1 night p/w	Dublin	23/07/2018
IT Skills QQI Level 5	Sept 11 - Dec 4	14 weeks 1 night p/w	Dublin	23/07/2018
IT Skills Advanced	Sept 12 - Dec 5	14 weeks 1 night p/w	Dublin	23/07/2018
Union Representative Introductory	Sept 10/11/12	3 days	Limerick	23/07/2018
Union Representative Advanced Senior	Sept 17/18/19	3 days	Cork	23/07/2018
Union Representative Introductory	Sept 24/25/26	3 days	Dublin	23/07/2018
Training and Development Part 1	October 1/2/3/4/5	5 days	Dublin	13/08/2018
Trade Union Representative QQI Level 5	October 8/9/10	3 days	Dublin	13/08/2018
Health and Safety Level 5	October 15/16/17/18/19	5 days	Dublin	13/08/2018
Union Representative Introductory	October 22/23/24	3 days	Galway	13/08/2018
Union Representative Advanced Senior	November 5/6/7	3 days	Dublin	13/08/2018
Negotiation Skills 3	November 12	1 day	Dublin	13/08/2018

If you are interested in attending any of these courses, please contact your Mandate Union Official or Mandate Organising & Training Centre on **01-8369699** or email [mandateotc@mandate.ie](mailto:mandateotc@mandate.ie)  
 ● Dublin courses will take place in Mandate Organising & Training Centre ● Please note venue/dates may vary ● To secure your place book early to avoid disappointment





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## OPINION

# A Fourth Industrial Revolution is with us now... but there's slim pickings for likes of us

By **Brian Forbes**  
Mandate National Co-ordinator

THE bold Danny McCoy of IBEC speaking at a recent Social Justice Ireland (SJI) event made a number of really interesting statements linked to challenges of the future of work.

The business leader produced the mind-boggling new world of work prediction that 65% of children of school age will hold jobs that don't yet exist. He went on to report on another US-based estimate that those currently in education will hold more than 10 jobs before the age of 40.

I don't know about you but given the potential full breadth of the unimaginable changes and their impact in the workplace especially with the growth of technology and, in particular robotics, I'm now rejoicing rather than lamenting that I turned 50 this year.

One of the biggest challenges facing us in the Irish retail sector is the increasing proliferation of precarious working employment practices. Insecure employment and low pay present challenges to improving both the quality of work in retail and providing a decent living for those employed in the sector.

Policy makers in Ireland need to get to grips with the serious implications that insecure and precarious work places on families, individual workers, businesses and the overall state of the economy.

The 6th European Working Conditions survey conducted by the EU agency Eurofound released in 2016 indicated that one in five employees in Ireland said they were on "other or no contracts" in 2015. I'd predict it has deteriorated significantly since then but remembering that this 2015 statistic is still the fourth highest rate in the EU 28.

Ex-SIPTU President Jack O'Connor, speaking after Danny McCoy at the SJI event, declared we have already entered the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution' – the age of digitalisation – which will exponentially increase both in scale and at a pace unprecedented in all of human history.

Despite the positive business noises emanating from McCoy, it was comrade O'Connor who brought some much-needed reality back into the proceedings when he declared "the good old days were never for everyone. The great tragedy is that we are continuing to make the same policy choices (not to be misinterpreted as policy failures), which reinforce core inequality, and which precipitated the collapse in the first place."

Jack is spot on in his analysis that the neo-liberal model of successive Irish governments has not served the majority of Irish people well and a fundamental shift in political ideology and policy making is required to rebalance the injustices and inequality that exists and which are just getting wider and deeper.

Things have never been better for Ireland's super-rich, with their total worth heading for a

record high of just over €100 billion.

Ireland now has 18 individual billionaires on the *Rich List 2017*, compared with 14 last year. Billionaires and their less affluent second cousins – millionaires – have benefited richly from both the recession and the fake news "recovery".

OECD, Eurostat data and CSO data all confirm what the dogs on the street already know. Ireland has one of the highest levels of low pay among the developed economies and one of the most flexible and precarious workforces as well.

CSO data from February 2017 states:

- 35.1% of those at work earned less than €400 per week;
- A further 37.5% earned between €400 and €800;

So, accordingly, a total of 72.6% earned less than €800 per week.

Research released by TASC in 2016, titled *Enforced Flexibility? Working In Ireland Today*, shows that "flexibility" is being imposed on more and more workers across a range of different industry sectors.

The trend of increasing flexibility is something

“ The Irish State is facilitating the casualisation of precarious work by having a tax system that incentivises employers to employ part-time workers rather than giving them full-time contracts... ”

that employers demand rather than a free choice to work flexible by the worker. The Irish State is freely facilitating the casualisation of precarious work by having an Irish tax system that incentivises employers to employ part-time workers rather than giving them full-time contracts or increasing their hours like so many workers want and need.

The social welfare system is antiquated and not fit for purpose because of the increasing change in working patterns which is now well beyond the control of the workforce.

However, even if the system was fit for purpose and provided a decent safety net for workers in precarious employment, why should it be the Irish taxpayer who inevitably foots the bill for profitable companies to have all the flexibility in the world while they continue to hive off profits in Ireland to offshore holding accounts and to pay their shareholders massive dividends?

Those very same CEOs and shareholders screwing the workers are likely to have their double-barrelled names added to next year's *Rich List* in Ireland, while you might be filling out a form for Family Income Supplement at your local dole office hoping that the social welfare transfers will mean the kids might get a decent present for Christmas.

As they say up North, *this society is wan sick puppy!*



# Awaking from this nightmare...



Picture: Bart Everson (CC BY 2.0)



FEW could be anything but appalled at the living conditions in rental properties across the country highlighted in a recent documentary *Nightmare to Let*.

The *RTE Investigates* findings are, in all probability, the tip of the iceberg. Many of our clients who are living in substandard properties, lack the basic necessities for a quality of life, such as adequate heating facilities, as well as hot and cold running water.

Many people living in sub-standard private rented accommodation are too afraid to report it for fear of notice of termination or landlords doing substantial work and then increasing the rent. Overcrowding is also commonplace with one in every 10 now living in accommodation with more people than rooms.

We need to see the immediate introduction of an NCT-style certification system on minimum standards in the private rented sector, along with definition of overcrowding and severe penalties for landlords who place the lives and health of tenants at risk. For over 10 years, Threshold has been campaigning for an NCT-style certification system for rented homes. We firmly believe that a certification system needs to be put in place where the onus would be on landlords to prove their compliance with minimum standards. If a certificate does not exist, the penalty for renting should be severe, so that there is no excuse for being outside the system.

The present system relies on landlords being caught. But the prospect of being caught is very slim. There is no fear of the consequences in the absence of regulations and proper, robust and proactive inspections. However, the current reliance on our fire service to enforce fire safety standards is too much of a demand on overstretched frontline services.

The passing of the Sinn Féin motion on minimum standards by the Dáil on November 9 was a positive step towards acknowledging the im-

portance of the NCT concept. However, it was disappointing to see the suggestion by the Housing Minister Eoghan Murphy that self-certification for landlords could be the solution and we are asking him to reconsider this.

Self-certification is not a strong enough deterrent for the rogue landlords renting such overcrowded properties, which not only financially exploit vulnerable tenants but also put their very lives at risk. Landlords need to fear the consequences of breaking the law and self-certification is not going to achieve this. It has not worked in the past and Priory Hall is a case in point. If we can't self-certify a motor vehicle, then how can we self-certify rented homes? If landlords are required to furnish BER certificates, then it should be extended to cover fire safety and minimum standards.

We are also witnessing the mass eviction of tenants in Dublin with cases such as St Helen's Court in Dun Laoghaire, Gardiner Place and North Circular Road and, more recently, with Leeside Apartments in Cork.

With supply at an all-time low, we are seeing existing tenants and communities being driven out of their



homes and landlords hiding behind 'substantial renovation' or sale of properties as reasons for such evictions.

Despite improvements in legislation and rights in the private rented sector, there is still a long way to go in achieving security of tenure for renters and avoiding the spectre of homelessness, all too evident in Ireland today.

Threshold have been working at the front line for almost 40 years, protecting vulnerable families in the private rented sector. Last year alone we took 71,319 calls and helped 21,625 people during that time with tenancy issues. Between 2014 and the end of 2016, our Tenancy Protection Service has prevented more than 10,000 people at immediate risk from losing their homes.

“ The present system relies on landlords being caught. But the prospect of being caught is very slim ”

Right now, today and every day, Threshold is working harder than ever to save families from homelessness. Hundreds of families are walk-

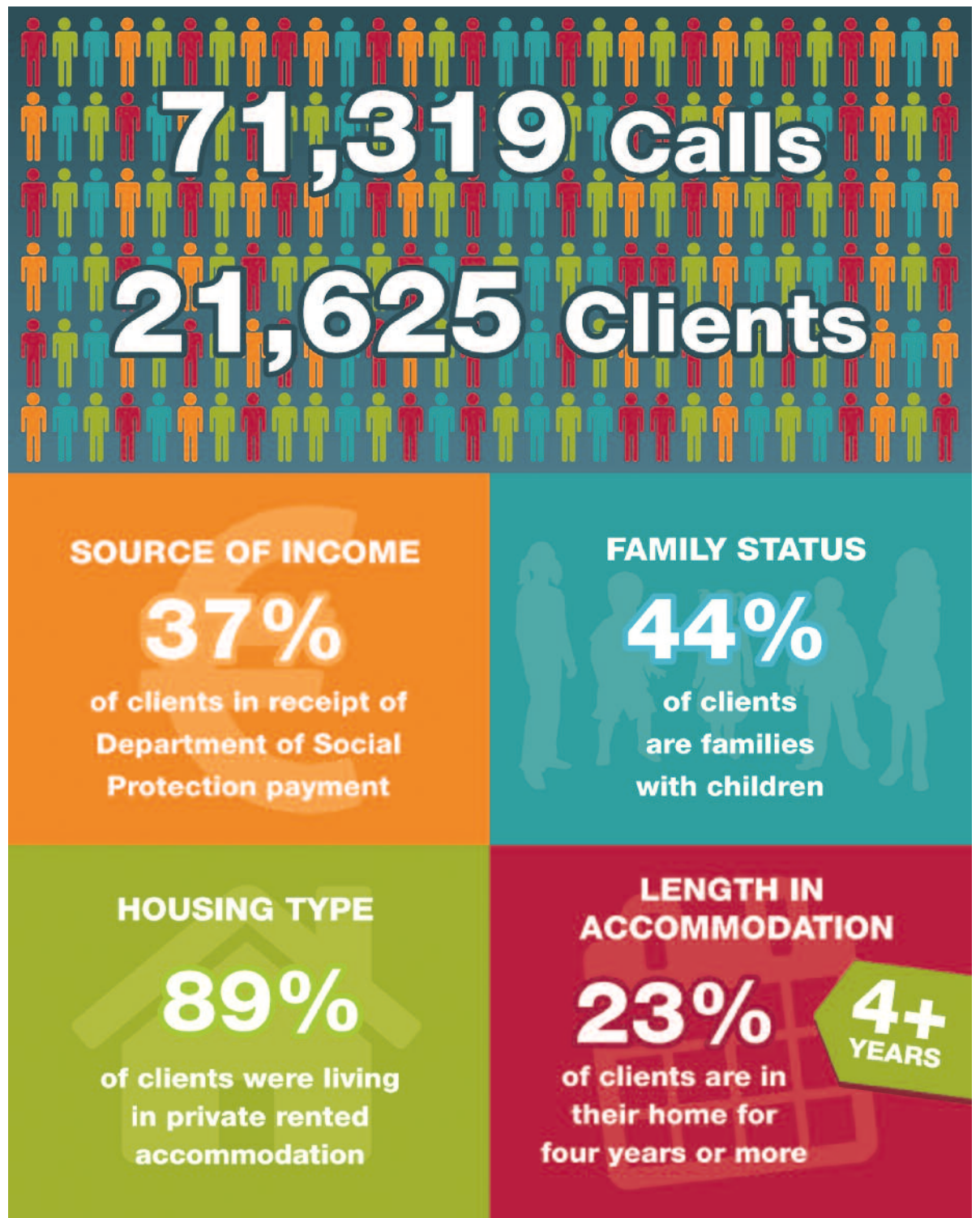
ing a tightrope between keeping and losing their homes and are in urgent need of our support.

With increased demand for our services, our Christmas appeal is one of our most important in decades. It is important that we have adequate resources to continue our work, advocating on behalf of vulnerable people and standing up to unscrupulous landlords.

Our frontline services are preventing five families each day from becoming homeless.

In the months ahead, we anticipate that demands on our services will continue to grow across the country, so it's crucial that Threshold can continue to provide advice and support for people at risk of homelessness.

We would urge union members and their families to lend their support and please give what you can to our Christmas appeal, by donating at <https://www.threshold.ie/donate> or calling 1890 43 44 45. You can help Threshold to save five families a day from homelessness.



John-Mark McCafferty is Chief Executive with Threshold, the National Housing Charity, whose aim is to prevent homelessness through advice, tenancy protection and advocacy. He took up this position in January 2017, having previously worked as Head of Social Justice and Policy with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. John-Mark also represented SVP during Social Partnership programmes and was a National Economic and Social Council (NESCC) member. During his career he has also worked for the Combat Poverty Agency



# My solution to Brexit? A united Ireland



**Brian Forbes**

TODAY Brexit remains the great known unknown. We know that something will happen but we really have no clear idea exactly how all things Brexit might materialise over the coming months and years.

There's a lot of robust discussion North and South about the free movement of people, protection of public services, the future economy and, of course, the real clincher for many people, "Will there be a hard border, a soft border or – better still – no border at all?"

Regardless of your personal views on Brexit, it is becoming increasingly clear that we are all victims of a vision far beyond our control. The lack of leadership from the UK government and the increasing ineptitude of British Ministers on Brexit is bordering on farce at this stage.

The UK Brexiteers are blaming everyone but themselves for the mess of their own making. Our own politi-



The border on Killeen School Road, with the Cooley Mountains as a backdrop. Only indication you're crossing into the Republic is the Km/h speed limit sign *Picture: Oliver Dixon (CC BY-SA 2.0)*

cal leaderships, North and South, are equally as uncertain and appear to be behaving like rabbits caught cold in the headlights of a steaming locomotive called Brexit.

The notion of a return to a customs border similar to the one I grew up with in the West Tyrone border town

of Strabane is becoming spine chillingly close to a growing reality. Any reinstatement of a customs border would pose a major challenge to how we go about our daily lives on this little island.

I, like thousands of other people traverse freely between North and

“ The notion of a return to a customs border similar to the one I grew up with in the West Tyrone border town of Strabane is becoming spine chillingly close to a growing reality ”

South regularly and without hindrance. I recall back in the dark, auld days of customs checkpoints, road barriers and British army checkpoints, having to negotiate two different forms of invasive searches going in both directions.

The added fear to all of this is the potential for a Brexit and a border of any nature between North and South to derail the Peace Process that has benefited so many of us on this island.

10th April 1998 was a historic day in the shared history of our people – in that the Good Friday Agreement provided an Ireland for my own children to grow up non-sectarian and,

crucially, without the direct fear of bombs and bullets that so many children of Ireland were subjected to as normal life on our battered and divided land.

Add to this mix the growing inequality and the rampant, uncontrolled rise of the precariat in Ireland which is clearly far from “the unfettered control of Irish destinies” which the men and women of the 1916 Rising fought for and some died to achieve.

### Tender mercies

That independent and sovereign Irish Republic is as far away from the ideals of those brave revolutionaries than at any stage in the past 100 years. It was squandered within a few years of the 1916 Rising on the altar of a newly-created, church-aligned state and latterly to the excesses of a neo-liberal capitalism that seeks to abandon Irish citizens and society to the tender mercies of big business and global capital.

The political capital being derived out of those now suddenly finding themselves pro-EU is quite staggering. Many political commentators and parties who fought hard against the past excesses of the EU are now firmly in the EU camp, claiming that the British have ‘lost the run of themselves’ and that the EU, while not per-

## Calling all Mandate members! What is **Treatment Benefit** and do you qualify?

Treatment Benefit is a scheme that may allow you to qualify for: • Dental Benefit • Optical Benefit • Contact Lenses (on medical grounds) • Hearing Aids

### Dental Benefit

Dental Benefit covers dental examination and diagnosis.

### Optical Benefit

Optical Benefit covers an eye examination only.\*

### Contact Lenses

If you need contact lenses on medical grounds, the Department will pay up to half the cost, subject to a fixed maximum contribution, provided you have a doctor's recommendation.

### Hearing Aids

The Department will pay up to half the cost of a hearing aid or repairs to a hearing aid, subject to a fixed maximum contribution of €500 for one aid and €1,000 if you need two aids. Before you buy your hearing aid you should make sure that you know the

amount that you will need to pay on top of your grant. This grant can be paid to a person who has the necessary PRSI contributions or to their adult dependant. You can find a list of hearing services companies on the website [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie). You can use your hearing aid grant if you qualify when buying hearing aids from them.

\*The Department does not pay towards the cost of an eye examination for visual display units (VDU), such as computers or for driving licences.

## How do I qualify?

To qualify for Treatment Benefit you must satisfy the PRSI conditions. Only PRSI at Classes A, E, H and P count. \*At least 13 of these weeks must be paid contributions.

However, if you do not have 13 paid contributions in the relevant tax year, you may use the following years instead:

- either of the two previous tax years, or
- any tax year after the relevant tax year.

The 13 weeks paid contributions does not apply if you:

- reached age 66 before 6 July 1992,
- are aged 55 or over and receiving ‘unemployment credits’,

■ are getting any of the following Social Welfare payments:

- Invalidity Pension,
- Carer's Allowance,
- Carer's Benefit,
- State Pension (Transition),
- Illness Benefit (for 12 months or more),
- a combination of Jobseeker's Benefit and Jobseeker's Allowance (for 12 months or more),
- long-term Jobseeker's Allowance, or
- Pre-Retirement Allowance.

■ are on a Community Employment Scheme, Back to Work Scheme, Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme or Community Employment Development Programme. Aged 66 or over, the PRSI contribution requirements vary according to when you reached age 66.

**Mandate members should be aware that these benefits exist and if you would like more information log on to [www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie) or telephone: (071) 919 3302 or drop into your local Intreo Centre or your local Social Welfare Office**



# followed by a hokey cokey Irexit...

fect, is the 'only real game in town'. Utter poppycock!

I agree with those who say the UK outside the Eurozone could precipitate a decimation of, and an attempt at dismantling, the NHS which would invariably lead to a domino effect involving the privatisation of public services and less scrutiny over how multi-nationals do their business. Inevitably, this will lead to an ever increasing race to the bottom on jobs, trade and living standards. But isn't that already what the EU have planned for small countries such as Ireland through collective trade agreements?

Despite a hardline stance publicly adopted on a "hard border" by An Taoiseach, the Irish State is totally unprepared for the increasing likelihood of the UK crashing out of the EU on March 29th 2019.

Ireland has an unsustainable business model already offering low corporate tax rates and legal tax avoidance schemes to foreign investors. The fact that the EU is forcing Apple to pay €13 billion to the Irish Government in taxes, despite our government stating that they don't want nor need it, is a clear indicator that this corporate business model is not sustainable for very much longer.

## Tax haven

Our legislators and their corporate friends love our wee tax haven status and, with the UK out of the EU, it will weaken Ireland's argument against the EU-imposed tax harmonisation by losing a close ally in that regard.

If Ireland decides to fight Brussels in a bid to stop the harmonisation of the corporate tax base, it will inevitably lose out. Just imagine what we could do with an extra €13 billion plus all the other taxes owed to us by multinationals who have been milking the recession for all its glorious worth in Ireland for far too long?

We could build hospitals, schools, transport infrastructure, have a free national health service, vastly increase public housing provision, boost public services, pay people a living wage, fix precarious working practices and maybe even fix a pothole or two up in the wilds of Donegal without having to sell our vote to get it done.

So, indulge me please – what if Ireland decided to throw its collective hat into the ring with its near neighbour the UK and abdicate from the EU? Would an Irexit (an Irish Brexit) be such a doomsday scenario if our closest and biggest trading partner decides to go it alone? Leaving the EU would mean the Irish state would not be bound by devilish collective trade agreements such as the Transatlantic Trade & Investment Partnership (TTIP) – which is a clear and present danger to Irish democracy, jobs and pretty much everything that stands for decency in our working lives



No Border No Barrier: recent protest outside Stormont

Picture: Sinn Fein (CC BY 2.0)



“ A united Ireland along the lines envisaged by the revolutionaries 100 years ago... An egalitarian and inclusive all-island Republic built on those proud socialist principles of liberty, equality and fraternity ”

today. TTIP undermines corporate transparency and allows multinationals to challenge and usurp Irish law with its provisions for common regulatory zones and anti-democratic disputes procedures.

While I'm being provocative, it should also be noted that Ireland,

since 2014, is a net contributor to the EU Budget, paying in €1.69 billion and receiving €1.52 billion. Effectively what this means is that any EU money coming into Ireland under funding arrangements such as cohesion funds and common agricultural policy, to name two, is basically Irish taxpayers' money being recycled through Brussels and back into Ireland again.

So the public fallacy that the EU is a benevolent cash cow and that we would all lose out financially if Ireland left the EU is simply not true. In fact, an Ireland free from the restraining fiscal shackles imposed by the EU would have complete control over where funding is applied and may even be able to afford increased funding freed from the overseeing eyes of Brussel bureaucrats.

Of course, there are so many more unknowns surrounding the consequences for Ireland, North and South, should the UK leave the EU. However,

it is worth considering Irish public opinion could very well be set against the views of our politicians according to that bastion of balanced reporting the Irish Daily Mail.

On October 31, 2016, The Mail published a poll which showed that four in 10 Irish people would choose open borders and free trade with the UK over membership of the EU. Whatever happens with Brexit, it is clear that if and when the UK leaves the EU, then the economic and societal relationship between Ireland and the UK will fundamentally change. In fact, it's a complete game changer for the entire failing project of Team Europe.

## Hari Kari

So how might Ireland conduct its own Irexit, I hear you ask? That indeed is a fine question my friends. The 1937 referendum that adopted the Irish Constitution is not in itself a barrier to Ireland leaving the Eurozone. This can be done by the Irish government without a referendum. If our political leaders decided on foot of the UK jumping ship that we'd conduct our own Hari Kari Irexit version of Brexit, then it would depend on the reasoning and logic for doing so that would determine my position on it as a concept.

For example, if it was being done to reclaim Irish sovereignty and to apply democratic principles in line with the January 21, 1919 Democratic Pro-

gramme of "liberty, equality and justice for all" then count me in, brothers and sisters.

However, I can never imagine the Thatcherite, neo-liberal poster boys and girls of our Civil War parties having the foresight and egalitarian nature of our forefathers, so it'd be more likely that any Irexit led by current political parties would more be an even deeper "love-in" with the corporate entities of austerity and the perpetrators of the ongoing ravaging global class war.

So Marx's prediction 150 years ago that capitalism would lead to greater concentration of wealth, in particular, the means of production and capital, has proven conclusively to be correct. Marx's view that poverty and inequality of income and wealth would not improve under capitalism, neoliberal or otherwise was right on the money, if you'll pardon the pun.

The Brexiteers' campaign to abandon the EU is irrational at best. It's an emotional kneejerk in pursuit of an unattainable dream of 'Making Britain Great Again'. It's a bit like the unachievable fantasy of making America great again because neither were that great to begin with.

We are now moving into the period of the great known unknown that will see the UK attempt to "persuade" Ireland to see things from their perspective. The next EU summit in mid-December sees the UK present its proposals for dealing with the Irish border, EU citizens' rights and their divorce bill from the EU. The options are limited in terms of avoiding a hard border – for example, the North might become a semi-detached part of the UK similar to the Isle of Man or the UK might stay within the Single Market and the common customs area. Both options, while unlikely, would be a bitter pill to swallow for the gung-ho Brexiteers.

My simple solution to the quandary that surrounds us all with Brexit is a somewhat more straightforward and uncomplicated resolution. A united Ireland. A united Ireland along the lines envisaged by the revolutionaries 100 years ago who saw a very different Ireland to the Ireland of today. An egalitarian and inclusive all-island Republic built on those proud socialist principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Custom unions require the surrender of sovereignty; otherwise, why would they need to exist in the first place? Ireland has long passed its sovereignty over to Brussels so maybe it's time we reclaimed a bit of it back and began to build a lasting legacy for future generations.

One that's not built on subservience and austerity but one we all can be proud to hand over to future generations whether that's inside the EU tent looking out or outside the EU tent looking in.

A hokey cokey Irexit, if you will, based on the great known unknown collective phrase of the Brexiteers, "Where the f\*\*k do we go from here?"

Brian Forbes is Mandate National Coordinator



EXTRACT

Frank Connolly's NAMA LAND reveals the inner workings of Ireland's 'bad bank'



Picture: RollingNews.ie

IN JULY 2015, the Irish political and corporate world was shocked when Wexford TD Mick Wallace claimed in parliament that a sum of £7 million had been lodged in an offshore bank account in connection with the sale of more than £1.24 billion (€1.5 billion) in publicly owned property assets.

The scandal over the sale of the Northern Ireland portfolio of assets controlled by the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) continues to unfold and has damaged the reputations of leading politicians and business figures on both sides of the Irish border. It is to be investigated by a Commission of Investigation headed by a High Court judge, while many other aspects of NAMA operations have also come under scrutiny.

Over the last few years the largest transfer of property assets from public ownership to private interests in recent times has taken place in this small country on the edge of Europe. A total of €31.8 billion in distressed loans – with an original par value of €74 billion – transferred to NAMA following the banking collapse, have been sold in large bundles which only a handful of global funds can afford.

Hedge funds and other investment managers, many using Irish-registered subsidiaries, are sweating out the assets in order to multiply profits on commercial and residential properties they purchased at massive discounts. Thousands of Irish families and business people have lost homes or remain in permanent default on their mortgages and loans.

The Irish state, through NAMA, has

facilitated the disposal of huge tracts of land and properties based on toxic loans which were transferred to the 'bad bank' after it was established in 2009. NAMA was set up to restore credit in the economy and to help the banks recover by removing their toxic loan debt. It was intended to sell off the hugely discounted loans over a ten-year period and make the maximum return for the exchequer and the Irish people. It has not worked out as planned.

By seeking to offload the properties as rapidly as possible NAMA may have failed to obtain the best return for the Irish people, and by appointing people to lead the massive property management project who had no experience in the real estate investment business it may have facilitated inappropriate decisions and mismanagement. Many people hired by NAMA have since left the agency to work for companies with a vested interest in the purchase of badly performing loans and debt. The agency is still embroiled in the massive political and financial scandal over the disposal, in 2014, of its Northern Ireland portfolio, Project Eagle, which contributed to the destabilisation and collapse of the power sharing executive at Stormont in early 2017.



FOR MORE READ

**NAMA LAND**

BY FRANK CONNOLLY  
(Gill Books)

Industrial and political struggle in the Russian Revolution

# Lessons for today from Red October

By Sean Byers  
Trademark – Anti-sectarian Unit ICTU

FOR the British Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm, writing in the early 1990s, the Russian Revolution was the key event of the 20th century, its impact “far more global and profound” than that of the French Revolution a century earlier.

But as Sheila Fitzpatrick has noted recently, the so-called ‘end of history’ has meant that there is little enthusiasm to commemorate the events of 1917. A whole generation has grown up without any experience of the world shaped by the Russian Revolution, while even for sections of the Left it is seen as irrelevant or, worse, something which ushered in decades of bloody conflict and repression.

Nowhere does this apply more than Ireland, where efforts to mark the centenary of the Russian Revolution are few and far between. In lieu of an official programme of events, it has been left to a small number of individual unions and trades councils to organise their own lectures, seminars and discussions on the subject.

### Grassroots level

This compares unfavourably with trade union support for the 1916 centenaries programme last year, at both an institutional and grassroots level. It is unclear whether this is an accurate gauge of political consciousness in the trade union movement, but it does appear to betray a lack of interest or awareness of 1917 and its relevance to the task of organised labour up to the present day.

At the very least trade unionists should be able to recognise the importance of understanding the Russian Revolution so that it cannot be used against those of us arguing for an alternative.

Or, as China Miéville puts it in his masterful account of 1917, the world’s first socialist revolution deserves to be celebrated because “things changed once, and they might do so again”. History records only a few occasions when masses of ordinary people overturned an oppressive state order and took power. The ability to point to such occasions, and to draw on the hope and ideas generated by them, is indispensable to confronting the challenges of the present.

The preamble or prehistory to the Russian Revolution can be traced back to the late 19th century, when the vast empire began to undergo radical changes that outstripped Tsarism’s capacity or inclination to adapt accordingly. It was in this period that the Russian working class grew in numbers and confidence.

Despite or perhaps because of the weakness and illegality of the organised labour movement, Russia experienced four waves of mass strikes in the lead up to the war – the first in the late 1870s, the second in 1896-97, the third in 1903-06, and a fourth beginning in 1912. Workers gradually learned from experience that economics and politics in Russia were inseparable: when they struck for improved wages and working conditions, they faced the repressive arms of the Tsarist state.

This coincided with liberal pressures towards constitutional monarchy, which elicited a combination of reform and repression on the part of the regime. These struggles generated rising workplace militancy and increased political radicalism, confounding orthodox Marxist views of Russia’s backwardness.

The long road to the October Revolution was paved with successive political crises that prompted the Bolsheviks in particular to reconsider their theoretical preconceptions and tactics for realising their objectives.

major defeat suffered by Russia during the First World War – and there were many – would cause society to turn against the hapless Nicholas II and his government, highlighting their illegitimacy.

Secondly, the economic hardship caused by the war – high inflation coupled with low wages, and food shortages leading to mass starvation – heightened the sense of discontent felt by Russia’s vast population. In these harsh conditions the rapidly expanding industrial workforce grew more militant and strikes more frequent.

And while the economic struggles continued, the political strike movement gained new momentum. Stories broke through of mutinies, of small groups of soldiers refusing orders to fire upon demonstrations; increasing numbers joined the ranks of the revolution. This new development underscored one unintended but ultimately fatal consequence of the war effort: the coming together of Russia’s disparate and diverse working class on the battlefield as well as on the home front.

### Radical message

The Bolsheviks’ radical message became more popular with workers as the mood became more militant. But not even they expected revolution to break out when it did. No strikes had been called for International Women’s Day, 23 February 1917.

The influential Bolshevik Vyborg Committee based in the heart of Petrograd saw no appetite for strike action. So when 7,000 low paid women workers from the city’s textile mills spilled onto the streets demanding ‘Bread!’, it was a surprise to everyone but the women themselves. Because, as Neil Faulkner rightly notes: “The working women of Petrograd were doubly oppressed: ground down in the workplace, by wretched conditions, long hours and low pay; ground down at home by the toil and poverty of everyday existence. Many were on their own, their brothers, husbands and sons conscripted. Many were grey with hunger and exhaustion. Sometimes they would go two or three days without eating. Sometimes they would cross themselves and weep with joy when they managed to buy bread. When a loaf can induce tears, revolution is close.”

By the close of International Women’s Day, the striking women had called out tens of thousands of workers from neighbouring engineering factories. Within three days virtually all of Petrograd’s major factories had been shut down. More than 300,000 people were now active in a political

“ At the very least trade unionists should be able to recognise the importance of understanding the Russian Revolution so that it cannot be used against those of us arguing for an alternative ”

The 1905 Revolution began with the sacking of four workers before escalating into a movement of mass strikes, peasant insurrections and military mutinies, climaxing in the autumn with the newly established St. Petersburg Soviet – a workers’ council elected from the city’s factories – staking control of the capital.

Panicked and wounded, the regime was able to bolster its chances of survival by ending the war with Japan and pledging the creation of a national parliament, the Duma. However, the nascent worker-peasant alliance continued to pose a threat into 1906, land seizures and soviets being the order of the day.

The outbreak of the war introduced a number of new dynamics that accentuated the old regime’s contradictions and weaknesses. In the first place, with the Russo-Japanese War still raw in people’s memories, each

Ireland 4,000 years ago. Traditional life in a Stone Age community is irrevocably transformed by the arrival of a stranger with the magic of turning stone into metal.

Not everyone is happy. Many are fearful. A story of adventure, horror and violence, that changes lives forever. Nothing will ever be the same...

A riveting, thought provoking and revealing read,

**YELLOW SUN**

is the debut novel from Stiofán Ó Nualláin.  
(David J Publishing)







The furnace of change: a packed assembly meeting, above, of the Petrograd soviet in 1917. UK Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, below. Corbyn's socialist message has proved popular across Britain Picture: Public Domain

strike, the slogan 'Bread' crowded out by banners reading 'Down with the autocracy!', 'Down with the war!' Army regiments mutinied in larger numbers than before, with thousands of soldiers coming over to the revolution. Before long it had spread to Moscow and the provincial cities, leaving the Tsarist regime crippled beyond repair.

The February Revolution brought about the collapse of the Romanov dynasty that had ruled Russia for centuries, giving way to a 'dual power' situation in which the soviet – now comprised of worker and soldier delegates – gradually became the ultimate source of sovereign authority.

On the surface, this power manifested itself in the Provisional Government's adoption of key parts of the soviet programme and the loyalty of the armed forces to the soviet. At the same time, new trade unions were formed, with Mensheviks and Bolsheviks taking up leadership positions; and at a grassroots level, workers' committees drew down economic power by assuming control of their factories.

The struggle between the Provisional Government and the soviet found expression in a series of political crises that occurred between February and October. Membership of the Bolshevik Party increased from just 24,000 to over 350,000 in the same period, as the population grew war weary and economic conditions deteriorated.

Strikes and workplace occupations played an important role during the July Days demonstrations – for instance, when most of the 500,000 demonstrators who came out did so under the Bolshevik banner of 'All power to the soviets!'

General Kornilov's attempted coup of August likewise failed in large part because of the actions of ordinary workers: railwaymen diverted trains bringing troops into Petrograd, printers halted the distribution of Ko-

rnilov's plans, and soviet activists used their newfound influence on the soldiers to prevent wider bloodshed.

With hindsight, the Bolsheviks gaining control of the Petrograd Soviet at the end of August and the Moscow Soviet a week later would seem to imply an inexorability about the Russian Revolution. The events of 25-26 October, both on the streets and behind the scenes at the Second All-Russian Soviet Congress, were much more chaotic and uncertain than this.

Of Lenin, Miéville has written that, "Reality, radical, now stunned him." However, the strength of the Bolsheviks' position was that they had spent a year immersing themselves in the working-class movement, reformulating their tactics to confer with changing conditions. When the Revolution came, they were able to hasten the transfer of power to the soviet and guide it towards implementation of a socialist programme.

**Full circle**

One hundred years on and we have in many ways come full circle. New faultlines are emerging and becoming increasingly threatening in the existing economic and political order. But with this comes possibilities that haven't existed in years. While the Russian Revolution cannot be taken as a blueprint as the only way of building a new society, it does offer a number of positive lessons for trade union and community activists.

Firstly, when we look at the history of how successful revolutions are made, we find that it means not merely lecturing at people but listening to them, learning from them and harnessing their experiential knowledge. It also means being involved in ongo-

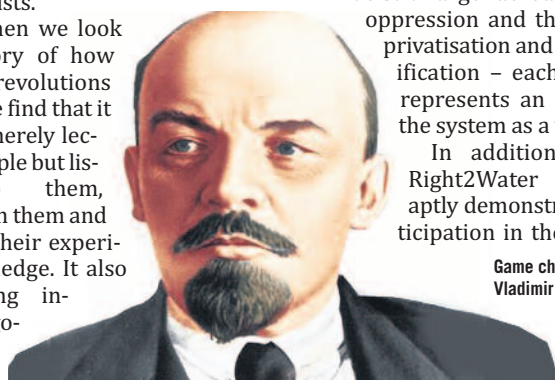


“ The Russian Revolution shows that we must come armed with a positive vision for a better future and win the battle of ideas, over the course of a generation if necessary ”

ing struggles, campaigns and forms of resistance which are objectively anti-capitalist even if they are not meant as such. Struggles for universal healthcare, the right to a home, a high quality system of free public education, for a sustainable environment, or against racist and gendered forms of oppression and the logic of privatisation and commodification – each of these represents an attack on the system as a whole.

In addition, as the Right2Water campaign aptly demonstrates, participation in these forms

Game changer: Vladimir Illych Lenin



Picture: Public Domain



Aileen Morrissey stepped down from role in July

# Mandate's training and education pioneer retires

JULY 2017 saw the retirement of National Co-ordinator for Education and Training, Aileen Morrissey.

Aileen is a lifelong trade unionist and activist, working in BHS (now Penneys) O'Connell Street, Dublin, elected Mandate shop steward and National Executive Council member before being appointed as a Mandate Divisional Organiser for the Midlands where she proved to be an effective and tenacious advocate on behalf of our members.

She was promoted to the newly-created role of National Co-ordinator for Education and Training based in Mandate's state-of-the-art training facility in Dublin.

She was charged with rejuvenating Mandate's training and education programme, a challenge she relished. Aileen's success has seen the training centre grow from strength to strength with more than 1,000 union activists passing through a wide array of courses each year and the centre achieving accredited status.

Our union activists have taken full advantage of courses such as shop stewards' training, politics, English language, computer training to name but a few.

Log on to [www.mandate.ie](http://www.mandate.ie) training for more details of valuable training opportunities delivered right across the country.

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# Dunnes back on top spot in Irish grocery market

By David Gibney  
Mandate communications officer

DUNNES Stores have reclaimed top place in the share of the Irish grocery market ahead of Christmas with 22.4% of the market according to Kantar Worldpanel.

It's the first time in nine months that Dunnes have been at the top and much of their success is down to their ongoing discount campaign and the hard work of their staff.

David Berry, director at Kantar Worldpanel, said: "Dunnes Stores tra-

ditionally posts a strong performance towards the end of the year and 2017 is no exception. While growth of 1.4% compared to this time last year is slightly behind the market average, shoppers have spent almost €2 more per trip this period, which has been enough for the retailer to edge ahead of the competition."

SuperValu is in the second spot with a 22.0% share of the market – in line with last month – though larger basket sizes have contributed to a sales improvement of 0.5%.

The strongest growth this month has come from Tesco. As David Berry explained: "Tesco's sales are 5.1% higher than they were this time last year, which has lifted its share of the market from 21.3% in 2016 to 21.9% today.

"The retailer is the only one of the top five not to lose shoppers this year, and customers have been tempted in by lower prices. On average, consumers have paid 2% less than this time last year and in turn this has contributed to shoppers making big-

ger trips and returning to store more often."

Mandate General Secretary John Douglas, Mandate told *Shopfloor*: "The sales growth in Tesco is testimony to the hard work of all Tesco staff and is an indication that the company can face the challenges of a competitive retail market without targeting their staff."

Meanwhile, Aldi and Lidl have both continued to see sales grow ahead of the market – up 2.9% and 3.8% respectively.

However, it wasn't just Christmas that consumers were stockpiling for this period. David Berry continued: "Storm Ophelia – which hit on October 16 – had a surprisingly strong effect on the Irish grocery market. The week before Ophelia landed supermarkets were buoyed by a spike in sales as shoppers batted down the hatches in preparation for the course of the storm.

"Munster in particular saw an up-lift in sales, with growth reaching 12% during that week."

## Retail sales up 4.5% in October when compared with last year

By David Gibney  
Mandate communications officer

THE volume of retail sales was up 4.5% in October compared with the same period last year latest figures from the Central Statistics Office show.

The sectors with the largest monthly volume increases were pharmaceuticals, medical and cosmetic articles (7.3%); fuel (1.3%); and clothing, footwear and textiles (1.3%).

The sectors with the largest month-on-month volume decreases were books, newspapers and stationery (-2.5%); electrical goods (-2.1%); and other retail sales (-2.1%).

There was a decrease of 0.1% in the value of retail sales in October compared with September and there was an annual increase of 2.5% compared with October last year.

Merrion economist Alan McQuaid said retail sales "remain erratic" on a monthly basis, but that the underlying trend is "positive".

John Douglas, Mandate General Secretary told *Shopfloor*. "Now that we are entering some sort of positive growth in retail, it is only fair that workers, who have suffered from the harshest austerity in the history of the country, get their fair share of that growth."

He added, "While house prices have been increasing at 13% per annum and rents have increased by 40%-50% in recent years, workers

haven't had pay increases to match the essentials of everyday life.

Mr Douglas issued a challenge to retail workers: "If workers think their employer will benevolently hand them a pay increase above cost of living, they are sadly mistaken.

"In order to achieve a significant pay increase, workers need to get organised in their trade unions. They need to make sure everyone in their workplace is in the union, and then together they can agitate for improved terms and conditions of employment.

"And there is no better time to do that than now, when retail is growing."

Despite weakness in sterling since last year's Brexit referendum, which has enticed some shoppers to spend in Northern Ireland, retail sales in the Republic "have held up quite well".

VAT receipts for the year are running ahead of official Department of Finance expectations which is positive for the retail sector.

However, with the pound still very weak, some analysts are worried that up to €60 million could be lost to cross-border shopping.

Another factor effecting cross-border shopping is the higher VAT rate in the Republic of Ireland (23%) compared to the north (20%).

Headline retail sales volume growth of around 3.5% in 2017 is now expected.

### IN THE PICTURE...



ABOVE All smiles following a meeting of Wicklow Local Council in Bray Golf Club on October 24 BELOW RIGHT Vicky Hanrahan, a shop steward in Tesco Ballybeg, Waterford recently completed a QQ1 Level 6 in Trade Union Studies

### TESCO Ballinasloe

## Members win €500 each over breaches to Working Time Act

FOUR Mandate members working at Tesco Ballinasloe have won claims under the Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997 at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC).

What was in dispute was the failure by Tesco to provide four members with their 15-minute break because of the shift pattern that operated in the Tesco Ballinasloe filling station.

Over the years staffing levels in the filling station have been cut and when there was only one person per shift it was not possible for our members to take their statutory 15 minutes when they worked in excess of four-and-a-half hours, as the pumps could not be left unattended.

While it is welcome that the issue is currently resolved, it had been ongoing for a significant period of time.

The issue was raised as a collective grievance in October 2016 and Tesco delayed and failed to engage in the process. The issues was referred to the WRC in accordance with Mandate and Tesco agreed procedures and a conciliation conference was arranged for March 29, 2017.

However, when no agreement could be reached, Tesco stated that they would not attend the next stage of the agreed

procedure: a full hearing of the Labour Court.

The issue was then referred as four individual claims to the WRC under the Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997. However, at the WRC Adjudication Hearing, Tesco then argued that the union had failed to identify the specific dates and times of the breaches of the law.

Tesco further argued that the Adjudication Officer had only the authority to investigate the six months immediately before the date of referral to the WRC under the 1997 Act.

In conclusion, the Adjudication Officer was satisfied that the members had specified the details of the breaches of the 1997 Act and that Tesco's breach of agreed procedures had added to the delay and so granted an extension in backdating the claim.

The Adjudication Officer also found that Tesco had failed to comply with the 1997 Act during the relevant period and awarded compensation of €500 to each member.

As Divisional Organiser John Carty was on long-term sick leave at the time, Industrial Officer David Miskell represented the four members throughout the dispute.





# No decisions about us without us



Michael Taft

OUR current model of industrial relations – whereby employers not only ignore their employees but have legal sanction to do so – is no longer sustainable if our goal is to create a prosperous 21st century economy. And retail workers find themselves at the epicentre.

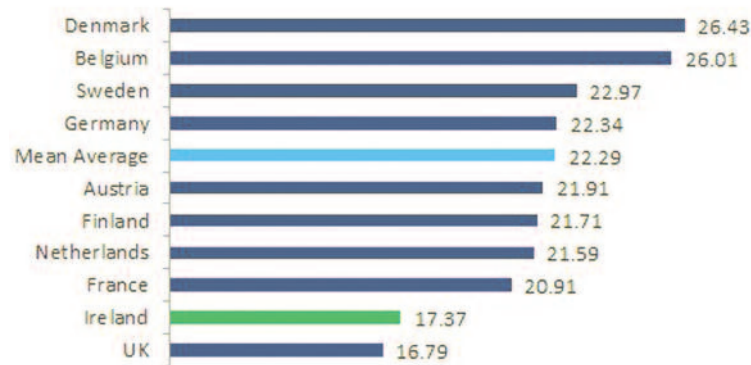
Let's start with wages. Overall, Ireland is a relatively low-waged economy compared to our European peer group (other Northern and Central European economies). However, when it comes to the main domestic sectors – like retail – Ireland is ultra-low-waged.

In the distributive sector, Ireland is at the bottom – except for that other low-waged economy, the UK. The data above takes account of inflation through purchasing power parities (PPPs). If Ireland is at the bottom of the table, there is a range of productivity measurements which puts Irish retail workers near the top of the table with profits ranking in the upper half. In short, Irish retail workers are highly productive but lowly paid. Employers take the rest.

The second set of problems workers face is the high-risk of precariousness. There is no clear definition of precariousness but in Ireland over 40% of all workers have what are called 'non-standard' or 'atypical' contracts – that is, they do not have full-time, open-ended contracts.

These types of contracts are made up of temporary agency work, zero/low-hour contracts, part-time work, casual and seasonal work, self-employment (including bogus self-employment), fixed-term contracts, 'gig' economy work, etc. This precariousness can take the form of uncertain hours, low wages and income, and inability to access PRSI benefits (e.g. unemployment benefit, illness benefit). Not all people working under these non-standard contracts

Table 1: Wages in the Wholesale & Retail Sector 2016 (Real € per hour)



**In short, Irish retail workers are highly productive but lowly paid. Employers take the rest...**

are at risk: many self-employed or part-time workers are quite satisfied. But it is within these general areas that we find the highest levels of social and financial insecurity. And in the retail sector, this precariousness would be higher than most other sectors.

### Bargaining

The third area is how few workers benefit from collective bargaining. This is called 'collective bargaining coverage'. In some countries 80% to 90% of workers are covered by collective bargaining agreements at industry and sectoral level, in addition to agreements at the individual business level. This means these workers have the benefit of a trade union negotiating their wages and working conditions. A further benefit – and this is crucial – is that workers' wages and conditions are removed as a basis for race-to-the-bottom competition between employers.

In Ireland, collective bargaining coverage is low. The OECD estimates that only 30% are covered (though these stats can be complicated by countries having different definitions of 'collective'). Given that almost all

public sector and semi-state workers are covered, this leaves very few in the private sector covered under such agreements. Ireland has very few sectoral or industry-wide agreements, especially with employers boycotting statutory bodies such as the Joint Labour Committee. This has direct implications for wages and precariousness.

If it's bad in the private sector, it is even worse in the retail sector. Again, in many other countries over 60% – up to 90% – of wholesale and retail workers are covered by collective bargaining agreements. In Ireland it is much lower – made much lower by the conduct of aggressive and anti-union employers.

We need a number of strategies to reverse these dismal trends – low pay, precariousness, and poor collective bargaining coverage. But they all start with trade union organisation in the workplace. This is the fundamental starting point. It is about recruitment, organising and education in each workplace, building confidence among workers and members, learning how employers operate and learning from the experiences of workers in other countries.

From this foundation, workers can start to influence the public debate – putting their wages and conditions on the agenda. Here we are pushing at an open door. There is a consensus within public opinion in favour of the Living Wage because it speaks to both common sense and decency ('working people should at least be paid a decent wage to keep them out of poverty'). A further benefit for retail



Great value... for bosses: figures show Irish retail workers are ultra-low waged

Picture: Alisdair (CC BY 2.0)

workers is that people meet them every day, know them from the community, went to school with them. Putting a human face on the powerful themes of common sense and decency is an important tool to influencing public opinion and, therefore, the politicians and policy makers that must respond to that opinion.

Lastly, while the long-term goal may be to reform our institutions to introduce sector or industry-wide collective bargaining, this will only be achieved by a strong, organised presence in the individual workplaces. And here it will be a long-term struggle.

Employers are engaging in more aggressive and sophisticated anti-worker strategies, advised by international consultancy firms which specialise in union-suppression activities. But even here, faced with a

more confident and antagonistic employer class, workers can develop strategies that incriminate company brands. A company's brand is an important asset and is a potential weak spot for employers in the struggles ahead.

Low wages, precariousness, and the refusal of employers to engage with its employees – these need not be the permanent state of retail employment. There are alternative strategies that can lead to better and more prosperous outcomes for workers. But all these strategies start with trade union organisation. Becoming organised, working together with your colleagues – this is the way forward, working under the common banner: no decisions about us without us.

Michael Taft is an economic analyst and trade union activist



## Hasta la victoria siempre! Ardara...

By Giaran Campbell  
Mandate Divisional Organiser

AN POST'S recent surprising and controversial homage to Che Guevara Lynch, wasn't the only Irish tribute marking 50 years since the passing of the Argentinian-born revolutionary hero.

Across many parts of Ireland, both urban and rural, left-wing and social activists launched and hosted a series of wide-ranging events in honour of Che – the man, the revolutionary and politician.

On October 6, the residents of Ardara, a small town in south west Donegal, woke up to Cuban flags billowing in the customary coastal winds as local social activists and organisers Liam White and Bill O'Brien, both of the Irish Cuban Solidarity Group Ireland, bravely launched their 'Che Abú' festival to celebrate the life and legacy of Ernesto Guevara Lynch.

The festival, which ran from October 6 to October 8, was opened by sitting Ind4Change and R2C TD Thomas Pringle and the then-

Cuban Ambassador Dr Hermes Herrera.

Many of the festival events were centred in the local Nesbitt's Hotel and involved several keynote speakers such as Dr Helen Yaffe, TDs Maureen O'Sullivan and Catherine Connolly, Traveller activist Eileen Flynn, alongside enlightening presentations on Cuba's sustainable organic farming and a photographic exhibition on Cuba by Emer O'Shea in Ballyshannon.

The festival was a welcome blend of interactive debate and

discussion with well-organised social events that did little or nothing to threaten the early morning festival starts.

Che's life and legacy celebrations finished with a well-attended Bill O'Brien lecture on 'The Communism of Fr McDyer' hosted in the beautiful Glencolumcille folk village where Fr McDyer lived, worked and campaigned as the local parish priest from 1951 onwards.

Maith Sibh Liam agus Bill



# Gerry Light

Assistant General Secretary  
Mandate Trade Union

## VIEW *from the* SHOPFLOOR

# Do you fancy a Double Irish or a Single Malt?

**BEFORE considering accepting the apparently attractive offer contained in the above headline take some time to understand why, through their very existence, innocuously named tax avoidance schemes such as these are hurting each one of us and crippling the laudable aspirations many have for building a just society.**

Following the most recent revelations contained within the Paradise Papers it is now estimated that 10% of the entire wealth of the world is held in secretive tax havens by a few individuals while the societies and economies in which these elite actually claim to belong continue to pick up the burden for their manipulative and highly secretive tax avoidance activities.

In statistical terms around 50% of the wealth held in tax havens belongs to households with more than \$50 million in net wealth. In countries such as Russia, the riches of the wealthiest are held outside of the country while in France, Spain, Germany and the UK, 30%-40% of the wealth of the richest 0.01% households is also held abroad.

**Of course the impact of these individuals' covert financial activities pails into insignificance when one looks at the manner in which large multinationals also attempt to hive off their profits.**

Many of the tax havens that attract and encourage this type of investment, such as those located in Bermuda, provide little or no data concerning their rich and selfish clients. The same cannot be said for the havens to be found in certain EU member states.

Recent research has shown that six European tax havens alone account for the washing of €350 billion annually. Regrettably, and to our shame, Ireland is one of the countries identified along with Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Belgium, Malta and Cyprus. Globally it is estimated that €600 billion is moved through similar tax havens on a yearly basis. The main purpose behind the financial trickery carried out is to ensure that the massive wealth involved is taxed at rock bottom rates of between 0% to 5%. The EU loses about one-fifth of the corporate tax it currently collects directly as a result of the money laundering activities taking place in tax havens.

**Funny we used to reserve the use of terms such as money laundering for criminals and sinister underworld characters; however, what is happening in the worldwide use of tax havens is essentially no different.**



Of course, those who jump to the defence of such activity will tell us that there is essentially nothing to see here and the transfer of wealth in this way is entirely legal. Unfortunately they are correct in this assessment and that is because certain governments, instead of imposing sanctions against the financial institutions that facilitate the hiding of wealth, openly allow and encourage this type of activity.

In Ireland, we have witnessed the use of tax evasion schemes known as "The Double Irish" and more recently "The Single Malt" which creates a loophole facilitated between Ireland and Malta that permits big business to take advantage of an arrangement to make sales and profits in one country only to be taxed in another.

Even when our Government was forced to close off the benefits available under the Double Irish arrangement they remarkably granted a five year grace period to allow companies to find new tax practices. Once this happened Apple quickly used this window of opportunity to move the taxation of its massive profits from Ireland to Jersey.

**Legal it may be but tax evasion on the scale that is currently being availed of is morally corrupt and flies in the face of – and seriously impedes – modern societies in their efforts to build progressive structures that prevent unnecessary inequality and social deprivation.**

While many might view what is going on as the games that rich people play, make no mistake every cent that is lost in forgone taxes means a punitive burden falls on ordinary workers and their dependents through the imposition of additional taxes and the reduction in and removal of essential public services. It is also obvious that the inter-generational and selective transfer of wealth that is taking place enriches the old while the young are being systematically impoverished.

You could easily form the view that the benefits that flow from the large scale activity being generated here in Ireland has to be economically good for us and will eventually enrich our citizens. Sadly when one observes the social ills and chronic State under-resourcing associated with issues such as homelessness, the health service, the education system, and protection of our environment, to name but a few, you quickly realise that the trickle-down effect does not automatically happen.

**The irony is when the EU decided that the favourable tax arrangements we put in place for Apple were unacceptable the Irish Government refused to collect the billions of euros due. Instead they are now spending more hard working taxpayers' money in costly litigation in trying to prevent us benefiting from the massive amount of money that has been deemed rightfully ours.**

It is clear that no country that currently houses a tax haven activity will act alone in attempting to stop this global practice of wealth concealment, nobody wants to be the first to jump. A lot of credit must go in recent times to those investigating journalists who through the publication of the Panama and Paradise Papers have started to lift the veil of secrecy on how the super-rich hide their wealth.

In addition to this, what is required is the creation of a global financial register that would allow each one of us the chance to readily identify and show our disdain towards wealthy multinational corporations and individuals who, through branding or other forms of association, dare call themselves one of our own.

**Such a privilege comes with a price and for many that means, like the rest of us, paying taxes that are properly due.**

## INTERNATIONAL

# Savage war of peace...

By Stephen Nolan  
Trademark – Anti-sectarian Unit ICTU

AFTER two years of secret talks and nearly four years of formal negotiations brokered by Cuba, the chief FARC negotiator, Ivan Marquez and the head of the Colombian delegation, Humberto de la Calle signed a historic peace agreement at a ceremony in Havana in 2016 bringing to an end over 50 years of war that has seen more than 222,000 deaths and millions of internally displaced.

Iván Márquez, the FARC's top negotiator, said: "We have won the most beautiful of all battles: [the battle] of peace for Colombia. The battle with weapons ends and the battle of ideas begins."

The final agreement went to a plebiscite on October 2, 2016 but with a low turnout of 34% it failed with 50.2% voting against it and 49.8% voting in favour. In areas central to the conflict the vote was in favour while in urban areas that saw less of the conflict larger numbers voted against it. Following the failure of the plebiscite a revised agreement was passed with a vote of 75-0 in favour in the Senate and 130-0 in the House of Representatives.

The deal is designed to address both the root causes of the conflict while laying out a calendar for the disarmament and demobilisation of the FARC. The deal is comprised of six parts:

1. Reform of the rural economy and eradication of rural poverty.
2. Guarantees for political participation and broadening of democratic rights.
3. Ceasefire and disarmament of the FARC and their reincorporation into civilian life.
4. Solution to the problem of illicit crops and drugs.
5. Truth, justice, no-repetition and reparations for victims of the armed conflict.
6. Implementation and verification of the final peace agreement.

Crucially, the agreement states that the government must address the

huge inequalities in wealth, land ownership and income that characterise Colombian society. In turn, the FARC will move its estimated 7,000 fighters from the hinterland into 'disarmament camps' to be overseen by the United Nations, where the demobilised guerrilla fighters will receive 90% of Colombia's minimum wage as they dis-arm and attempt to re-integrate into society.

The deal also includes reparations to victims and sets up a transitional justice system for crimes committed during the conflict and although an amnesty will be granted for less serious offences it will not cover the worst atrocities.

### Death squads

The agreement nonetheless faces serious challenges, not least a lack of agreement on prisoner release and the ongoing activities of paramilitary death squads. If you were to read about the conflict in the western press you might be led to believe that the conflict was between Marxist guerrillas and state security forces, what is rarely mentioned is the role of Colombia's right-wing paramilitary death squads who are notorious for their brutality and who have been responsible for the vast majority of the human rights abuses that have occurred in the country in the past 25 years:

*"They are infamous for their use of vicious violence, including massacres with chainsaws, brutal torture, sexual violence and cutting off of limbs as tactics designed to instil fear and terror among those they target. The scale of their violence is astonishing and it is estimated that the paramilitaries have killed around 150,000 Colombians and displaced hundreds of thousands more."* – Justice for Colombia

Of most concern is the open secret that these right-wing groups are directed by a network of wealthy landowners, business figures, senior military officers and drugs traffickers that is known as the 'United-Self Defence Forces of Colombia', or AUC, its





President Raúl Castro looks on as Colombian President Santos, left, and FARC-EP leader Timoleón Jiménez shake hands after signing the ceasefire agreement in Havana in June 2016

Picture: Presidencia de la República Mércena (CC BY 2.0)

Spanish acronym.

Since the start of the so-called 'Paramilitary Peace Process' in 2002, the Colombian government's official line is that these paramilitaries have demobilised, but this is not the case and thousands of activists, trade unionists and peasants have been murdered as these groups continue to function with impunity across the country. Their existence and links to the deep state pose a very real threat to the peace process.

The latest report from the human rights observatory, Somos Defensores, revealed that 35 human rights activists were killed in the first six months of 2016. There were 232 death threats, 21 attempted assassinations, 13 arbitrary arrests and one disappearance. The report states that paramilitary groups are responsible for the majority of attacks, 68% of cases, while the army was responsible for 10% and the FARC 0.1% of cases. Since the peace agreement was signed more than 130 'social leaders' have been murdered.

The United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, has called on the Colombian government to increase efforts to implement the peace deal with a greater focus on reintegration of demobilised FARC guerrillas into civil society, guarantees over political participation for the FARC's newly-formed political party and security in areas vacated by the FARC that have subsequently been occupied by right-wing paramilitaries.

Working tirelessly at the centre of the peace process is Mariela Kohon and the team at Justice for Colombia, a trade union-sponsored NGO established in 2002 in response to the appalling human rights crisis in



And still the killings continue... Marcha Patriótica remember their dead – the sign reads 'Five murders in 48 hours'

Colombia, and particularly serious abuses of trade unionists.

In 2008, JFC Ireland was set up, and in 2014 Mandate was part of a trade union delegation to Colombia to draw attention to both abuses of trade unionists and support for the burgeoning peace process.

Key to this trip was an investigation into the impact of the EU-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. It was felt that the agreement would reward human rights violations and, through increased investment in mining, increase land grabs and forced displacement of local indigenous groups. The north of Ireland has also played its part with both the DUP and



Sinn Fein involved in advising and supporting the process with the final agreement clearly drawing on the shared experiences of the Good Fri-

day Agreement.

While we must, of course, celebrate this first stage of the peace process, there is no doubt that very

real difficulties lie ahead.

As with other peace processes around the world there is the very real likelihood that we will see the 'double transition' from conflict to peace and, simultaneously, from a decidedly undemocratic capitalism to an ostensibly democratic, neoliberal capitalism that will be characterised not by social justice and equality but by free trade zones, privatisation and deepening inequality.

### Real fear

Added to this economic threat is the very real fear of a return to conflict; only days after the peace deal was signed Cecilia Coicué, a member of the Marcha Patriótica movement, was murdered in the region of one of the proposed demobilisation areas.

FARC and human rights observers have pointed to the dangers of these attacks in undermining the entire peace agreement and their fear is well founded. In 1985, the FARC created a political wing, Patriotic Union, in order to negotiate a peace. Over the following few years, Patriotic Union was exterminated with more than 5,000 members murdered by the AUC.

The signs are ominous, since the deal was signed, right-wing death squads have continued their campaign of murder. In the last month, six FARC members have been killed by right wing paramilitaries in El Charco, Nariño, while former guerrilla Henry Meneses Ruiz was murdered in Cauca.

According to Colombia's National Human Rights Coordinator, Cristian Delgado, at least 38 FARC members or close family relatives of members have been murdered since the peace agreement was signed in November 2016.



# BLOW THE WHISTLE ON THE BAD BOSSES



## 10 REASONS TO JOIN MANDATE

### 1. An organising and campaigning union:

Mandate is focused on building an activist base to protect and improve employment conditions. Through better organised workplaces and the power of the collective strength, we will deliver justice for working people.

### 2. Modern and effective training:

Mandate provides free courses to help you learn new skills, improve existing skills and develop you and your prospective career. We negotiate agreements with employers to pay for attendance at courses and also to provide reasonable time off for employees to attend them.

### 3. Campaigning for success:

Mandate is a progressive campaigning union fighting on issues that really matter to our members, their families and society in general. Mandate campaigns challenge social injustice at all levels of Irish society.

### 4. Protection at work:

Highly trained and skilled Mandate officials provide professional advice and assistance, where appropriate, on a variety of employment issues.

### 5. Safety at work:

Mandate health & safety representatives are trained to minimise the risk of workplace injuries and ensure that employers meet their legal obligations at all times.

### 6. Better pay:

Year on year, Mandate campaigns for and wins pay rises for its members. Mandate also campaigns to close the widening gender pay gap in Irish society.

### 7. Legal protection:

Mandate has won significant legal compensation for members who are injured as a result of an accident at work.

### 8. Mandatory pensions:

Mandate has secured pension schemes with a variety of retail employers and will campaign to secure mandatory pension schemes for all members working in the private sector, particularly those on low wages.

### 9. You're less likely to be discriminated against:

Mandate has won agreements with employers on respect and dignity at work policies and procedures. Mandate will continue to campaign for tougher laws to make it illegal to discriminate on the basis of sex, race, age, disability or sexual orientation.

### 10. You're less likely to be sacked:

Membership of Mandate protects you and strengthens your voice in your workplace.

**Together we're stronger**



JOIN MANDATE TRADE UNION ONLINE AT <http://www.mandate.ie/Contact/Join.aspx>

## RIGHTS

A GROUND-BREAKING report into trade unionists' attitudes to abortion throughout Ireland, North and South, was launched on October 19. The report, titled *Abortion as a Workplace Issue*, is based on a quantitative and qualitative survey commissioned by trade unions Unite, Unison, Mandate, CWU and GMB, as well as Alliance for Choice (Northern Ireland) and the Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment (Republic of Ireland).

The research was conducted by Ulster University and analyses responses from more than 3,000 trade union members.

Introducing the report and speaking on behalf of the research team at this morning's press conference, lead researcher Dr Fiona Bloomer of Ulster University pointed out that the study is the first of its kind to consider trade union member views on abortion issues in Ireland North and South.

She said: "We believe this is also the first study to consider the specific matter of abortion as a workplace issue in the English speaking world. The study captured a range of views on abortion, and is reflective of the wider public debates on abortion.

"This is a very wide-ranging survey and report, but I would like to highlight two particular findings: 80% agreed women's health should be the priority in any reform of the abortion law, and 597 respondents, or 20%, stated they had direct experience of abortion as a workplace issue.

### Legal reform

"Not only does *Abortion as a Workplace Issue* quantify support among trade union members for legal reform, but it also provides a valuable insight into the perspectives of those with direct experience of abortion as a workplace issue."

Mandate General Secretary John Douglas said: "The report clearly indicates, in particular, that young trade union members across the island of Ireland support access to abortion for women in a variety of circumstances. Whether it's 'when the pregnancy is the result of rape', 'when a woman's health is at risk' or 'when a woman asks for an abortion', young people in greater numbers than other generations believe access should be afforded to women."

He added: "This is significant because these are the women who have to live with restrictive access to abortions now and in the future, and they're also the generation who have never had an opportunity to have a say on this issue in the Republic of Ireland because the last referendum was 35 years ago."

Recalling the origins of the research, Unite Regional Women's and Equalities Officer Taryn Trainor said: "During an interview with Amnesty International a couple of years ago about trade unionists' perspectives on abortion, I realised we didn't have any empirical evidence.

"Thanks to this report commissioned by Unite, Unison, Mandate, the CWU and GMB, and supported by Alliance for Choice and the Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th, we now have quantitative and qualitative evidence to show that abortion is a workplace issue affecting women workers and their families throughout the island of Ireland.

"As trade unions, we ensure that workers facing a range of issues are

# Pioneering survey charts union members' attitudes to abortion



John Douglas: 'Young union members are backing change'

represented and supported in the workplace. Women facing a crisis pregnancy and all the healthcare issues involved deserve the same representation and support – and this report, based on responses from over 3,000 union members, tells us why."

### Overwhelming support

Welcoming the report's release, GMB Regional Organiser Denise Walker said: "This report demonstrates that our members overwhelmingly support reform of abortion legislation on both sides of the border.

"It is clear from the research that this is a matter for trade unions and we must move forward to ensure that this subject is firmly on the trade union agenda, both in terms of campaigning for reform but also in the

arena of workplace negotiations. The trade union movement must provide the space for dialogue and help to bring an end to the stigma of abortion."

CWU General Secretary Steve Fitzpatrick said: "Trade unions strive to be at the fore when addressing the welfare of our members and this applies to a range of issues. The voices of over 3,000 trade unionists are part of this all island report. The findings are significant for a variety of reasons, not least because they provide evidence that abortion

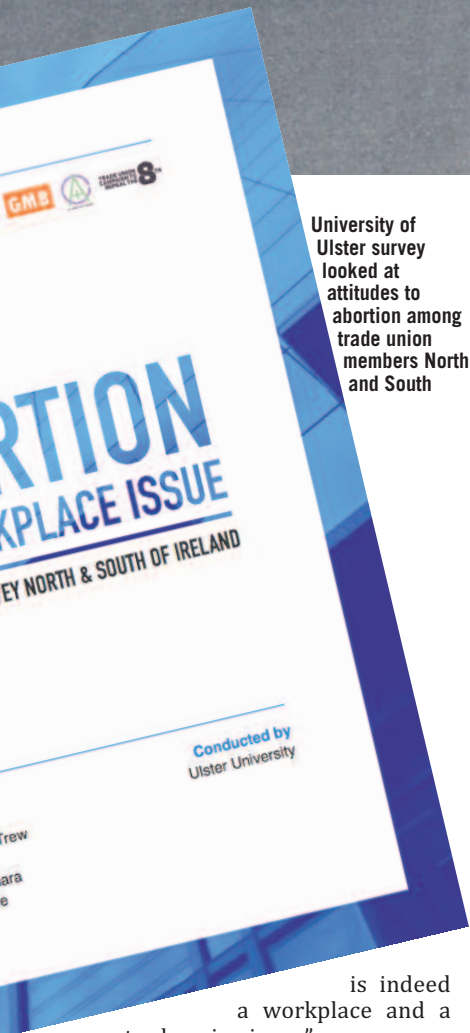




# Key Members' Abortion



Pictures: Tommy Clancy



University of Ulster survey looked at attitudes to abortion among trade union members North and South

this deeper engagement with the unions involved was the next step. We are delighted that the findings echo those of the Citizens' Assembly, i.e. that when ordinary people have access to the lived experiences of abortion seekers and have a chance to fully engage on the issue then we see that they understand the need for a change in the laws as they stand, North and South as well as specific workplace support.

"With the current changes happening in both jurisdictions in regard to abortion access and the law, we recognise the important role trade unions have to play as the largest civil society group on the island."

### Members' experiences

Mandy La Combre, representing the Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment, said: "The Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment is pleased to have played a part in producing the pioneering report *Abortion as a Workplace Issue*. For the first time, unions have direct access to members' experience of abortion as a workplace issue: lack of money; unable to afford or get time off; fear of being 'found out'; fear of seeking follow-up treatment.

"Of those surveyed across five unions, North and South, 87% oppose the criminalisation of women who have abortions. A clear majority of women, men and trans respondents of all religions and none want legislative change to abortion regimes on the island of Ireland.

"Of particular importance for trade unions and all activists facing into a



Taryn Trainor: 'Women who are facing crisis pregnancy deserve our support'

“ Responses in this survey tell us that denying women choice impacts on their lives in the workplace. There are important messages we must heed ”

referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment in the new year is the fact that talking openly about abortion in a safe context caused respondents to reflect on – and sometimes

alter – their own position on the issue.”

Anne Speed, Head of Bargaining and Representation for UNISON, said: "Responses in this survey tell us that denying women choice impacts on their lives in the workplace. There are important messages we must heed.

"Feedback in this survey offers a strong mandate to unions both North and South to back legal reform to remove bans on abortion and support the growing calls from health care professionals that the health and wellbeing of living women must be paramount.

"Most of all, it confirms that sitting on the fence on women's reproductive rights is no longer a credible option."



Mandy La Combre: 'Pioneering report'



Anne Speed: 'No fence sitting on rights issue'

is indeed a workplace and a trade union issue."

Emma Gallen, speaking on behalf of Alliance for Choice, highlighted the role of trade unions as the largest civil society group on the island.

She said: "This piece of research was originally conceived to understand the specific workplace needs and stigmas facing abortion seekers.

"Alliance for Choice have done a lot of work, training, education and workshops with trade unions and



# Dunnes claim likely to go to Lab Court

THE pay and benefits claim served on behalf of Mandate members in Dunnes is currently at the Workplace Relations Commission. It is likely the claim will be sent to the Labour Court in the very near future.

Assistant General Secretary Gerry Light said: "Once again it is regrettable to report that we will be forced to send this claim to the Court under a Section 20 (1) referral.

"This comes about when the employer in question refuses to engage in normal, orderly industrial relations with the representatives of the workers concerned.

"Dunnes seem to think that because they granted a 3% pay increase earlier in the year that our claim would go away. However, that was never going to happen because it contained other important features such as: a call for more fulltime jobs; the introduction of a banded hours framework; and the application of a staff discount to all workers."

Mr Light continued: "Yet again the thousands of our members employed in Dunnes have to resort to a Section 20(1) referral to the Labour Court to fight for the introduction of certain entitlements that are now commonplace in

some of Dunnes competitors in the sector.

"When will the owners of Dunnes realise that the treatment of workers and their union in this way does little to positively promote their image in the eyes of the shopping public? This can only be bad for their business in an ever-increasing competitive marketplace."

And he urged management for once to think about applying the old principle of 'What's good for workers is good for business', adding, "You never know, they might end up being pleasantly surprised."



## Union Representative Advanced Senior

The Union Representative Advanced Senior Course is for union representatives who have a keen interest in the Political & Social Economy and who have questions over the wider social agenda in Ireland & globally.

### Course Content:

- The emergence and development of the market system.
  - The impact of globalisation.
  - Free trade and open markets in a modern society.
  - Collective Bargaining ● Effective Representation
  - Conflict Resolution ● Re-connecting with members
- Effective communication ● Organising and campaigning
  - Connecting with communities
  - Reflecting community diversity

Places are limited. As there is a high demand for this course please ensure to contact your Mandate Union Official or the Mandate Training Centre on **01-8369699** or email [mandateotc@mandate.ie](mailto:mandateotc@mandate.ie) to secure you place

Mandate members who completed the Union Representative Advanced Senior Course run between January 30th – February 1st had this to say:



"I am a retail trainer. This was the best training I have ever done. I would recommend it to anyone. It was so good I would do it again!"

– **Eoin Kelly, House of Fraser, Dundrum**

"Brilliant course."

– **Jason Beirne, Tesco, Carrick On Shannon**

"I would recommend this course to others, 100%"

– **Sandra Reape, Penneys, Ballina**

"The information in this course has been very good. I would love to see it rolled out to all of our members."

– **Paul Daniels, Tesco, Carrick On Shannon**

"It was excellent – best course I've been on."

– **James Sheikh, SuperValu, Swords**

"One of the most interactive, relevant and interesting courses I've been on in Mandate."

– **Vicky Hanrahan, Tesco, Waterford**

"A very good course – I would suggest that all Mandate members do it."

– **Keith Leonard, Tesco, Castlebar**

# Disputes fought pay rises won and attempts at union busting

IN A YEAR that has been quite possibly the most difficult and hostile for Mandate and all its members, I'm proud to say that I believe we have come out the other side stronger than we have ever been before.

Firstly, I would like to recognise, commend and thank all of our members in Tesco who have been pushed harder than anyone over the last 12 months. You have shown courage and sent a clear message to all employers – not just your own – that if you push us hard enough, we will push back. We will not tolerate the absolute disregard by any employer of long-established terms and conditions of employment that you have worked hard for over the years to obtain.

We will not in any way sit back and let employers use union-busting tactics to try and take away our right to representation and our right to be organised.

On personal note, I would like to thank all of those I was able to speak to on the picket lines as well as those I didn't quite get a chance to speak to. All of you made your union – and yourselves – very proud. You showed what the strength and power of every union is – and that's YOU!

You embody the importance of standing together even when some issue may not affect you personally and you have proved that together we are stronger. While Tesco management have used, and continue to use, every tactic they can think of to break us, I can assure you that under no circumstances has this changed the commitment of the NEC, Mandate staff and myself to fight back against Tesco – or any other employer – that attempts to break us.

Thanks go to all of the national negotiating teams and officials who work with each team for their hard work and dedication. Congratulations on the various pay increases – varying from 2% to 4% without concessions – you have won for your fellow members throughout the year. Your dedication and hard work has prompted many employers to recognise that it is about time they acknowledge the dedication of their staff and award non-concession-based pay increases.

Some of the pay rises won by the respective teams this year include: M&S – 3% over 18 months; Brown Thomas – 4% over 24 months; Penneys – 4% over 22 months; Deben-



hams – 2.5% over 12 months; MOPI – 2% over 12 months; Argos – 3% over 24 months; Shaws – 2% over 18 months; Dunnes – 3% over 24 months; Tesco – 2%.

And through our involvement in the Right2Water campaign our members have collectively saved more than €20 million a year by not paying water charges or through refunds to all those who had already paid.

Well done and thank you to the Dunnes national team for continuing the fight for secure hours and piling the pressure on TDs to push the legislation that is so desperately needed through the Dail.

“No matter how hard 2017 may have been, together we will continue to grow. Together we will continue to stand up for our each other and for what is right and together we will face whatever challenges 2018 may bring...”

I urge our members to support the *Secure Hours = Better Future* campaign and do everything they can locally by speaking to TDs in their own constituencies. By doing this we can and will secure a better future not just for ourselves but for all workers.

To close on behalf of myself personally and the National Executive Council, I would like to thank all of the national teams, general membership and staff of Mandate for their work hard work and dedication this year. We wish you and your families a Very Happy Christmas and Peaceful New Year.

No matter how hard 2017 may have been, together we will continue to grow. Together we will continue to stand up for our each other and for what is right and together we will face whatever challenges 2018 may bring.



# Paradise Papers... but it's hell for workers

By Eugene McCartan

RECENTLY the media was abuzz with the revelation contained in the "Paradise Papers".

While media focus concentrated on some of the personalities, such as Bono, the head of state of our nearest neighbour filled the headlines. Yet the real story remained hidden.

The use of tax havens has been central and an essential element in the growing concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands or what is called the "1 per cent".

This exclusive club is made up of oligarchs, chief executives of multinational corporations, politicians and celebrities. But what has gone unnoticed and not explained is the link between tax havens (Dublin Financial Services Centre which runs down the quays from Connolly Station to near O2 concert venue) and multi-nationals.

According to United Nations Committee on Trade & Development (UNCTAD), the value of assets held by foreign affiliates of multi-nationals has risen from £2.97 trillion sterling in 1990 to £77.3 trillion in 2014 and much of this movement of wealth around and within global corporations structures has been and is aimed at very aggressive tax avoidance.

What Apple and other such corporations do is set up 'brass plate' companies with a handful of employees. They circulate their global profits

through low tax jurisdictions like Ireland, Luxembourg etc and then on to tax havens in British Crown Dependencies such as the Cayman Islands.

Corporations use capital stashed away in tax havens to buy back their own share there inflating the prices of the shares and increasing dividends to shareholders including their CEOs. According to Oxfam, the top 500 US corporations have on average 64% of their profits to buy back shares. They give the CEO share op-

tions then buy them back at inflated prices so it's a win-win for both the shareholders and the CEOs.

This explains why multinationals are working to turn so much of their profits into shareholder value. For workers within multinational corporation structures, such as Tesco etc, or companies in the supply chain, this pursuit of "shareholder value" has resulted in the intensification of exploitation, offshoring of jobs, outsourcing of jobs, sub-contracting, the disruption of collective bargain-

ing structures, more precarious work and increased automation resulting in the historic wage squeeze on workers.

As increasing number of states put in place low taxation regimes on corporations and wealth, so the tax burden shifts to workers to fund state services. The very same corporations are as a result subsidised because many workers need family income supplements to make ends meet.

In Britain, the poorest 10% of the population have experienced the per-

centage of their income paid as tax rise from 35% in 1979 to 43% in 2010, while the richest 10% have seen theirs fall. Corporation tax rates fell from 50% in 1984 to 33% in 2014.

All this has contributed to the revolutionising of production – the removal of labour – with a growing concentration of capital in global financial institutions. Added to this is creation of a precarious 'industrial reserve army' of labour (global mass unemployment).

## Strategies

Trade unions need to develop international strategies of cooperation that target weak points in the global supply chain, coupled with a back-to-basics strategy of mobilising workers in the workplace. In many case building from scratch.

Capitalism was always a harsh and anti-workers economic system, it is become increasingly harsher and the exploitation will only intensify. Precarious employment is becoming the norm as it was in Dublin in 1913. The state has and is restructuring the economy more than ever to meet the needs of multi-nationals leading to precarious employment coupled with precarious shelter and a very precarious future.

The time has long past in attempting to patch up this system up. It is fundamental root and branch changes that we need.

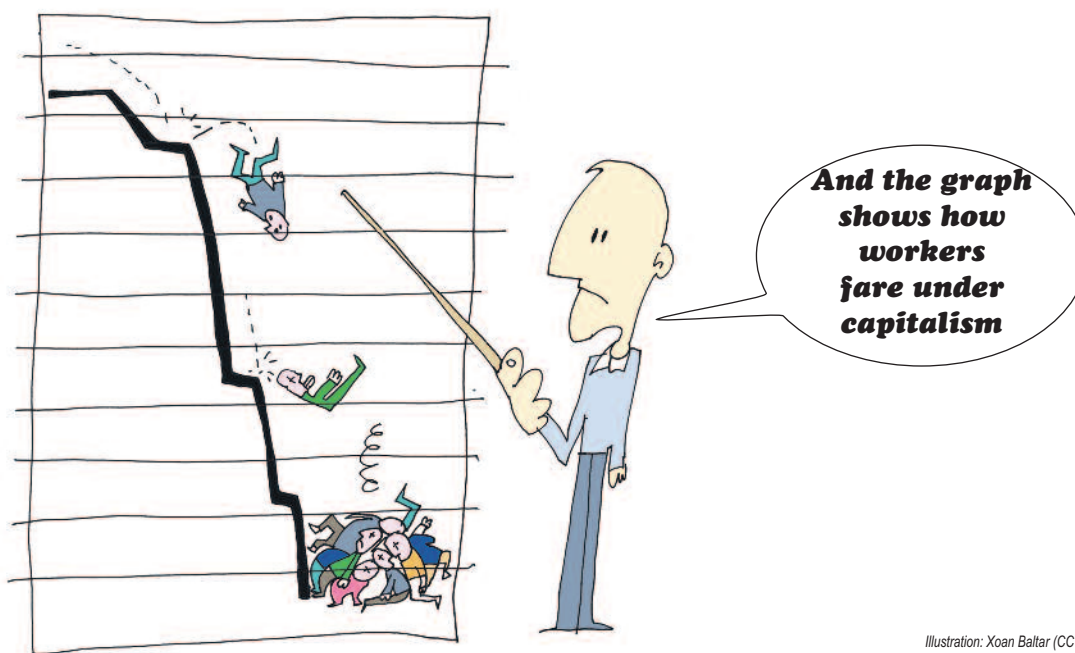


Illustration: Xoon Baltar (CC BY 2.0)



Mandate in conjunction with Skills for Work is offering funded training. The courses are to encourage members back into learning and training whilst aiming towards a QQI Level 3 Award.

## Personal Finance Training Course

*Personal Finance: For those who want to brush up on their personal finance skills, while also developing and understanding budgeting techniques etc.*

### COURSE CONTENT:

- Planning a realistic budget by understanding how you use money and prioritizing
- Improve basic maths skills: Use of calculator for percent and Memory keys
- Understand the equivalents of decimal, fraction and percent.
- Demonstrate estimation and rounding skills
- Use Excel to aid money management
- Use of internet to navigate revenue.ie, social welfare, and comparative sites for best prices in electricity, gas, broadband and telephone
- Understand your payslip, work out tax credits, PRSI and USC.
- Investigate social welfare payments and schemes
- Understand and compare different types of savings and loans available
- Compare bank accounts, credit cards, personal loans
- Understand consumer rights and how to complain

Evening courses take place one evening per week for a duration of 12 weeks in a venue near your workplace.

If you are interested please contact Mandate's Training Centre on **01-836 9699** or by email [mandateotc@mandate.ie](mailto:mandateotc@mandate.ie). Check out [www.mandate.ie](http://www.mandate.ie) for further training courses

Places limited and allocated on first come, first served basis. Courses delivered by Education & Training Boards inear to your workplace.



## Safety Representation for Elected Reps QQI Level 5

This course is aimed at Health and Safety Representatives.

The following topics will be covered on the course:

- Health and Safety Legislation
- Role of Health and Safety Representative
  - Safety statements
- Role of Health and Safety Authority
  - Occupational health
- Identification of hazards and risk assessment
  - Accident investigation
  - Fire safety
- Effective communications
- Health and safety promotion

### Certification and Progression:

Members who successfully complete this course will receive a QQI Level 5 component award certificate and may progress to other courses offered by Mandate or other organisations.

Please contact your union official or Mandate Training Centre phone **01-8369699** or email [mandateotc@mandate.ie](mailto:mandateotc@mandate.ie) to confirm your place



MOPI-SUPERVALU

# PCC review commences

AS PART of Mandate's most recent national agreement with MOPI-Supervalu – which included a 2% pay increase for members – a review of the flexibility provisions contained in the 2008 PCC Agreement has begun.

Assistant General Secretary Gerry Light told *Shopfloor*: "The issue of work/life balance arising from proper and fair rostering is very important to our members working at MOPI-Supervalu.

"We know this because they told us in a national survey carried out by the union earlier this year. That is why it found its way on to the agenda for national negotiations and formed part of the latest national agreement."

He continued: "Therefore, the pur-



Gerry Light: 'Work/life balance very important'

pose of the review is to ensure the spirit and the term of the 2008 PCC agreement is applied so that all our members are treated in a fair and equitable way when it comes to the distribution of weekly working hours."

It is understood further meetings are scheduled to be held in early 2018.

TESCO

# Lab Court hearings for Jan 4

THE LABOUR Court is also set to hear the 2017 pay and benefits claims submitted by Mandate on behalf of thousands of its members who work for Tesco

Ireland nationwide on Thursday, January 4, 2018.

Along with a general pay increase Mandate is seeking the following:

- Upward adjustment to ensure greater equality across hourly rates of pay;
- Enhanced/Secure weekly working hours;
- The creation of more full-time jobs; and
- The enhancement of work/life balance arrangements.



THE outstanding claim for the 6% pay increase due to our members employed in Tesco Ireland on pre-1996 contracts will be heard at the Labour Court on Thursday, January 4, 2018. It is important to note that the increases being sought have already been paid to the rest of the union's members working in Tesco over the past three years.

Picture: Olama (CC BY 2.0)

DO YOU HAVE A MANDATE-THEMED STORY OR PIC? Email us at [news@mandate.ie](mailto:news@mandate.ie)



## Trade Union Representation (QQ1 Level 5)

This course for shop stewards/union representatives who have completed the introductory course or who have relevant experience.

**Course content:**

- Understanding Mandate's structures
- Overview of Mandate's rules
- Industrial Relations institutions and mechanisms
- Mandate's Organising Model
- Negotiations & Collective Bargaining
- Understanding Equality and Diversity
- Developing induction presentation skills
- Introduction to Employment Law
- Identifying issues and using procedures

Certification and Progression: Members who successfully complete this training course will obtain a Mandate certificate. They may progress to the QQI Level 5 Certificate in Trade Union studies or other relevant training courses offered by Mandate.

If you are interested in this course, please contact your Mandate official or Mandate's Training Centre at 01-8369699. Email: [mandateotc@mandate.ie](mailto:mandateotc@mandate.ie)



## House Committee Training Course

This House Committee course is designed to assist members in their role as Mandate Trade Union representatives and to build on their skills and expertise as a House Committee member. This three-hour course is delivered to House Committee members with a minimum of five in attendance and held at a time that suits you in a location convenient to your workplace.

**Course Content:**

- Background to Mandate Trade Union.
- A stronger union workplace.
- Organising your workplace.
- Development of effective communications.
- Building your network and involvement in Mandate Trade Union.

If you are interested in this training please contact the training centre at:

**Mandate Organising and Training Centre, Distillery House, Distillery Road, Dublin 3**  
Tel: (01) 836 9699 Email: [mandateotc@mandate.ie](mailto:mandateotc@mandate.ie)



# Some thoughts on Kim and the Donald

By **Ciaran Campbell**  
Mandate Divisional Organiser

SINCE nuclear testing began on the morning of 16th July 1945 with the US's detonation of its first atomic bomb at a desert test site in Alamogordo, New Mexico, 2,050 nuclear explosions – only some 150 of them for peaceful, scientific purposes – across five different countries were recorded over the following five decades.

Of these explosions the US account for more than 50% of nuclear blasts, the then-Soviet Union 35%, France 10%, the UK and China each sharing less than the last 5%.

After 1996, India, Pakistan, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea – North Korea – have openly declared that they have also con-

ducted nuclear testing and explosions. North Korea has tested six to date.

With the fall of the Soviet Union, countries such as Belarus, Kazakhstan and the Ukraine are known to possess nuclear weapons alongside South Africa and Israel – who are albeit ambiguous about admitting they possess such an arsenal.

This represents an escalation in the global nuclear threat and/or deterrent – that up to then had been the preserve of first world western countries.

In that context of the ongo-

ing and alarming brinkmanship between President Trump and North Korea's Kim Jong-un, this has real catastrophic potential on a global scale. Very recent hostile actions, subsequent threats and bombast – often very personalised – by both sides would at first glance suggest we are reaching the point of no return. Or is that case?

North Korea's nuclear programme, rapidly advanced by Kim Jong-un, has all the optics of sticking two fingers up at the US, which – given America's brutal conduct during the 1950-53 Korean War – carries some substance.

But North Korea has

always declared that its nuclear programme is motivated by defence. It appears it has achieved the capacity to launch long-range nuclear strikes.

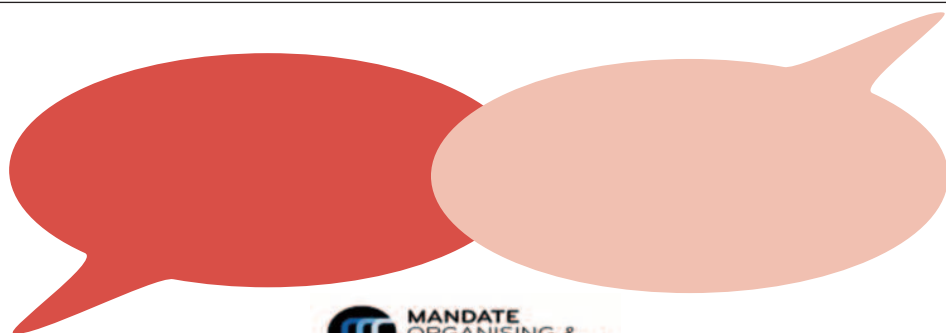
Paradoxically there is now a real possibility that both sides can address and negotiate their hostilities from a position of 'equals' – one psychological, the other physical.

Despite the sabre-rattling rhetoric, Trump's response to the latest North Korean development was generally more temperate than usual. And encouragingly the US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has assured the world that "diplomatic options remain viable and open".

That remains to be seen but it would be breathtakingly irresponsible if both sides failed to seize this opportunity. We all could benefit!



Picture: Gage Skidmore (CC BY-SA 2.0)



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Mandate, your trade union, is offering English speaking classes for members. The course is for members who while speaking some English have never had the opportunity for formal training. In the course you will learn the basic grammar and improve your vocabulary. You will have the chance to correct those mistakes that your workmates are too polite to tell you about! Improved language skills can add to your confidence and improve your quality of life.

Training is **free** to Mandate members. If there are 10 Mandate members who wish to attend this training, classes will take place in a location near to your workplace.

If you are interested please contact:  
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*Places are limited and are allocated on first come, first served basis*



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Places are limited and are allocated on a first come first served basis and are open to Mandate members who are currently unemployed.

**Please see Mandate website for further training courses at [www.mandate.ie](http://www.mandate.ie)**



North and West Division hosts discussion with visiting delegation of German trade unionists and workers

# Visitors get Mandate lowdown on 'life on the western fringe'



Mandate activists Keith Leonard and Emma Browne, centre, with the visiting Arbeit und Leben delegation from Hesse, Germany

MANDATE'S North and West Division hosted an active group discussion with a delegation of German trade unionists and workers in Castlebar on October 13. The theme of the discussion was 'Life and Work between Tradition and Modernity at the European Fringe'.

Divisional Organiser Ciaran Campbell explained the background to the visit: "Earlier this year we received an invite to give a presentation and to host a discussion for a number of trade unionists and workers visiting from Germany.

"They wanted to know about Mandate's position on the economic and social development of the country's western regions, both past and present, and the impact such changes had on workers and – ultimately – their families."

He added: "We really couldn't pass up this opportunity, given Mandate's current policy struggles both on an industrial relations and societal level."

Most of the participants from Germany were from the federal state of

Hessen and were part of the decentralised nationwide organisation 'Arbeit und Leben' which works with the German trade union movement and community adult education centres.

Arbeit und Leben organise a range of seminars and courses – one of which is on political education. Those employees who apply and participate must legally be released for these courses, which range in length from one week per year or two weeks every two years.

Attending the courses will not impact on the employee's annual leave entitlement. However, due to the current economic situation in Germany, which isn't as positive as is portrayed by the country's mass media, employees are now more reluctant to avail of these political education seminars, believing it will impact on their employment prospects.

Ciaran Campbell said: "Not all of those in the audience were trade unionists but to a person they were clearly very interested in what we had to say, most notably from contributions made by leading activists and



local Tesco shopworkers Keith Leonard and Emma Browne.

"Both these workers gave real accounts of the current industrial relations environment within their Tesco employments which went down very well with the audience."

The day-long event – part of the Division's Mayo ROC (Recruitment, Organising and Campaigning) strategy – included a Mandate position presentation which outlined the lack of

legislation around collective bargaining rights; the fact that Labour Court recommendations are not legally binding on industrial relations issues; zero and insecure hours contracts – particularly in the retail industry; the pre '96 dispute as well as the effects of austerity and water charges.

Mr Campbell continued: "We gave an extensive presentation on a whole raft of issues that currently and will continue to impact on Mandate mem-

bers and their families. Our German guests were absolutely taken aback at the lack of collective bargaining legislation, the prevalence of precarious working practices, the imposed austerity measures and its impacts on the West of Ireland's declining populations as well as Brexit.

"After the presentation we had a long, open-ended discussion coupled with a question and answer session, where – to be honest – I took a back seat allowing Keith and Emma to take over.

"Their contributions had more resonance as they were able to give their real-life experiences on all these issues as well as demonstrate the real impacts austerity has had over the last number of years."

Reflecting on the visit, Keith Leonard told *Shopfloor*: "It really was an opportunity for us to come out of our comfort zone and talk to people from a different background, culture and language.

"It was challenging but rewarding and gave as a real chance to showcase our efforts and successes."

## Danke schön, Mandate – German trade unionists send message of thanks...



THE German group who participated in a week-long seminar for political education in Co Mayo got a very warm welcome in Castlebar on October 13 from Ciaran and two of his fellow trade union members and shop stewards.

Ciaran gave a detailed and extensive overview and analysis regarding the issues Mandate is

struggling for and also explained the structures of the Irish trade union movement which differ considerably from the experience of the German visitors.

The fellow German trade unionists were taken aback by the various issues and, consequently, necessary struggles in the Irish retail sector and

in particular the big retailers like Tesco.

The discussions and exchanges during and after the presentations helped the German visitors to get a much deeper understanding of trade union issues in Ireland. Many thanks again for the brilliant organization and welcome by Mandate and their representatives!

DO YOU HAVE A MANDATE-THEMED STORY OR PIC? Email us at [news@mandate.ie](mailto:news@mandate.ie)

## IRISH LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

For those who want to brush up on their Irish speaking, writing and spelling skills while also developing communication skills which are important for dealing with workplace and personal situations.

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- Use introductory vocabulary, to include greetings, introductions, exchange of basic personal information etc.
- Exchange familiar information in the Irish language context.
- Read simple notices, signs and short pieces of text on familiar subjects to include social and work related information.
- Interact in social and work related situations using Irish language as the means of communication.
- This course will help you to use the Irish Language at beginner level.

This Course is open to members who have not achieved their Leaving Certificate or who have an out of date Leaving Certificate. Places are limited and allocated on a first come, first served basis. Courses delivered by the Education & Training Board near to your workplace

If you are interested please contact Mandate's Training Centre on 01-8369699 or by email [mandateotc@mandate.ie](mailto:mandateotc@mandate.ie)





# New equality law guide

THE Irish Congress of Trade Unions has published a comprehensive new guide to employment equality law and the taking of employment equality cases in the Republic of Ireland.

Titled *Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015: A Guide for Trade Unions*, it was written by Kevin Duffy BL, a former Chair of the Labour Court.

It provides a comprehensive guide to the taking of employment rights cases in the Republic of Ireland, in light of the 2015 Workplace Relations Act and reflects changes in procedures and processes affecting both the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court.

The guide was published with the support of the Irish Human Rights & Equality

Commission (IHREC). Speaking at the November 7 launch at the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin, Kevin Foley, who is current Chair of the Labour Court, said: "The principle of equal treatment in employment is underpinned by the law. It is critical that law is understandable and that all parties to the employment relationship are equipped to understand how that principle of equal treatment set out in law operates."

"Kevin Duffy has a long record of significant contribution to Irish life over many years and I think this extraordinarily comprehensive, learned and accessible guide will prove to be an invaluable resource to all who use it to understand the operation of equality law."

Check out guide at <http://bit.ly/2B9qzts>

Guide author Kevin Duffy is a former Labour Court Chair



Picture: ICTU

## Seismic shift needed on primary care

ICTU has told the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health that an expansion of Primary Care services as recommended by the Sláintecare report would require "a seismic shift" in eligibility and public access to GP and Primary Care services.

Congress told the Committee that all such services should be provided by "directly employed health professionals."

Speaking before the Oireachtas Committee on November 29, Liam Doran, Chair of the Congress Health Committee, said: "We believe the expansion of these services should, in the context of universal access, be integrated. In other words universal access to GP, and Primary Care services should be seamless and delivered by a Primary Care team of health professionals."

Mr Doran explained that "the seamless approach is the most effective way of dealing with growing demand, including the management of chronic disease, in a quality assured way."

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT

# Congress calls for revision of workplace code of practice

THE Irish Congress of Trade Unions has called for a renewal and redoubling of efforts to tackle sexual harassment and violence in the workplace and across wider society, including a revision in an existing workplace code of practice on sexual harassment.

ICTU Equality Officer David Joyce, speaking on the eve of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (November 25), told *Shopfloor*: "As recent events have clearly demonstrated we need to renew and redouble our efforts if we are to effectively tackle sexual harassment and violence in the workplace and wider society."

"Trade unions and employers play a major role in making work safe for women, and helping to eliminate harassment and violence against women."

"Collective agreements have proven to be a most effective means to combat this scourge and it is timely to remind ourselves of the 2002 Code of Practice on Sexual Harassment at Work (revised in 2012) previously



agreed between Congress and employers' body IBEC. The code points out that the best way to minimise such behaviour in the workplace is through preventive measures and to create an effective policy with a strong commitment to implementation."

Mr Joyce noted that ICTU has also recently called for complaints of sexual harassment to be elevated to the

status of 'protected disclosures' – as opposed to 'workplace grievances' – thereby ensuring stronger protection and reporting mechanisms for those submitting complaints.

ICTU General Secretary Patricia King has described this proposed change as a "potential game changer" and a "major step forward for those suffering such abuse."

And it is understood ICTU is now

“ Women should not have to resort to #MeToo to expose abuse. There should be no more brushing of sexual harassment and violence under the carpet... ”



David Joyce: 'We must redouble our efforts'

Picture: ICTU

calling for a further revision of the code to ensure the maximum protections for people and to review how best practice can deliver workplaces free of sexual harassment.

ICTU is also supporting the campaign to push governments to support a binding ILO Convention to end gender-based violence in the workplace. The Irish Government has a seat on the ILO governing body and ICTU has urged them to play a "proactive role".

Mr Joyce said: "Women should not have to resort to #MeToo to expose abuse. There should be no more brushing of sexual harassment and violence under the carpet."

## IN THE PICTURE...



Industrial Officers John Callan (first picture, far left) and Barbara Anderson (second picture, far right) at ICTU Labour Court training. Both IOs are based in Mandate's Dublin Office



By **Ciarán Nugent**

Nevin Economic Research Institute

THE national median disposable, net or after tax wage has increased by just under 8% since 2012 (now at €2,087 p.m. approx.) whilst the take home pay of a full-time minimum wage worker has increased by about 10% (now at €1,490).

The most recent reports by daft.ie show an almost 60% rise in average rents across the country and 40% growth in asking prices for residential properties in the same period. The biggest increases have been in the Dublin area where housing costs were already significantly ahead of the rest, followed by Cork and Galway.

The growth in housing costs relative to wages has obvious implications for the standards of living of employees, especially those in rental accommodation. In addition to the regional component, growth in housing costs have important distributional implications as some sections of society benefit at the expense of others.

Current trends disproportionately affect young people and those in the lower end of the income distribution (those more likely to be renting), as a higher proportion of their disposable income is eaten up by price increases. Higher rents also further diminish the chances of saving for the minimum required deposit to buy a property.

This has resulted in a 91% rise in the amount of young people recorded

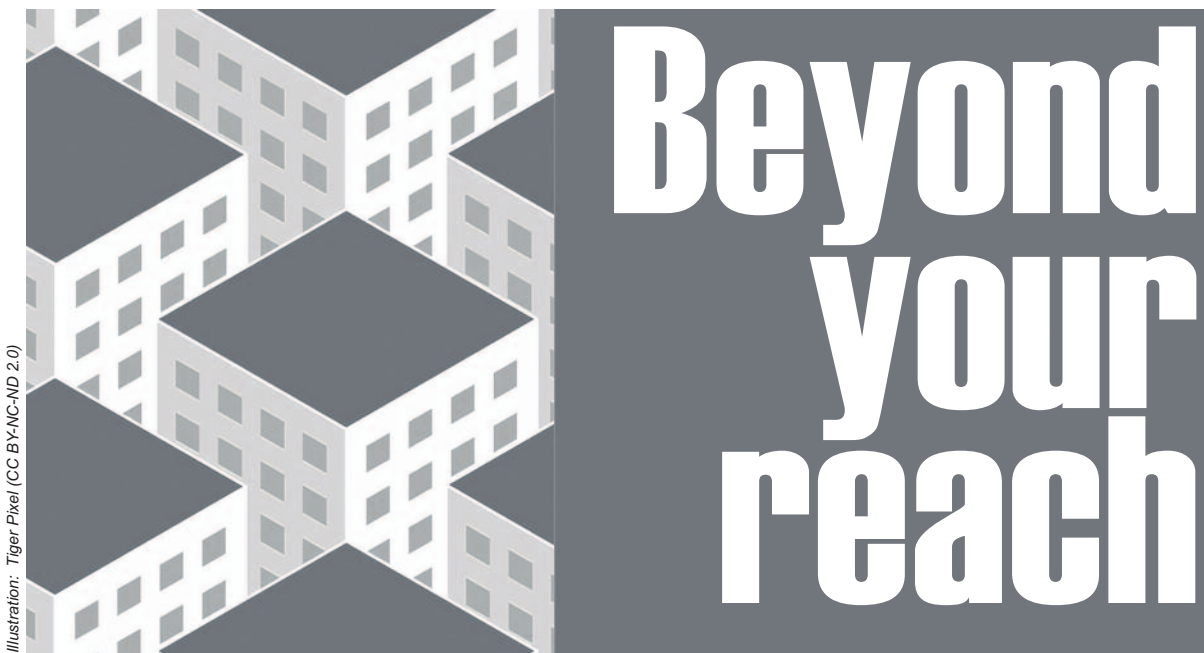


Illustration: Tiger Pixel (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

as homeless since 2012, twice as many adult children living at home as in 2006 (460,000 in 2016) and the average age of a first-time buyer rising from 29 to 34 in the same short period.

Since 2012, though unemployment has come down markedly – in 2015 the deprivation rate (a consumption-based poverty indicator) was still more than three times the rate for workers as it was in 2007 (16.4% compared to 4.9%). Unfortunately, the excessive rental costs also inhibit

the ability of young and low-paid Irish workers to save up for a ticket to Vancouver or Perth!

These developments benefit a relatively small section of society, namely current property owners and banks. Property owners are happy to see their negative equity position improve, landlords are happy to see rents increase whilst banks are happy to see their balance sheets improve.

The rise in these costs also has implications for every other sector in society in that it lowers demand for

goods and services elsewhere as people prioritise the fundamental need to put a roof over their head. This hits sales in the local shop, pub or restaurant, business for taxi drivers and car dealers as well as demand for extracurricular activities for children such as sport clubs or music schools.

By extension, this affects the decisions of these businesses to hire new workers, to give wage increases or to invest more generally. Similarly, this redistribution of resources affects Ireland's ability to attract multinationals, the lynchpin of our development policy for the best part of four decades. Higher rents mean higher wages to pay to highly skilled and highly mobile workers. Recruiters are pointing to growing difficulty in

South Co Dublin is broadly similar.

In practical terms, 50% of Irish employees would have €170 or less left a week after rent to pay for food, transport, utilities, clothing, health and a pension should they rent a one-bed apartment in any of these areas. In Cork, though rental prices are not as high, a full-time minimum-wage worker would still have to spend 56% of his/her after tax wages on renting a one-bed, leaving just over €150 a week for the rest.

As a rule of thumb, economists and financial experts recommend that housing should not take up more than 30% of an individual's or household's net income. Judging by this metric, **Graph 2** shows that renting a two-bedroom apartment in most areas in Dublin is unaffordable for two workers earning the median wage, with prices particularly prohibitive for younger workers.

Indeed, it is clear that this really is a Dublin problem, though the other cities are by no means cheap. Taking a three-bed as the minimum acceptable size, there is nowhere in the Dublin area where two full-time minimum-wage workers could hope to raise a family without significant state intervention.

### Maximum allowable

In Dublin 8 the average two-bed apt/house would cost over 50% of the net wage of two minimum wage workers and €185 more than in 2016, a full 20 hours' worth of wages. It follows that a four-bedroom house is even further beyond the reach of most wage earners and thus not gone into in great depth here.

Central Bank rules state that the maximum allowable mortgage loan is 3.5 times the annual gross income (before tax) of the applicant. The aforementioned paper calculates the relationship between current median after tax wages and current average asking prices in Dublin as an indicator (but by no means a golden rule) of affordability.

The ratios show that the median earner in the 25-34 year age bracket would be unable to secure a mortgage on their current wages for a one-bedroom apartment anywhere in Dublin with the average cost of a two-bed over six times the annual net wage of two median earners in Dublin 1,2,3,4,5,6,6W,14,18 and South Co. Dublin.

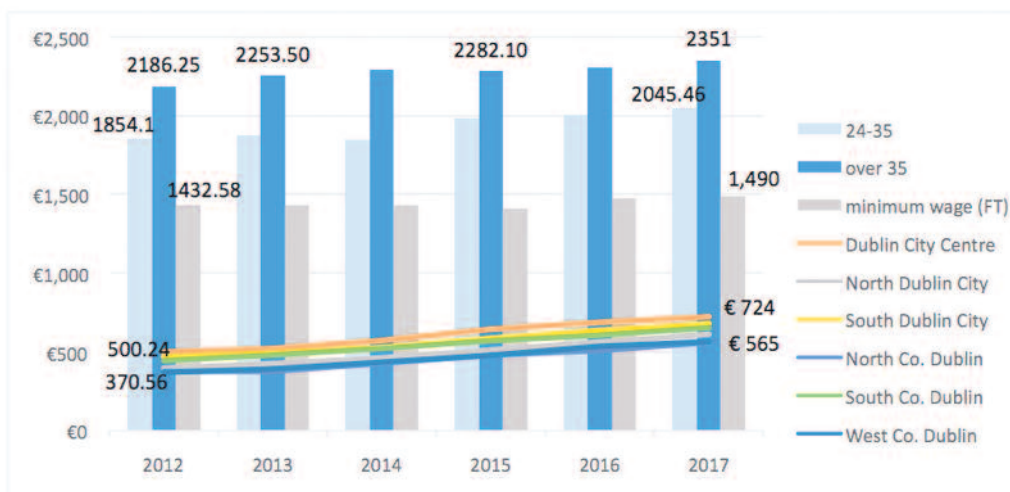
It is no surprise with these figures that the Central Bank found in 2014 that over 50% of homes purchased were paid for with cash as it is clear that most workers would be unable to access the Dublin housing market on their current wages.

This also has the consequence of increasing inequality and social mobility as low-income workers with no additional source of wealth – for example, from parents who can act as signatories on a loan or gift a deposit – cannot hope to escape from excessive rents through home ownership (no matter how early in the morning they get up), whilst those that do, can.

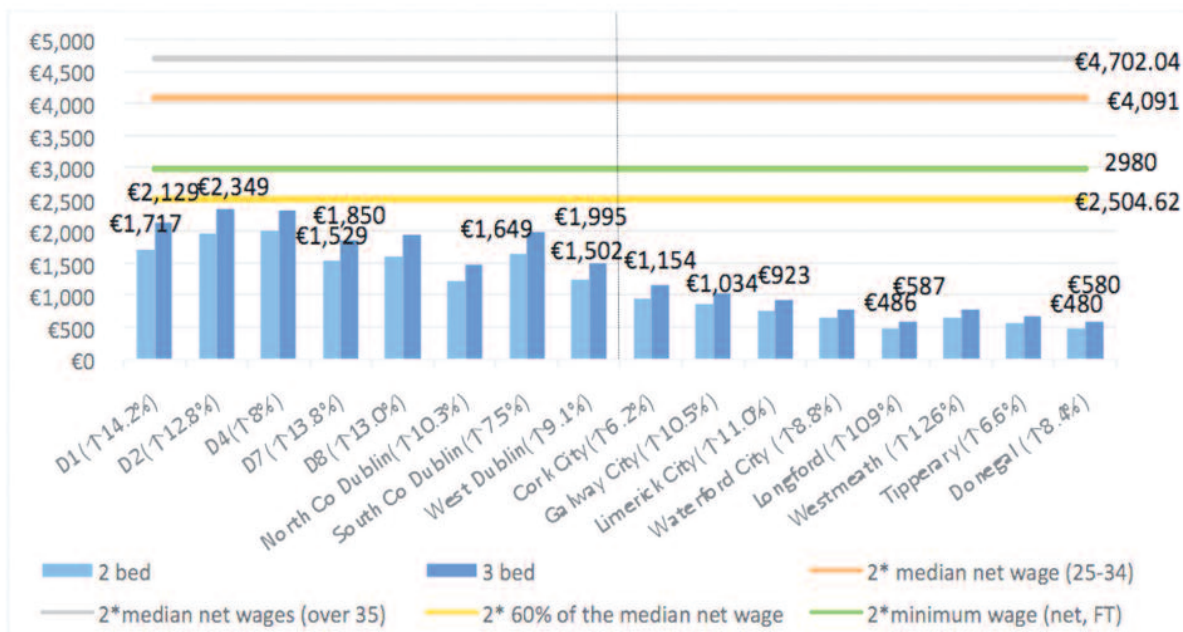
A three-bedroom house is over seven times the net wages of two Irish employees at the median of the wage distribution in Dublin 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,13,14,16,18 and South Co. Dublin with no area in Dublin below 4.5 times the disposable wages of those two workers.

Ciarán Nugent is a Research Assistant at NERI  
SHOPFLOOR | December 2017

**Graph 1: Median net wages and renting a double-bedroom (shared) Quarter 2, 2017**



**Graph 2: Median net wages and renting a 2/3 bed apt/house Quarter 2, 2017**



Note: percentage changes refer to annual changes in the year up to Quarter 2, 2017. Wages given are for two wage earners



By Jimmy Doran  
Campaign for Public Housing

THE Campaign for Public Housing had its public launch on October 28 in the Unite Hall on Middle Abbey Street, Dublin.

A huge crowd was present for the meeting and many people had to be turned away as the hall was full to capacity – a reflection of the anger our people have at the housing crisis in our country at present.

The campaign is supported by a number of TDs, councillors, housing, homeless and community groups along with three political parties, the Communist Party of Ireland, Éirigi and the Workers Party.

The Campaign for Public Housing is not looking for concessions or tweaks to the present housing policy. The state's housing policy has failed our citizens drastically but filled the pockets of landlords, developers and financiers with rents, subsidies and tax breaks as it was designed to do.

This is the way the state is run – in the interest of the business class not the people. Housing policy cannot be patched up or reformed. It must be completely dismantled and changed transformed into a system where every citizen has a right to a decent, secure home available for rent from the state as part of the social contract between citizen and state.

### Key demands

The key demands of the campaign for public housing are:

1. Universally accessible public housing available to all citizens as a right.
2. A tenant's bill of rights to protect tenants, control rents and provide security of tenure.
3. A ban on economic evictions until the state can supply all citizens with a publicly-owned home to rent.
4. A referendum to put a right to public housing in the constitution.

These homes will be designed, built and fitted out by a state-owned building company and the local authorities. This will reduce costs by up to 50%. It will ensure homes are built to a decent, safe standard to fulfil the needs of our people – unlike the shoddy, unsafe tiny homes that were built by the private sector over the last number of years.

It will bring to an end the precarious nature of construction employment and the widespread use of bogus self-employment in the industry. It would provide thousands of decent, well-paid secure union jobs in the construction sector.

It will stabilise the housing market as it will end the artificial shortages in available properties as the state will build or purchase enough homes as are needed annually. The shortages are artificial as the private sector manipulate supply of available properties in order for prices and rents to rise and, of course in turn, their profits to be boosted which is their only reason for building homes.

If stopping building or delaying the building of new homes during a housing crisis leads to homelessness, despair and death – well, so be it, because it enables speculators to increase profits and income as the state will pay the same group of property owners millions in rent to house our people in hotels, B&Bs and hostels to deal with the emergency accommodation needs required due to their artificial crisis.

# A home by right for all



New deal on housing: the packed launch of the Campaign for Public Housing in Dublin in October. Below: prominent backers of the campaign



Pictures: Doran Higgins

ing policy from where a home is seen as a commodity to make profit on, into a citizen's right to have a home supplied by the state.

We are very aware of what we are suggesting and who we are taking on. If the profit element is removed from 60% of all homes, this will have a devastating effect on the profits of property speculators, developers and builders as property values will fall and stabilise.

It will end the gravy train of rent subsidies for hoteliers, landlords and developers as there will be no more emergency accommodation required because homelessness will be a thing of the past.

It will bring an end to most private rented accommodation. It will end the precarious nature of shelter as is the case today.

### Golden Circle

We are well aware that the people losing all this profit will not take it lightly and that they are the very same Golden Circle that finance the establishment political parties. The Golden Circle may go on investment strike thus threatening jobs and the economy to pressurise the government into not changing its housing policy.

The construction industry is not like other industries – such as pharmaceutical or computer manufacturing – where the state would not be in a position to take over these industries. In this case we will already have established a state-owned construction industry. This will take some power away from the threat of not investing in other areas of the construction sector.

If they were to do this, what is there to stop the state nationalising the entire building industry? The expertise is here – we are famous all over the world for our building and design skills. Who in Ireland will complain if the state – i.e. us, the people – were the beneficiaries of the massive profits available in the building industry?

Until now, it is the Golden Circle who have been making all the profits to lavish on the Galway tent, private jets and exorbitant lifestyles.

Instead these profits could benefit health, education and all the other requirements of a civilised society. We need to wake up to who really runs the government and in whose interests it is run. The answer is one and the same – Big Business, the capitalist class. We are many, they are few. The housing crisis will never end if left up to the establishment. We urge people to join with us and become part of the solution that is the campaign for public housing.

We are having a national weekend of action to highlight the housing crisis in all local areas on the weekend of December 15 and 16.

● If you want to get involved or set up a group in your area, email [campaignforpublichousing@gmail.com](mailto:campaignforpublichousing@gmail.com)

“ What is different about the Campaign for Public Housing and previous public housing developments is homes are to be made universally available to all that choose to avail of them as a right regardless of income ”

What is different about the Campaign for Public Housing and previous public housing developments is homes are to be made universally available to all that choose to avail of them as a right regardless of income.

In the past whether they were public, affordable or social housing developments, homes were only available to people earning less than a certain income level. This led to a concentration of low-income families occupying these developments. This stigmatised living in public housing as less than desirable which exacerbated the low levels of income and unemployment in the areas. This led to the ghetto-isation of areas with citizens who were abandoned by the state in huge estates with few facilities.

Our aim is to have at least 60% of all families living in public housing as income restrictions are removed which will end the stigmatisation and the mistakes made in the past.

We would reverse the policy of encouraging citizens to buy their council houses; instead we would

“ ...what is there to stop the state nationalising the entire building industry? ...Who in Ireland will complain if the state – i.e. us, the people – were the beneficiaries of the massive profits available in the building industry? ”

encourage homeowners to sell their houses into the public housing pool which at the end of their life would be rented to another family as publicly-owned property.

Our plan is to transform the hous-





**T**HERE IS a lot more to class than accent or dialect. It is a power relation, the dynamics of which have shaped the contours of the Irish state since its establishment over 90 years ago in the courtyard of Dublin Castle.

The economic interests of Ireland's moneyed class have had an inordinate influence on our laws and on the scope and direction of government policies. They have been able to do this because their objectives and operational procedures are deeply embedded within the institutions of the state itself. They are without doubt the greatest block to progressive change in Ireland.

Take housing for example. It is no secret that we are in the midst of a housing crisis and the way to solve it is to build more houses. The problem is not the solution, which is refreshingly self-evident, but rather the question of whose economic interests should be served or side-lined by whatever plan is put in place.

Should we protect the financial interests of speculators and hope that they do the right thing, or should we protect ordinary households because we know that the former will only ever look after themselves?

The housing plans put forward by Fine Gael are designed in such a way as to ensure that the speculative price of a house will continue to rise. The Government will try to help people 'afford' that price but it will not do anything to dampen, stall, or reverse its upward ascent.

The Government says that property speculators need the right encouragements to build, and that the best incentive for them is a rising market. Meanwhile affordable accommodation is out of reach for ordinary households and this is compounded by official state policy.

The problem is that we are not just dealing with the relationship between property speculators and political parties: we are also talking about banks; land-hoarders; estate agents; insurance companies; the Department of Finance; the Central Bank; the Revenue Commissioners; tax lawyers; The Housing Agency; Real Estate Investment Trusts (Reits); the Department of the Taoiseach, and the Department of Housing and Local Government.

Housing is an industry. It comprises those involved in property speculation, financial and legal services, and the crafting of government policy. They have a shared economic interest and common cultural and intellectual reference-points, and these are not down to nor exclusively held by any one person or group.

These economic class interests have an institutional form: they are supported and maintained by the state apparatus and by the way the state operates. They are deeply embedded in our legal and taxation systems, both of which prioritise the

interests of speculators and financiers over the common good. They are embedded throughout our banks as well as the regulators - as can be seen by the recent tracker mortgage scandal - and in the policy units of our government departments.

There has been in this state a 40-year move to shut down social housing and the class that has benefited from that will not allow any crisis for ordinary people to reverse that trend. In fact, the selling-off of our public housing stock, the almost complete privatisation of the rental sector, and the creation of the myth that home ownership 'is in our DNA' has been one of the great ideological successes of that class. They are not going to give that up for anyone.

And it is not just in housing that this class flexes its muscles. It is in workers' rights as well.

On 28 September 2017 Regina Doherty, the Minister for Employment Affairs & Social Protection, appeared before the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Social Protection and proceeded to defend proposed new laws that would further erode the livelihoods of ordinary working people.

The minister said that she wanted to introduce measures to ban zero-hour contracts, but that she would also want to insert a caveat to ensure that "work of a casual nature" was exempt from the legislation.

The minister was challenged on the idea of a law that would allow the continuation of the very thing it is supposed to ban, but Regina Doherty was not for turning. The law would stand as drafted, she said, before going on to criticise the Committee for being so negative.

Trade unions and civil society groups can lobby government and hope to influence the outcome, but in general Irish state departments will protect the interests of private business, with nothing but the weakest of concessions to fairness and social cohesion.

This leads us to the situation we have now: a minister who says she will ban zero-hour contracts - except in cases where bosses want to use them - and will force workers to apply for a work contract under terms that would give employers a fit of the giggles. This is coupled with a housing policy that is designed to benefit speculators and financiers over ordinary people.

We have been here before of course. The decision in 2008 to give an almost blanket guarantee to six banks in Ireland - despite the severe problems that were known in relation to at least two of them, Irish Nationwide Building Society and Anglo Irish Bank - was an exercise in genuine class power.

It put certain vested interests over the well-being of the state. It was an unconscionable act that was not repeated by any other country within the Eurozone. As for the banks, however, it was nothing more than what their heightened sense of entitlement expected at the time.

Five days after the announcement of the Irish bank guarantee Sean Fitzpatrick, the chairman of Anglo Irish Bank, gave an address at the annual La Touche Legacy seminar in Greystones, Co Wicklow, where he called for the "sacred cows" of Irish society to be tackled once and for all. These were, in his opinion, universal child

# The desire to make the world a better place is not enough to make it happen, what you need is an insight into how class works...

benefit, state pensions and medical cards for the over 70s. He also called for Ireland's corporation tax rate to be cut to 10%.

The cost of guaranteeing Anglo Irish Bank would eventually come to around €30 billion, equal to just less than half of the bailout funds sourced from the Troika. The legacy debt of Anglo Irish Bank will be on the shoulders of the Irish people until 2054. It is certainly true that Ireland has sared cows, and in 2008 they were the ones given a blanket guarantee to cover their disastrous investment plans while they waxed lyrical about child benefit and medical cards when the mood suited them.

"Real elites only enter the day-to-day operations of government in periods of crisis," wrote William K. Tabb in his seminal work on the 1970s New York fiscal crisis, "they move to the background as soon as possible, after they have restructured the context of decision-making in ways they find congenial."

Ireland during the 2008 financial crisis was no different. There was a rupture in both the mechanisms and institutions that support economic class power in Ireland, and the political and economic strategy was to protect and rebuild those structures by whatever means necessary, regardless of the social cost. This was

done via an unprecedented transfer of collective wealth from the citizenry to the banking system - a transfer that was only possible through State direction and control.

It showed us that, despite what we would like to think, class power matters. It is real, and it is ruthless.

But it is not enough to look at capitalism simply in terms of economic class alone, for if we do so we are in danger of missing out on the gendered nature of how capitalism works.

Given the debate that that is out there at the moment - that somehow feminism and identity issues 'distract' from the struggle against capitalism - let me lay it out straight that nothing could be further from the truth. It is simply impossible to confront capitalism and not confront the exploitation of women through gendered roles and economic position in society. Impossible.

And I don't mean this as some kind of moral response on the part of progressives - that we should do it because it is 'the right thing to do'. The struggle against the economic exploitation of women through gendered roles is a struggle against capitalism itself. That is a fact. Any progressive movement worth its salt ignores that at its peril.

By way of background, in the summer of 1972 a group of feminist activists from England, France, Italy and the US met in Padova, Italy and launched a new campaign based around wages for housework. "Class struggle and feminism for us are one and the same thing" they said in a statement to the journal *Off Our Backs*. "We reject both class struggle as subordinate to feminism and feminism as subordinate to class struggle."

The group identified itself as Marxist feminist and put forward a definition of class which incorporated the "exploitation of the labour of women in the home and the cause of their more intense exploitation out of it." The group said that "such an analysis of class presupposes a new area of struggle, the subversion not only of the factory and office but of the community."

The group saw two equal and interdependent struggles in the two areas of production - the home and the factory - and said that it was wrong to assume that the women's struggle was somehow secondary to that of class. "This assumption of the auxiliary nature of women's struggle flows directly from the misconception that women's labour in the home is auxiliary to the reproduction and develop-





Illustration: Xoan Baltar (CC BY 2.0)

ment of capital” they wrote, “a misconception which has so long hindered us all.”

This idea was expanded upon in a pamphlet co-written by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James published the same year entitled *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*. “The community therefore is not an area of freedom and leisure auxiliary to the factory, where by chance there happen to be women who are degraded as the personal servants of men,” they said. “The community is the other half of capitalist organisation, the other area of hidden capitalist exploitation, the other, hidden, source of surplus labour.”

It was a continuation of a similar analysis put forward by the Canadian feminist activist, Peggy Morton, in her seminal 1970 article, *Women’s Work is Never Done*. Morton saw that in order to fully understand capitalism it was necessary to “see the family as a unit whose function is the maintenance of the reproduction of labour power,” and that “this conception of the family allows us to look at women’s public and private roles in an integrated way.”

A lot of left-wing thinking assumes a division of work into productive and unproductive sectors – with ‘factory’ productive and ‘household’ un-

productive. This is a fundamental misconception, a blind spot to the manner by which capitalism operates. The household is the space where human labour is produced, maintained and reproduced, the cost of which is borne by the household.

Capitalism does not willingly pay for the reproduction of the labour it exploits. Social democracy forced it to contribute to this reproduction through legislation and general taxation, but from the 1970s onwards these very supports have been under profound attack, in particular by finance capital.

The slashing of corporation and capital taxes is the slashing of finance and industrial capital’s contribution to the social reproduction of human labour, pushing the burden back on to the shoulders of ordinary people. Austerity is a continuation of this process. It is class war writ large, with gendered consequences.

The drive to dismantle the welfare state in its various guises has had the effect of placing more pressure on women to compensate for the withdrawal of the state from this arena of social necessity. The absolute need for finance capital to devour the welfare state for profit-seeking purposes leaves finance capital open to attack. The issue contains the potential for a genuine counter-attack against fi-

nance capital. In the words of the London-based activist group, *Feminist Fightback*: “An alliance between working mothers and childcare workers has radical potential. It would require – and therefore constitute – a significant shift in mentalities, thereby pushing against one of the key divisions from which capitalism has benefited. ...This would not be an alliance to defend the current system, but to call for its transformation; for something better. Such alliances would also make visible the labour and economic impact of care work, confronting the logic at the heart of the government’s representation of public services as a luxury extra.”

Such strategies shine a light on the patriarchal nature of capitalism. They show that both class and gender are crucial to understanding how actually-existing capitalism works, and are crucial to any plan to oppose it.

**R**IGHT2CHANGE needs to embrace all these three elements discussed – class, gender, and labour – in a commonwealth of civil society groups and trade unions. We need to do this in order to shape our own future. The alternative to the current situation of seeing the interests of Ireland’s moneyed classes made law is quite straightforward: we make the laws ourselves. And in order to do that, we need to organise.

Class power and class interests cannot be tackled at an individual level. The only thing that can take on deeply-embedded class interests is a counter-class organisation. In other words, if we want to take on those who are organised at a class and state level, then we need to do the same – we also need to organise at a class level with the aim of shaping the direction of the state in a progressive way.

But again whereas the solution is somewhat straightforward, the pathway to it is fraught with tensions, contradictions and compromises.

Societies are never static. It is simply impossible for them to be so for it has too many millions of moving parts. Society is in a constant state of development: it is an ongoing process.

Institutions, however, are a different matter. Once a class interest takes an institutional form it is very difficult to dislodge it. The issue that confronts us today is not so much societal but institutional change.

We want the state to be reflective of where we have already arrived in our thinking. The question is how do we harness the change that is happening and give it an institutional expression? How do we replace the old conservatism and embedded financial interests with the new in terms of social solidarity, and how do we do it without making things worse?

Right2Change produced a document before the last election in 2016 that outlined what it saw as essential policies of a progressive state. These included a right to housing, health, and education; to democratic reform; to equality and a sustainable environment; and to the public ownership of natural resources including water.

All of this requires organisation. It

also needs a plan. Without a workable method of implementation any vision put forward of a progressive and equal Ireland is merely an aspiration. It is a set of words that serves no threat to power and its institutions.

The desire to make the world a better place, though, is not enough to make it happen, no matter how worthy the shopping list of reforms. It never has and it never will be. Progressives have no choice but to organise on class lines, because that is exactly what Irish moneyed interests have done.

They have the state to protect those interests, so progressives need an organisational framework that is able to confront those interests and overcome the blocks to change they have put in our path. In order to have any chance of success, progressives need a different organisational dynamic to that of Right2Water, the campaign that formed the basis for Right2Change.

Right2Water was not about a new vision for Ireland, it was about stopping the Government and the Irish moneyed class from putting in place their economic plan for a public utility. Right2Water was able to do that because the mechanisms that utility needed in order to work as a private, profit-seeking company were not in place at the time the protest began.

The utility, which became Irish Water, needed a separate and clearly identifiable income stream via charges in order to attract private investment and remain listed as a private entity for government statistical purposes. This was fatally undermined by the payment boycott. The company’s funding model assumed a 90% compliance rate by private households; by the end of 2015 it stood at 30%.

The payment boycott worked because of the dozens of community-based organisations that sprang up to resist the installation of water meters and charges in general. The massive rallies that followed gave national expression to that local energy. The message that was sent out on Facebook and Twitter countered the media bias. People could see the resistance with their own eyes. They stopped believing RTE; they stopped believing the Irish Times. The class interests of Irish society were there for all to see.

Right2Water was reactive, in a positive way. It was an act of resistance, and a successful one at that. The task that faces Right2Change is to build a transformative movement out of a reactive campaign. This is not an easy thing to do. I do not see, though, how we have much choice. As the old saying goes, when life gives you lemons, organise.

**N**O PLAN survives contact with reality. The more intricate the design, the more likely it will fail. To coin an old phrase, ‘Men plan and God laughs’. The strategies that work are the ones that leave room for creativity and spontaneity. They have to do this, for the world has a way of throwing curve balls that knock you over when you least expect.

This means that a progressive movement cannot simply follow a

plan as if life is some sort of predetermined pathway. No. A progressive movement needs: a set of objectives; an organisational structure to harness the societal energy that is out there for progressive change; a plan on how to achieve those objectives; and crucially the ability to think and rethink the plan while it is in operation. The objectives stay the same, the flexibility is in the methods we adopt to get there.

We need an organisational structure that is robust enough to make our objectives real, flexible enough to allow us to achieve them, and reflective enough of the particular and specific class antagonisms and gendered exploitation that are at play in this state to allow us to confront the class that opposes us.

No small ask, and, unfortunately, one that cannot be googled. There is no Wikipedia page out there on how to build a progressive movement specific to the societal needs and class dynamics of Irish society. (No need to check, I already have.)

This is one thing we are going to have to work out for ourselves. We are going to have to teach ourselves to think about how Ireland works. We need to develop these skills so we can adapt our strategies ourselves as circumstances arise.

The skill of thought and reflection is often labelled as education, but it has little if anything to do with school or experts. Activist education, done properly, does not teach you how Ireland works, it teaches you to think about how Ireland works.

And it does that for a very specific and practical reason: activists are on the ground and they need to be able to adapt strategies when the need arises – that means they need to be able to think clearly about how to achieve the same objectives but by different means.

The Right2Water campaign threw up dozens of examples of this such as the various ways of blocking water meters, the use of social media as an organisational tool, and the ‘silent women’ protest in Coolock.

When we talk about education we are talking about a way of harnessing this experience and creativity, and placing it within a conceptual framework of economic class power and how it operates in Ireland today.


Education used in this way simply gives direction and focus to what is already there. Education is not knowledge; it is understanding. It is not passive; it is active. Education is a tool that builds a deeper understanding of class as a power relation by using the knowledge and experience of activists on the ground.

A movement that is able to think for itself – genuinely think for itself – is genuinely transformative.

In conclusion, in order to tackle Irish moneyed class interests we need a commonwealth of civil society and trade unions working in tandem with a progressive political sphere. It’s about education, campaigns, legislation, and resources, all framed by class consciousness – that is, an awareness and understanding of how class works in Ireland, its economic and gendered necessities, and the organisational solidarity needed to tackle it.

It is entirely achievable.





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# This Government can't smooth over our need for recognised craft qualifications



Picture: TAFE SA TONSLEY (CC BY 2.0)



**Billy Wall**

THE APPRENTICESHIP system that existed within my own craft of plastering in the city of Dublin was based on centuries of organising and control. The term of apprenticeship originally lasted nine years then moved to seven and now a standard based system of four years.

Originally apprentices were indentured to their masters and were prohibited from committing fornication, marrying within their term, playing cards or any other unlawful games and he could not "haunt" or use taverns, ale houses or playhouses.

Our rule book of 1893 stated that members could not apprentice anyone but their sons. This ensured that the craft was secured and that a strong control existed on the workers' side as opposed to nowadays.

When we look at the apprenticeship system now, they exist in electrical, plumbing, painting, bricklaying, carpentry and – my own trade – plastering. A school leaver will serve four years, both on and off-site, being taught every aspect of a craft.

How does a young school leaver gain an apprenticeship?

Firstly, they must seek out a sponsor (an employer) who will make an offer of apprenticeship. After the offer is made and accepted, a contract of apprenticeship is signed as opposed to a contract of employment and the apprentice is registered with Solas within two weeks of starting.

Solas – the body tasked with the training of apprentices – requires a

sub-contractor to employ qualified crafts people in order to provide on-site training. Solas also requires the apprentice and the crafts person to be employed on a PAYE basis.

Apprenticeship rates apply and within the construction sector, those rates are found within the provisions of a Sectoral Employment Order (SEO) which was signed into legislation on October 19. They are legally enforceable.

- 1st Year 33.33% of the Craft Rate of pay €6.22 per hour
- 2nd Year 50% of the Craft Rate of pay €9.46 per hour
- 3rd Year 75% of the Craft Rate of pay €14.19 per hour
- 4th Year 90% of the Craft Rate of pay €17.04 per hour

*The rate applicable to craftspeople is €18.93 per hour.*

Below are figures of those currently in the system...

<b>PLASTERING</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>BRICK &amp; STONE LAYING</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>CARPENTRY</b>	<b>263</b>
<b>ELECTRICIAN</b>	<b>1,076</b>
<b>PLUMBER</b>	<b>375</b>
<b>PAINTING</b>	<b>28</b>

While serving their time, the apprentice details are held on a register of apprentices. When fully qualified, they can enter a number of sectors or industries.

Building sites today work completely different to what are the acceptable norms in all other sectors in Ireland. The main contractor – which is the one with their name on the begging board outside the site – is merely a project manager employing no building workers.

The workers are employed by sub-contractors or agencies who employ them for the most part as self-employed workers. This allows them to circumvent employment legislation

and it saves them financially as the employer's PRSI contribution is no longer applicable as no employer exists.

So, after spending the last four years training in a craft, you find that anyone can walk on to a building site today and call themselves a plasterer, carpenter, bricklayer, electrician etc without management seeking qualifications.

So after spending four years training in a craft, you find an unskilled operative carrying out one small aspect of your craft for less than the minimum wage and with no terms and conditions.

Our union carried out a survey over the summer on construction sites around the Dublin area asking the main contractor if they required their site plasterers to hold qualifications, and whether or not they had a policy on employing apprentices.

## Shocking

Out of those surveyed one main contractor had a policy on employing apprentices and none asked for qualifications. This is shocking considering the need for apprentices.

In a report issued by DKM Economic Consultants (Demand for Skills in Construction to 2020) in 2016, it shows an increase in production within the sector year-on-year culminating in a workforce of over 210,000 by the year 2020.

This does not stop there as this figure could rise with the current crisis in housing and the shortage in modern office space. The question arises – where are we going to get the skilled people necessary to build?

If we try to import them, as we did during the last boom, where will we house those seeking work? A few industry bosses have, through the media, stated that it would appear necessary to seek workers from Eu-

“ As one union member to another, I would ask you when looking for a plasterer to carry out work, seek a unionised-registered plasterer from our register ”

rope. We should not fear workers entering the workforce from Europe once they hold the necessary qualifications. It must be said that during the last boom many Europeans came to Ireland seeking work, they held no qualifications and hence it allowed the employers to easily exploit those entering the industry.

During the last boom from 1996 to late 2008, those employed as apprentices where forced under pain of losing their jobs to abandon their apprenticeships. Those who remained, completed a period of on-site training and over the last 20 years or so have become highly skilled and competent in a craft, but hold no National Craft Certificate (NCC).

Because of the diminished pool of qualified crafts people remaining in the sector, the State should now look to examine and qualify, where suitable, those who have remained here during the recession and kept an industry going as it is clear that the industry bosses are in no hurry to remedy the matter.

What needs to change so that young people and their parents see the "value of apprenticeships" is that both they and the craft need to be protected.

Each year we have about 58,000 young people leaving school. There are just over 50,000 CAO places of

which 10,000 are allotted to international students to comply with international standards. This leaves around 18,000 of our young people without any third level education.

This is crazy in an era when our citizens require housing and where office space is in need of updating and where local authorities need to maintain their properties.

Our youth could be equipped with the skills necessary to carry out these necessary construction projects and protect those skills as acquired.

What will ensure the apprenticeship system going forward and ensure that our youth are attracted to it is a National Register of Craftspeople. All those holding qualifications will be allowed on the register. This will provide comfort to parents in the knowledge that their children are entering an industry that is regulated.

The apprentice is safe in the knowledge that when they are finished serving their time, the chances of unskilled labour carrying out their work will be restricted. And the general public will have an advantage over the cowboys as they can refer to the register when seeking a crafts person to carry out work in their homes.

Our union is leading the way as we have recently launched the Irish Plasterers Register. Those contained on our register are highly-skilled craftspeople who value and respect their craft and have pride in their work.

For far too long we have allowed cheap, unskilled people to apply one small aspect of our craft and we aim through our register to change that.

As one union member to another, I would ask you when looking for a plasterer to carry out work in your home, seek a unionised-registered plasterer from our register.



By Bill Kelly  
Mandate Divisional Organiser

WE ALL know how stressful working in retail is, particularly at this time of year when employers are pulling out all the stops to make as much profit as possible as we come to the end of the year.

It is the season to be jolly – and busy and overworked and much stressed and even abused by customers who are in search of a bargain.

Mandate in the past has highlighted this abuse in its *Respect Retail Workers* campaign and we continue to highlight this unacceptable abuse.

The stress of this “Season to be jolly” can sometimes be the last straw for many workers already struggling with their mental health. In fact, as an official together with my colleagues, I am coming across more and more members suffering with their mental health.

Unfortunately by the time we are aware of the mental health issues involved, many members already find themselves being taken through a disciplinary process.

### Stigma

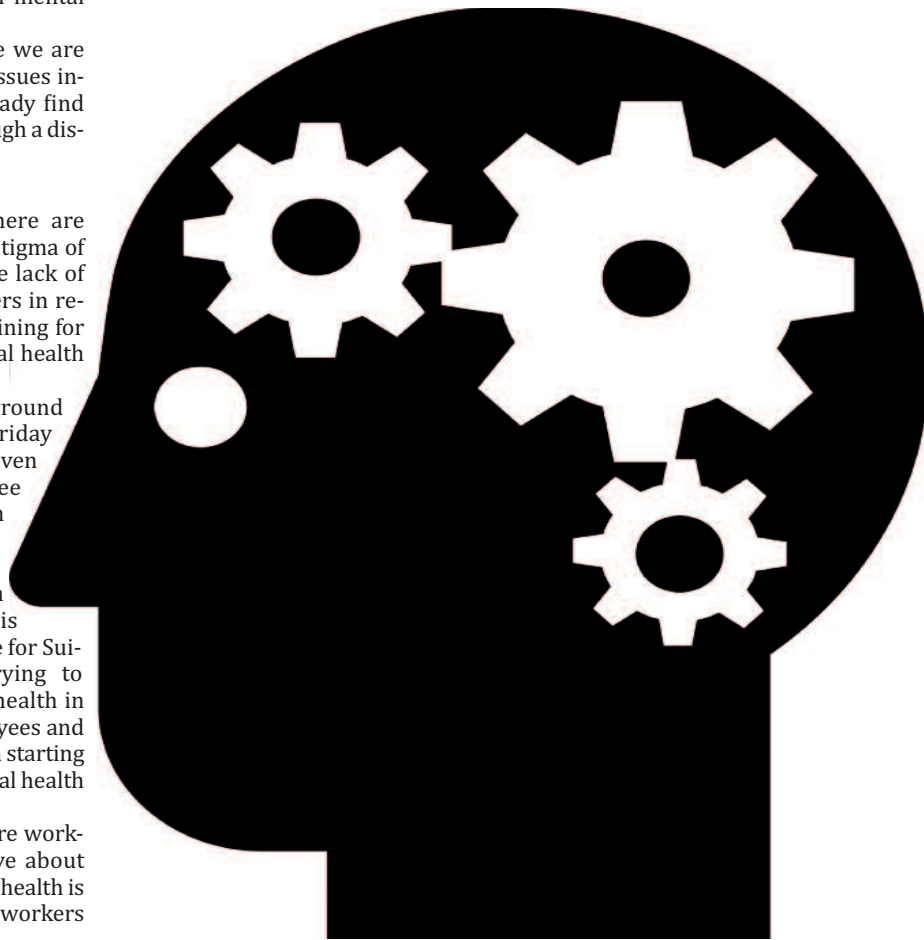
It can be argued that there are many reasons for this – the stigma of mental health in Ireland, the lack of employer support for workers in retail, the complete lack of training for managers to deal with mental health issues...

It was against this background that I attended a recent Friday briefing held by ICTU and given by an organisation called See Change on mental health in the workplace.

See Change – The National Mental Health Stigma Reduction Partnership – is funded by the National Office for Suicide Prevention and is trying to change attitudes to mental health in the workplace so that employees and employers are more secure in starting a discussion about how mental health can affect each one of us.

Creating a workplace where workers can be open and positive about their own and others’ mental health is good for everyone, will help workers

# Is your mental health affecting how you do your job..?



deal with stress, assist employers in developing supports for the one in four workers who may experience mental health difficulties, support managers in understanding mental health difficulties and reduce costs.

See Change has developed a six-step pledge programme to help Irish workplaces create an open culture around mental health and play a role in challenging the stigma surrounding mental health.

They also provide fully-funded training workshops for managers and staff. By signing up to the See Change workplace pledge, employers are showing they are committed to creating an open culture around mental health for workers at all levels.

These are signs to look out for and, while you are not expected to be an expert in the area of mental health, there are a number of key signs that may alert you that a col-

“ These are signs to look out for and, while you are not expected to be an expert in the area of mental health, there are a number of key signs that may alert you that a colleague is in difficulty...”

league is in difficulty:

- Changes in a person’s usual behaviour – tiredness, increased absence, lack of care for personal appearance;
- Previously punctual workers being late regularly or developing difficulties with duties which used to be no problem for them;
- A noticeable increase in alcohol consumption or smoking;
- Loss of humour, the occurrence of constant headaches and bouts of tearfulness.

Sometimes the most helpful thing you can do is let someone know that you are there for them and simply listen. Ask how best you can help. Chat about everyday things. Ask how they are doing and go for a coffee. Avoid the clichés because telling someone to cheer up won’t help – being open-minded and listening will...

If you are having difficulties:

- Don’t bottle things up and ask for help if you need it.
- Take a break and get a change of scene and some fresh air.
- Celebrate achievement and don’t just focus on what you haven’t done.
- See what in-house support is available at work.
- Make time for non-work activities and meeting friends.

There are many support services available:

- The Samaritans – Tel: 116123
- [www.yourmentalhealth.ie](http://www.yourmentalhealth.ie)
- Employee assistance programmes
- Your GP
- [www.seechange.ie/resources-and-support-services/](http://www.seechange.ie/resources-and-support-services/)

There is no doubt that that there is something we can all do. As workers we can be more open about mental health and challenge the stigmas that stop colleagues from getting help.

Employers need to do a lot more to provide managers with the training which will help them to assist workers while providing an employee assistance programme where there is none currently available.

As customers we can *Respect Retail Workers*.

## COMMUNICATIONS

### Training Course (QQI Level 3)

**DO YOU HAVE A DESIRE TO IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS? BUT NEVER GOT AROUND TO IT?**

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- Starting from scratch this course helps you to improve your communications skills.
- Courses are open to members who have not achieved their Leaving Certificate or who have an out of date Leaving Certificate.

#### Communication Skills:

For those who want to brush up on their writing and spelling skills while also developing personal and interpersonal skills which are important for dealing with workplace and personal situations.

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If you are interested please contact Mandate’s Training Centre on **01-836 9699** or by email [mandateotc@mandate.ie](mailto:mandateotc@mandate.ie)

Check out [www.mandate.ie](http://www.mandate.ie) for further training courses  
Places are limited and are allocated on a first come, first served basis.  
Courses are delivered by the Education and Training Board in a location near your workplace.





# Standing together changing Ireland...

By Ciara Melinn  
CWU member

THE Right2Change movement held a one-day conference in the Mansion House on Saturday, November 4, on the theme *Another Ireland is Possible*. The conference – which was very attended and hosted a broad range of speakers – was opened by the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Mícheál MacDonnacha.

In his opening contribution, Brendan Ogle of Unite/Right2Change stated that in the two years since the Right2Change Policy Principles had been agreed, life for most of people in Ireland had become “more difficult, considerably so for some”. This was reflected in the continuing homelessness crisis, the crumbling two-tier health service and the rise of precarious work.

While there had been some successes in recent years, such as the resistance to water charges, the *YesEquality* vote, and the continuing fight to Repeal the 8th Amendment, there had been no ideological shift that placed the welfare of the people above the greed of investors and corporations. And he told the conference this was what was needed to achieve “a secular Republic of equals”.

Mandate member Muireann Dalton from *De-cency for Dunnes Workers*; Karen Doyle from Right2Water Cobh; and Erica Flemming, a hous-



Stevie Nolan

Pictures: Doreal Higgins



Cecile Wright



Dave Gibney

ing activist took to the stage.

All three spoke passionately about their different – but ultimately interwoven – struggles. Muireann discussed the ongoing campaign by Dunnes Stores workers for banded hours. Karen spoke of her experience with the local Right2Water campaign group while Erica gave a moving account of her experience of becoming homeless with her daughter and the complete lack of support or safety net for her family throughout that time.

The second part of the conference was kicked off by Dr Stevie Nolan from Trademark Belfast. His political economy discussion focused on how the system has been set-up to maintain the power and increase the wealth of the few.

He pointed out that the media plays a role in diverting attention from this by directing our outrage towards single mothers claiming welfare and refugees coming to take our jobs, instead of the fact that five men now hold the

same amount of wealth as 3.6 billion people combined! He warned the conference: “You can have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few or you can have democracy – but you can’t have both.”

Stevie’s presentation was followed by a discussion on the media by Dr Steve Baker from Ulster University. He told the conference: “A plurality of rich people’s voices is not a plurality of voices at all.”

This presentation led on to a discussion about the need for an alternative, non-establishment media outlet, with Jo Bird and Brendan Ogle broaching the possibility of setting up a media cooperative in Ireland.

The final part of the morning session took the form of a panel discussion on housing, chaired by Kitty Holland of the *Irish Times*, with panel members Billy Wall (General Secretary, OPATSI), Tom Healy (NERI), and Dr Rory Hearne (NUI Maynooth).

There was a general consensus that the inability – or rather disinclination – of the Government to tackle the housing crisis stemmed from its adherence to the failed neoliberal ideology that the State must not intervene in the market. Hence, the incentivisation of private developers instead of a programme of public expenditure on social affordable housing.

In the afternoon, Dr Conor McCabe’s presentation on the reality of business operations in Ireland left no one in any doubt as to Ireland’s status as a tax haven, putting corporate greed above all else.

The next section saw contributions from three women involved in international grassroots campaigns: Professor Cecile Wright from Momentum; Emma Aviles from 15M; and Winnie Wong from People4Bernie.

Cecile discussed the growth of Momentum, which evolved from the Jeremy Corbyn leadership campaign in 2015. Through grassroots organising and volunteer work, the movement has grown to over 150 groups and around 200,000 supporters. She told the conference: “For the first time, through Momentum, we could use the word socialist to describe our values.”

## ‘We are many’

Emma followed and discussed some of ways activists with 15M have been using technology to propel the campaign and to take direct action. One such action was a day where activists shut down every branch of one bank in Spain. “We showed that we are many and that we are organised”, she commented.

Next up was Winnie Wong from People4Bernie who spoke of her own experience, starting out with Occupy Wall Street and then directing her efforts to “tackle the political class head on”.

USI President Michael Kerrigan, in his contribution, pointed out that Ireland would soon have the highest fees in third level education in the EU.

Dave Gibney, of Mandate/Right2Change, gave the final presentation of the day. He told the conference: “If we are in agreement that the Right2Change Policy Principles are what we want in Irish society, where do we go from here?” He cautioned that it was not possible to draft a plan that replicated the “zeitgeist” of the Right2Water movement, but that that “shouldn’t paralyse us into inaction”.

He said: “We don’t need one individual to lead the way; we need all of us, working-class heroes, doing our bit, standing together and changing Ireland. As Noam Chomsky said ‘We shouldn’t be looking for heroes, we should be looking for good ideas’”



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Places are limited and are allocated on a first come first served basis and are open to Mandate members who are currently unemployed.





## Computer Training Course QQI Level 3

Mandate Trade Union in conjunction with Skills for Work is offering funded training. The courses are to encourage members back into learning and training whilst aiming towards a QQI Level 3 Award.

Starting from scratch this course helps you to use a computer and builds confidence for communicating on-line.

Courses are open to members who have not achieved their Leaving Cert or who have an out-of-date Leaving Cert

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Please see Mandate website for further Training courses at **www.mandate.ie**

Email: **mandateotc@mandate.ie**

**Places are limited and are allocated on a first come, first served basis**

Picture: European Parliament

## VIEWPOINT

# Protecting workers in precarious jobs from workplace predators



**Thomas Pringle**

THE right to dignity is enshrined in national legislation which aims to protect employees from behaviours that constitute discrimination, bullying, harassment and sexual harassment within the workplace. But what about those in precarious employment not fully protected by employment legislation?

Most of the recent sexual allegations made by victims of abuse around the world were of scenarios that occurred in the workplace. It would be remiss if we did not reflect on our own domestic situation.

All workers no matter their income levels must have recourse to protection when and if abuse occurs in the workplace and must feel safe in the knowledge that their dignity at work is protected throughout the duration of their employment.

### Allegation

However, considering the realities facing many in precarious employment how can we ensure that those on low income and in zero to low hour contracts do not inevitably become the most vulnerable to abuse in the workplace and how do we ensure that they are protected once they come forward with an allegation?

I believe we should start with securing proper terms and conditions for employees including a ban on zero to low hour contracts. The Government has made a recent move on this but seeks only to ban zero hour contracts, not low hours which can be equally insecure for the worker.

Mandate's campaign for *Secure Hours = Better Future* will ensure that employment contracts will entail basic conditions for employees that will mean full protection under legislation. This can only help workers further when and if they face threats to their dignity at work.

While we don't have research available on sexual harassment in low wage sectors in Ireland if we consider the fact that Ireland is among the countries with the highest proportion

of low-wage workers in the EU, and that according to Eurostat, over one in five workers here fall into the low-wage category we can safely assume that Ireland has an epidemic of precarious employment.

We also know, according to latest CSO figures, that over 10% of Irish workers are being paid the equivalent of, or less than, the national minimum wage of €9.25 per hour. Women, meanwhile, are more likely to earn the minimum wage or less in this country.

Therefore, women make up the majority of workers in precarious employment due to a variety of reasons and as are historically vulnerable to sexual harassment. Deducing from that we can safely say that in the context of sexual harassment allegations made by victims across the

**“ Without proper access to trade unions, workers will become increasingly vulnerable to abuse which is allowed to fester in a workplace when employers are not held to account for the treatment of their staff ”**

globe, we should feel duty bound to enhance protections for those in precarious employment when it comes to threats to dignity at work.

Secondly, we need to amend legislation to allow union reps to visit workplaces and at a time of their choosing. Terms and conditions for employees can therefore be monitored including any breaches. If unions were able to witness first hand declines in work conditions and abuses by employers then breaches of dignity at work may be prevented or addressed once revealed. It offers another layer of protection to the employee. Furthermore, trade union representatives can question whether Code of Conduct guidelines exist in a workplace and that every-

one, including managers and staff, are aware of the protocols regarding dignity at work principles.

The University of Limerick Report on Zero Hours in Ireland found in 2015 that working arrangements have significant negative implications for individuals including: apprehension related to the unpredictability of working hours (in terms of number of hours and scheduling), unstable income, difficulties in accessing finance and welfare benefits, and difficulties in managing work and family life.

The report found instances where employment contracts do not accurately reflect the reality of the number of hours regularly worked by individuals.

### Threats

We've also heard anecdotally - I have in my own constituency clinics - reports of people in zero to low hour jobs not getting proper breaks, the withholding of wages, tips not being distributed properly to staff, people on fixed sums being made to work hours over and above those agreed and threats of hours being reduced, or people being sacked if a staff member complains about the conditions.

Without proper access to trade unions, workers will become increasingly vulnerable to abuse which is allowed to fester in a workplace when employers are not held to account for the treatment of their staff. A work environment can become suddenly too toxic for someone who comes forward with an allegation of abuse. Workers should not feel alone and having access to trade union representation in the workplace would offset that hugely.

We are at an impasse now as a growing number of sectors, particularly in retail, academia and media, are seeing increases in precarious and insecure work. Combine that with active hostility towards trade union membership then we could have a serious problem on our hands.

I would also argue that the State, which is largely responsible for the existence of cheap labour in this country, has a duty of care to those in precarious employment whose work conditions and lack of protection make them even more vulnerable to abuses in the workplace.

*Thomas Pringle is Independent TD for Donegal*



# TRAINING



ABOVE: Union Rep Introductory course held in Cork between September 25 and 27. Pictured are Gearoid McMahon (Tesco, Paul St); Kevin Brady (Penneys, Patrick St); Geraldine Crowley (Debenhams, Mahon Point); Rose O'Brien (M&S, Douglas Village); Anne Marie Higgins (Heatons, Blackpool); Loretto O'Regan (Lisavaird Co-op); Annette McSweeney (Debenhams, Patrick St); Tanya Dineen (Quish's SuperValu, Ballincollig). BELOW: Participants in the Training & Development course, held in Dublin between October 9 and 12...



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**Cost:** Free of Charge **Eligibility:** Mandate members



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- **Finding the right information that will steer you in the right direction**
- **The environment in which we live and work**
- **Social, political and economic landscape of unions**
- **Media ownership – who is telling you what and why**
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# Fidel: a man to look up to

By Brian Forbes  
Mandate National Coordinator

IT'S JUST over a year since Fidel Castro shuffled off this mortal coil and it's worth considering the legacy he has left to his beloved Cuba – child malnutrition is at 0%, there is a 99.8% literacy level, and all Cubans have free health care from the cradle to the grave in the best health care system in the world. All of these incredible advances happened since the Cuban revolution in 1959.

For its part, Ireland's 1916 revolution unfortunately led within a few short years to the setting up of a church-aligned state which today boasts a strain of neo-liberal capitalism that abandons Irish citizens and society to the tender mercies of big business and global finance.

## Revolutionary

Perhaps Ireland could learn something from Cuba about protecting and maintaining a revolutionary programme for society? Fidel was a divisive character for so many people but what can't be denied is the Cuban advances in health, medicine and education since he freed his country from global capitalism and greed.

Perhaps it's worth reminding ourselves of the words of President Michael D. Higgins on the death of Fidel Castro: "I have learned with great sadness of the death of Fidel Castro, founder of modern Cuba, and its Prime Minister from 1959 to 1976, as well as its President from 1976 to 2008.

"Following the revolution in 1959, Fidel Castro brought significant political and social change to his country, overcoming not just the regime of General Fulgencio Batista but also the economic isolation forced upon Cuba in the years that followed.

"Having survived some 600 attempts on his life, Fidel Castro, known to his peers in Cuba as 'El Comandante', became one of the longest serving heads of state in the world, guiding the country through a re-

## Here's what our President said about him...



Fidel Castro, above, on a visit to Washington in 1959. President Michael D Higgins, right, paid a moving tribute to the Cuban leader following his death in November last year

markable process of social and political change, advocating a development path that was unique and determinedly independent.

"Cuba achieved 100% literacy many years ago and built up a health system that is one the most admired

in the world. With economic growth rates similar to many other Latin American countries, inequality and poverty are much less pronounced in Cuba than in surrounding nations.

"His government faced not only issues of development but also the con-

sequences of an embargo imposed by Cuba's largest neighbour, the United States, which was a regular topic for discussion at the United Nations and which was criticised by a large number of countries in the international community.

"The economic and social reforms introduced were at the price of a restriction of civil society, which brought its critics.

"Fidel Castro was of a generation of leaders that sought to offer an alternative global economic and social order. He was President of the Non-Aligned Movement and a leading figure in international gatherings that sought a more equal world of trade, rejected odious debt and sought an independent path to development.

## Debt to humanity

"He advanced such ideas, for example, at such events as the Tri Continental Conference in 1966. And he would continue with this theme which informed his speech, for example, at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992.

"He was speaking of how it was possible to eliminate global hunger and of the enormous burden that international debt was placing on impoverished nations. Expected to give a lengthy speech, his very short statement ended with the phrase: 'Let us pay the debt to humanity, not the debt to the banks.'

"The restoration of diplomatic relations with the United States in 2014 and the visit of Pope Francis, and the response to it, have been ushering in a new period in Cuba's history, one which seeks to retain the achievements of a social kind with greater freedoms in the civil society.

"Fidel Castro will be remembered as a giant among global leaders whose view was not only one of freedom for his people but for all of the oppressed and excluded peoples on the planet."



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