

SHOPFLOOR

REPUBLIC OF HOMELESS?

- 8,270 homeless people
- 3,048 homeless children
- 73,706 mortgages are in arrears
- 120,000 people are on local authority housing lists
- 141 repossessions are taking place per month
- 2 families become homeless per day
- 46% of all homeless people are under 24 years of age
- Life expectancy for a homeless woman is 38
- Life expectancy for a homeless man is 42
- 8,000 units being built but there is demand for 25,000

COMMENT SPECIAL PAGES 2, 16, 17 & 23

John Douglas *General Secretary
Mandate Trade Union*

STRAIGHT TALKING

Housing and workers' rights – Govt's failure is no accident...

THE most visible manifestation of Ireland's housing crisis is the sight of citizens curling up in sleeping bags in shop doorways and lanes in every major city across the country. Less visible are the tens of thousands of families forced to exist in cheap B&Bs and hotels, moved on to new temporary locations on a daily or weekly basis. There are families living out of bags, always ready to be moved on to the next hostel or bed and breakfast.

More than 3,000 children are living like this: homeless, no place to do their homework, no place to make friends, no place to play – these children are the urban nomads, passed from room to room by a State system which has no compassion and no moral compass.

This Government and recent governments have made the "choice" that this is to be their lot and this is not happening by some social accident. It is a direct policy decision to privatise the provision of housing to the profit-maximising private sector of developers, hoteliers and landlords. Often these are one and the same person or persons.

In the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s when the Irish State was not nearly as wealthy as it is now, the governments of the time built thousands of social housing units in every corner of Ireland – good quality homes for workers and families, good community places where you made friends, had good neighbours, a place you could call home.

But in the last number of decades successive governments decided that they were building no more public/social housing. All citizens would be forced to engage with the private sector of bankers, developers and landlords to secure a home, whether or not your income or circumstances were sufficient enough to do so. The State stopped building houses and started paying billions of euro to landlords for more and

more unsuitable private units to rent to those families which the State ignored. The gravy train of rent subsidies for hoteliers, landlords and developers trundles on to this very day, lining the pockets of those who keep our failed Government in power.

The present Government's housing policy is akin to re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. They have no intention of solving the problem or upsetting their allies. They know what they have to do, it's not rocket science, it's as simple as "build houses". They have the land, they have the money, what they lack is the will.

To hide their real agendas they will muddy the waters with talk of planning delays, resource shortages, supply blockages etc., the reality is they have no intention of doing anything. The crisis is of their making and is fuelling their own ideological policies of giving all services to the private sector to make profit from what is a basic human right.

They have done this with healthcare as more than 700,000 citizens are waiting for care; they have done it with education with thousands of schools under-resourced; they have done it with water services where the infrastructure has collapsed.

See – first you create a crisis by starving public services of resources, then you declare that the public sector is inefficient and incapable of providing housing, water, education, healthcare or transport and then you pass it to the private sector to make profits by cherry-picking the most profitable parts.

Simple really, the State washes its hands of its constitutional responsibilities and becomes the paymaster to big business.

Ireland is a wealthy country, but it is a very unequal country as an increasing share of wealth created in Ireland is going to capital (profits, dividends) and the share going to labour (wages) is falling. So while productivity increases, wages remain virtually stagnant and that is why workers need to join together collectively in unions and demand a fairer share of private wealth and State wealth.

That is why workers and their families should only vote for politicians who will represent workers' interests and the working class. It is the only real way of making change happen. Unions are not perfect, they have not always made the right decisions, but they are the only power workers have and that is why employers and governments spend so much time demonising unions.

Workers must take responsibility for their unions, they must be active, they must recruit, but most of all they must organise. A strong workplace is an organised workplace, a workplace where management know the workers' strength and therefore are afraid to bully or intimidate workers.

Mandate – your union – is building worker power, at work and in our communities. All members are part of this movement, all members have a responsibility for themselves, their colleagues and their union. Whether it's Ryanair, Dunnes Stores or Tesco, workers have the solution within themselves: "organise, organise, organise".

A different Ireland is possible, but it must be won for nothing is given freely.



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NEWS



Dunnes workers get 3% pay hike

By David Gibney
Mandate communications officer

MANDATE has welcomed the announcement that members working in Dunnes Stores will get a 3% pay increase for 2017/18 effective from 3rd October.

And the union has pointed out that this is the FIFTH consecutive concession of a 3% pay claim by Mandate for Dunnes Stores workers in as many years though there are a number of issues of contention that remain to be settled.

Assistant General Secretary Gerry Light told *Shopfloor*: "This declaration by management comes in the wake of a pay and benefits claim served by the union on the employer earlier this year."

He continued: "While the pay in-

crease is welcome, we are conscious that the other important elements of the union's claim have not as yet been addressed by the company."

These include:

- Introduction of a banded hours framework to secure certainty of weekly working hours;
- Creation of an agreed number of additional full-time jobs;
- Application of staff discounts to all union members.

Mr Light added: "It now appears that Dunnes Stores management have no intention of dealing with the entirety of the union's claim. Therefore the matter will have to be pursued through the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) and the Labour Court, if necessary."

ARGOS

Good news story as deal is signed

MANDATE has signed a new agreement with Argos on rates of pay and contract sizes.

It comes as the union bids to boost its membership at the catalogue retailer with a recruitment drive in the autumn.

The agreement, signed on August 11, means that members who are currently on €9.35 per hour will move to a €9.65 per hour rate.

All other members will receive a 2% pay increase this year with a further 1% coming in 2018.

In terms of contract hours, Argos is to complete an overtime review. All members will be offered a new permanent contract equivalent to their current contract plus 80% of their average overtime hours provided they are not currently on full-

time hours. In addition the company also agreed to introduce a minimum of four hours per day with shifts and rosters now to be published two weeks in advance.

Divisional Organiser Willie Hamilton told *Shopfloor*: "This is a good news story and I think that that good news is getting through to workers who perhaps have not thought about joining the union before."

"In fact, we have already increased our membership in Argos by 20% in the last year and we are now preparing to launch a new recruitment drive in October this year."

He added: "I think this deal will help in that regard. It goes to show it pays to be a member of Mandate."

Mandate accuses employers' bodies in claim over misinformation drive

MANDATE has claimed employers' body IBEC and the Restaurant Association of Ireland (RAI) have initiated a campaign of misinformation in a bid to undermine proposed new legislation that will give workers some security over their working hours.

According to the union, representatives of both organisations were given a free run on the national airwaves on September 22 to discuss the Banded Hours Contracts Bill (2016) currently making its way through the Dail.

IBEC had an uncontested appearance on the most listened to radio show in the country, RTE's *Morning Ireland* as was RAI on Newstalk's *Pat Kenny Show*.

A Mandate source told *Shopfloor*: "It would seem that no trade union representing workers who would be affected by this legislation were asked to take part in either show, which allowed the employers' bodies to spin and misinform the listening public."

Reacting to the unbalanced coverage, General Secretary John Douglas described it as "just more scaremongering".

Bad employers

He said: "No employer has anything to worry about in this legislation. It's cost neutral. The only type of employers who have to worry are bad employers – those employers who abuse their workers who don't give them regular hours and cut their hours unjustifiably.

"These are the type of bosses who want to have their workers dancing on the end of a string, dancing to their tune. This is about fairness. It is about decency. It's about workers having a decent job, a decent wage and knowing from one week to the next what their wage will be."

Urging legislators to "get on with it", Mr Douglas pointed out that the proposed legislation had been going through various stages in the Dail for three years.

He added: "We've had a Dunnes Stores dispute, we've had a Tesco dispute, we've had many disputes all around the issue of decent jobs and respect for workers.

"The politicians have been debating this for a very long time with various consultation committees at which employers, unions and community groups have made very detailed submissions. The legislation is there, it needs to be enacted ASAP."

In 2014, Mandate surveyed members working in Dunnes Stores – which has 10,000 staff, making it one of the largest private sector employers in the country.

Dunnes management generally issue 15 hour contracts, but in reality, the average hours worked by employees is closer to 26.

However, should a worker step out



Striking Dunnes workers North Earl Street, Dublin



Bill: Ged Nash



Bill: David Cullinane

of line, lodge a grievance, join a union or if a local manager takes a dislike to a worker, they can have their hours slashed to 15.

If the employer chooses to spread those 15 hours over a number of days, it means a worker's income is significantly reduced because the employee cannot then access Family Income Supplement (FIS) or part-time social welfare. In effect, this allows the employer to manage a worker out of their job by pushing them into poverty.

More than 85% of Mandate members surveyed stated that allocation of hours was being used as a control mechanism over them.

Another regressive element to this type of contract is that workers cannot obtain loans or mortgages because the banks only look at their contracted hours, which in the case of Dunnes Stores workers, means they can only obtain a mortgage of be-

tween €25,000 and €35,000. This forces them into the private rental sector where they simply cannot afford to live because of increased rents.

More than 6,000 Dunnes Stores workers took industrial action in April 2015 in a bid to achieve security over their incomes. TDs and political representatives from all political parties attended the picket lines, with the Taoiseach Enda Kenny stating that he supported Dunnes Stores workers' right to know what hours and incomes they would have.

'If and When'

The strike led to the Government instigating a study into the prevalence of this type of contract through the University of Limerick. This study showed that while zero hour contracts are not prevalent, 'If and When' contracts, such as those given to Dunnes Stores workers, were "prevalent in the accommodation/food and retail sectors and in certain occupations in education and health: community care work, so-called 'bank' nursing, general practice nursing, university/institute of technology lecturing, adult education tutoring, school substitution, caretaking, and secretarial and cleaning work."

So, according to Mandate, this is a major nationwide problem.

Immediately after the Dunnes Stores strike, Mandate claimed the

“No employer has anything to worry about in this legislation. It's cost neutral. The only type of employers who have to worry are bad employers – those employers who abuse their workers who don't give them regular hours and cut their hours unjustifiably”

employer had moved against workers who had taken part in industrial action. And in doing this they used the very issue the workers had been highlighting in the industrial action. Striking workers' hours were slashed down to 15.

The solution then became an issue for legislators because it is unfair to ask workers in such precarious circumstances to strike when this action can be used against them.

Mandate lobbied all political parties for a change in legislation that would simply allow workers to obtain a contract of employment which reflected the hours they actually work.

David Cullinane TD from Sinn Fein launched the Banded Hours Contracts



John Douglas: 'spinning and misinforming' claim

Bill (2016) in the summer of 2016. The Bill, if enacted, will enable workers to request a new contract that reflected the average hours worked over the previous six months (as recommended in the University of Limerick report).

It would place workers inside a "band" of hours and give them certainty of earnings. This Bill was unanimously supported by the Dail, but Fianna Fail introduced an amendment to delay the Bill by 12 months so that all stakeholders could be consulted.

The Bill has now proceeded through the Joint Oireachtas Committee, which had inputs from trade unions, legal experts, business representatives, academics and more. The JOC has now made 23 recommendations – including the increase of the six month "look-back period" to 12 months.

Anti-victimisation

The Uncertain Hours Bill was put forward in the Seanad by Labour's Ged Nash. If enacted, it will do something similar to the Banded Hours Contracts Bill, but – significantly – this Bill includes anti-victimisation clauses for workers attempting to obtain contracts that reflect the hours they work. The JOC included this in its recommendations under the Banded Hours Meanwhile, the Government has now announced that it will be prioritising a piece of legislation that will address the concerns of low-hour contract workers.

Early indications are that this Bill (which hasn't been published yet) will have an 18-month look-back period. Mandate's position is that this is unacceptable. It allows employers the ability to manipulate hours to ensure workers cannot achieve a decent, secure income.

The Government Bill should at the very least match what was unanimously agreed in the cross-party Joint Oireachtas Committee on Jobs.

Employers bodies get a fisting p4

* **fisking:** n. [blogosphere; very common] A point-by-point refutation of a blog entry or (especially) news story. A really stylish fisking is witty, logical, sarcastic and ruthlessly factual; flaming or handwaving is considered poor form. Named after renowned foreign reporter Robert Fisk.

IBEC and RAI get a fisking*

By David Gibney
Mandate communications officer

THE employers' lobby was out in force on Friday, September 22 doing a bit of scaremongering about legislative proposals that would give workers security over their incomes.

"It's the disproportionate nature of a piece of legislation such as the one being proposed," said Maeve McElwee, Director of Employer Relations with IBEC told RTE's *Morning Ireland*, referring to the Banded Hours Contracts Bill currently going through the Dail.

But Mandate has insisted that IBEC selectively used elements of a University of Limerick report into the issue in a bid to delay the Bill or block it from passing.

"We don't have a very significant problem in Ireland with zero hours contracts," Ms McElwee assured listeners.

What she failed to mention was that in Ireland, these zero-hour practices are known as 'If and When' practices, which do exactly the same thing.

She went on to state that there were only 5.3% of the labour force on "constantly variable working hours" and that those on low hours within that category amounted to about 2.6%.

Sounds impressive. Almost as if this barely affects anyone at all. So what's the point in legislating for the very low 2.6% of workers being abused in this way? But look deeper.

Some workers will be on 10-hour contracts for 15 or 20 years, but regularly work 35 hours. They are not considered in this category because they are not working "constantly variable working hours", despite the fact that they can have their hours slashed at any time should a local manager take offence to them.

Then the 2.6% is only from within this category, but it doesn't tell you that more than 8% of the workforce (some 200,000 workers) are on low hour contracts, according to the University of Limerick Report she was quoting from.

Ms McElwee explained: "The issue and concerns that we have is around the actual cost of this particular piece of legislation."

What costs? The Bill would only allow workers to achieve the hours they are already working. There's no cost.

Interestingly, Ms McElwee attempts to frighten workers about the potential impacts of this legislation.

"This will apply to every employer in the

state. It will apply to every employee, whether or not you are working on an hourly paid contract or not. All salaried employees, all part-time employees.

"It will impact on an employer's ability to be able to vary your hours upwards because you will be in a band of hours. It will impact on people's ability to be able to consider a-typical working arrangements, flexibilities, e-working..."

Now this is absolutely disgraceful scaremongering. The legislation only takes effect when a worker requests a review of their hours. They don't have to request it if they don't want. And it will not prevent an employer from increasing a worker's hours above the band of hours should that worker wish to receive more hours. Ms McElwee knows this all too well.

She continued: "We haven't seen any regulatory impact assessment undertaken by the Government, to consider what the economic cost to employers, themselves included, will be."

Now this is where it gets interesting. As stated earlier, there is no cost. So why would Ms McElwee say this? Well we would argue that she's attempting to scare politicians, particularly the Government, into thinking there will be huge costs if, God forbid, public sector workers are afforded secure hour contracts too.

Also, if there is a cost to the Government, this means it would need a money bill which would delay the passing of legislation. This is absolutely not the case, it's simply disingenuous scaremongering.

We repeat, this legislation would only allow workers a contract that reflects the hours that they are already working.

Including the "regulatory impact assessment" as a request links in this interview with the interview by the Restaurants Association of Ireland on Pat Kenny's Newstalk a number of hours later on the same day.

Adrian Cummins, the CEO of the Restaurants Association of Ireland, called for the exact same thing - which indicates to us that the employers' bodies are working together on this campaign to prevent legislation from proceeding.

One of the more bizarre elements of Mr Cummins statement includes: "As a representative of an employers' body in this country, I find it incredible that we can't get a meeting with those that are drawing up the legislation. It's a

stone wall, take it or leave it attitude in this country. And if we can get into a room, and sit down, put heads together, we can draw up proper legislation that is fit for purpose for everybody."

It's strange, then, that Mr Cummins attended a Joint Oireachtas Committee hearing on the 14th February 2017 to discuss these very issues.

In fact, the day he was in the Joint Oireachtas Committee, he was joined by Patricia Callan of the Small Firms Association (SFA), Tim Fenn from the Irish Hotels Federation (IHF). Two weeks before, ISME, IBEC and Chambers Ireland attended the same Oireachtas Committee to discuss this issue. So, be under no illusion, employers have already had their say on this issue and have been part of this process.

Mr Cummins continued: "Before anybody does anything and it's signed into law, let's look at the costs of doing business in this country because we don't want to get back to the scenario, in 2008-2009 where running a business was, you know, the costs was so high, they were going to the wall."

Two things: Firstly, that is simply not why businesses went bust in 2008-2009. They went bust because the Government guaranteed private debt and implemented austerity measures to cover it, reducing spending in the economy and putting pressure on workers and subsequently on businesses.

And, secondly, again, this legislation is cost neutral.

Mr Cummins explained that the University of Limerick report stated that the retail, healthcare and education sectors had low-hour contracts, "but not so much in hospital area, but we're all being painted with the same brush at the moment, as bad employers or poor employers or whatever you want to call us".

This is not true. The report clearly stated that 'If and When' contracts are "prevalent in the accommodation/food and retail sectors..."

It would be interesting to hear what Mr Cummins thinks about the Workplace Relations Commission's 2016 report which states that out of 717 inspections in the Food & Drink industry, almost half (48%) of all employers were in breach of legislation and €332,903 in unpaid wages was returned to workers. That's an average of €464 per inspection. If this is replicated across the indus-



Picture: Alan Lewis (CC BY 2.0)

try, it could be tens of millions of unpaid wages that employers are stealing from their employees on an annual basis.

Not exactly an industry full of good employers by the looks of it. But, to be fair, exploitation exists in all industries in Ireland.

Mr Cummins called for more consultations. He calls for the regulatory impact assessment to take place before any legislation is passed. This is simply another delaying tactic. Workers have been waiting years for this legislation to pass. It has been debated up and down the Oireachtas in Committees, in the Dail Chamber, in the Seanad - and the business lobby, including IBEC and the RAI have been party to this.

Earlier on September 22, ICTU General Secretary Patricia King stated: "As employers are already required by law to keep working time records there is nothing in these proposals that would result in any new or additional administrative or regulatory burden for them."

"Ultimately, the only beneficiaries from increased casualisation in the workforce are bad and exploitative employers. Good employers have nothing to fear from these proposals," Ms King said.

Meanwhile, Mandate has called on good employers and employers' representatives to stop misleading the public. The union is also calling on all members of the Oireachtas to end the delays. Low paid and vulnerable workers have waited long enough. Pass the legislation now.

Nolan's deal shows what organising can do

MANDATE has signed a new procedural agreement with Nolan's supermarket in Clontarf that commits both sides to "maintain and foster productive and efficient operations" as well as putting in place "procedures conducive... to good industrial relations".

The final draft of the agreement, which was agreed in early September, covers all members of Mandate among the 120 staff working there.

Industrial Officer John Callan explained the background to the development: "The Organising Department along with the Dublin North Division had conducted an or-

ganising campaign in Nolan's over the last year. During that time we held regular meetings and listened to workers about issues of concern to them.

"A shop steward and a deputy shop steward were subsequently elected and we wrote to the company seeking a meeting. In the months that followed and after a series of meetings we were able to broker a new procedural agreement between Mandate and the company."

Mr Callan said its purpose was to specify the terms and conditions of employment in Nolan's and to put in

place "procedures conducive to the promotion of good industrial relations to the mutual benefit of our members and Nolan's".

The deal commits both sides to create an environment that provides open communication and a sense of recognition and agreement. It contains:

- General relationship recognition, procedures and consultative;
- Disciplinary policy and disciplinary procedures;
- Industrial relations engagement and communication;

- Grievance/dispute resolution procedure; and

Mr Callan told *Shopfloor*: "Both sides pledged to maintain and foster productive and efficient operations at all times and to solve all differences by reasonable and patient effort pursuant to the terms of the agreement."

He added: "This agreement is a classic example of workers organising to secure better terms and conditions and with the help of Mandate's Organising Department, it shows what unorganised workers can achieve when they organise themselves."



Industrial Officer John Callan hails new agreement



SuperValu Bray in-store House Committee with shop steward Brian Fogarty, pictured bottom right

GET INVOLVED – IT'S THE SMART MOVE...

By Brian Fogarty
Mandate NEC member

DO YOU see things happening in your store that you think are wrong and shouldn't be happening? Why not put your voice to good use?

It's YOUR union, so why don't you stop being a spectator sitting on the sidelines and get yourself in the game and get active. The first step is always the hardest...

In-store house committees are a vital cog in the union's wheel and I feel it is imperative to have a strong house committee in place in order to have an organised and efficient union presence in the workplace.

When I began my role as shop steward in SuperValu Bray we didn't have a house committee in any shape or form. My first task was to identify possible committee members. Like many others in the union they did want to help improve things but didn't know how to get active or how to make the first step.

I guided and motivated them to join the House Committee. We now have a committee of six strong activists coming from different areas of the store who assist me in my role as shop steward. We meet once a month and try to resolve issues with the management as well as trying to



improve conditions through in-store collective bargaining.

A number of House Committee members have attended training courses with Mandate to help them in their roles as union activists and in-store representatives.

Attending such courses has become more difficult in recent times due to the lack of paid leave from many employers as well as the distances involved travelling to Dublin.

However, Mandate is dealing with this issue by now running three-hour evening house committee training sessions across the country at convenient times and in locations

that suit the participants.

By taking part in this training activists will learn skills to deal with members' problems, disciplinary and grievance procedures as well as communication skills.

They also learn how to better organise the workplace and recruit new members which will help strengthen and grow the union.

So remember get ACTIVE, get TRAINING, JOIN your house committee and if you don't have one, ORGANISE ONE!

NEC member Brian Fogarty is a shop steward at SuperValu Bray

Legislation IS needed to tackle zero hour contracts

Picture: Sinn Féin (CC BY 2.0)



Patricia King: IBEC zero hour criticism rejected

CONGRESS has rejected IBEC criticism of new plans to tackle zero hour contracts and precarious work, and insisted that the legislation was "necessary to tackle the problem."

Responding to the criticism, Congress General Secretary Patricia King told *Shopfloor*: "We have been pressing for change in this area for some time and have engaged directly with the relevant officials over the past year in an effort to shape and influence the proposed legislation."

"While the proposed bill has not yet been published and will undoubtedly require further amendment, the overall legislative intent is positive."

She said that left unchallenged, precarious work practices and zero hour contracts created a downward pressure on employment standards that led to intolerable uncertainty

over hours and earnings for thousands of workers.

Ms King continued: "Indeed, such practices were central to a number of high-profile disputes in the retail sector in recent years and the problem is also evident in other sectors of the economy."

Legally required

She pointed out that employers were already legally required to keep working time records. "There is nothing in these proposals that would result in any new or additional administrative or regulatory burden, for them."

"Ultimately, the only beneficiaries from increased casualisation in the workforce are bad and exploitative employers. Good employers have nothing to fear from these proposals," Ms King added.

QUOTABLE...

Our labor unions are not narrow, self-seeking groups. They have raised wages, shortened hours and provided supplemental benefits. Through collective bargaining and grievance procedures, they have brought justice and democracy to the shop floor.

John F Kennedy
September 5, 1960

Picture: Florida Keys Public Libraries (CC BY 2.0)



Human trafficking on rise in Ireland – report

HUMAN trafficking is on the rise in Ireland, a new report by experts in the field has claimed.

Council of Europe body GRETA (Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings) found that a mismatch between the demand for workers and restricted legal migration options were fuelling the problem in Ireland.

Welcoming the report, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland spokesperson Gráinne O'Toole told *Shopfloor*: "This confirms what we have long stated: labour trafficking is increasing in Ireland due to the lack of legal migration routes for vital sectors like agriculture, fisheries, domestic work and restaurants. The demand for work-

ers in these sectors is growing daily, but the State refuses to give work permits for these areas.

"The few legal routes that exist often tie workers to their employers, creating the conditions for exploitation and forced labour. Workers are often trapped in exploitation and forced to work in terrible conditions."

Pointing out that domestic work continued to constitute the bulk of labour trafficking cases dealt with by the MRCI, she added: "Often domestic workers are rendered undocumented, exploited and abused by their employers, but are afraid to leave or to go to the authorities for fear of being left homeless and destitute."

Penneys meeting 'constructive'

MANDATE has described a meeting with senior management at Penneys to review the operation of the banded hours agreement as "constructive".

It is understood the union also took the opportunity to raise a number of concerns highlighted in a recent survey of members at the retailer.

Arising out of this, a new application for review form has been agreed and implemented. The management

have also agreed to come back on a number of other outstanding matters. Speaking after the meeting, Assistant General Secretary Gerry Light told *Shopfloor*: "The process of reviewing our banded hours agreement is important to ensure that the purpose for which the agreement was originally introduced continues to deliver for our members working in Penneys. There can be no doubt,

based on the data provided by the company, that the introduction of the banded hours framework has significantly benefited a substantial number of our members."

He added: "The additional hours that are gained and regularised through the deal is an appropriate way to reward the valuable contribution made by members to this successful Irish retail business."



Gerry Light: 'Valuable contribution'

Members at Debenhams yes to 2.5%

MANDATE members working at Debenhams have voted to accept a 2.5% pay deal following a national ballot.

There will also be an incremental movement for what the union described as a "significant number of members" who have been frozen on the pay scale for a number of years.

Commenting on the outcome of the ballot, Assistant General Secretary Gerry Light described the pay deal as "significant given the reality that the business only exited Examinership not that long ago".

He told *Shopfloor*: "The fact that the company was in a position to positively address our pay claim is testament to the hard work of our members employed in Debenhams.

"They have played a huge part in driving the Irish business out of Examinership towards what will hopefully be a more rewarding future for all concerned in the enterprise."

DEBENHAMS

Mandate hails 'line in the sand' ruling

MANDATE has welcomed a Labour Court recommendation on guaranteed overtime payments as an "important line in the sand moment".

The union took the case on behalf of a small group of members at Debenhams to the Labour Court after management attempted to unilaterally remove guaranteed overtime payments.

In its findings, the Court recommended that those involved should have their established earnings fully protected. The Court said that these overtime payments could be bought out at a compensation rate of 1.5

times annual loss – but only with the agreement of the workers.

Speaking after the recommendation was issued, Assistant General Secretary Gerry Light said: "This decision has established an important line in the sand moment in that the Court has recognised that retail workers' wages matter too and that they cannot be reduced at the whim of their employer."

He added: "It is also significant to note that the decision of the Court on this occasion differed dramatically to previous ones in similar circumstances – and that is to be welcomed."



INTERNATIONAL

A Catalan republic critically important statement of intent

AN IRISH journalist, newly returned from witnessing for himself the social ferment in Catalonia, has spoken of the significance of President Carles Puigdemont's assertion that creation of any independent state will be in the form of a republic.

Tom Stokes watched in horror as the events unfolded in Catalonia. It happened as Spanish PM Mariano Rajoy sent in thousands of police in a bid to disrupt the October 1 independence referendum.

He told *Shopfloor*: "I went to bed with some crucial words from Catalan President Carles Puigdemont occupying my thoughts. Speaking on TV, he indicated an early declaration of independence based on a 90% 'Yes' vote in favour, and concluded by saying that an independent Catalonia would 'take the form of a republic'."

Mr Stokes described this as a "critically important statement of intent".

He continued: "The intent to create a republic represents a clear break with the Spanish constitution which is that of a monarchist state, and a clear rejection of the authority of Spain's constitutional court which is not independent but is politically appointed by the Madrid government whose authority over Catalonia is also clearly rejected. In a republic the



Spanish police move against Catalan demonstrators during the October 1 independence referendum

constitution is the primary legal instrument of the people, and is moulded by them. In a republic there can be no monarch since it is the people who are sovereign." Mr Stokes claimed that on his latest visit to Girona and Barcelona in late September it felt as if "the essence of a republic was already in the ether."

And he expressed confidence that the democratic will of the Catalan people would not be snuffed out. "The people of Catalonia have the knowledge of their history on their side. The

battle to protect the Spanish Republic of the 1930s is still vivid. They don't need lectures from outsiders like me to know the value of a republic.

"Their ancestors, some still surviving, paid the high price required to defend it. From my observations both from afar and on visits to Catalonia, it seems the younger generations still have the spirit and the yearning for a better and more enlightened way of living together."

The Last Word – page 31

“ This has established an important line in the sand moment in that the Court has recognised that retail workers' wages matter too and that they cannot be reduced at the whim of their employer ”

Call for full public funding for higher education backed

THE IRISH Congress of Trade Unions has backed calls for a publicly-funded higher education system at a demonstration organised by the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) earlier this month and supported by trade unions in the education sector and union youth committees.

Speaking ahead of the October 4 demo, Congress Official and convener of the Education Sector Committee, Liam Berney said: "Congress believes that moving to a fully publicly funded system is the most equitable and sustainable option for students and those who work in the sector.

"A publicly-funded system and a clear funding strategy for the sector would help provide certainty for students and educators alike. It would also avoid creating enormous future debt burdens for students, as has been the experience in other jurisdictions."

Such a system would also ensure public control and oversight of the contribution of the higher education sector to the longer-term economic and social development of the country.

He added: "As major beneficiaries of the higher education system, Congress believes that employers should contribute more – as recommended by the Cassells Report – through an increase in the National Training Fund Levy to a level of €700 million annually."

EU has been weakened by Brexit and its class character revealed

By Jimmy Doran

AS THE Brexit discussions between Britain and the European Union continue, the true nature of the EU becomes clearer by the day.

The EU has been weakened, and its class character is being revealed. The subservient nature of the Irish establishment, and how little influence they have at the European level, is also being exposed and brought into the public glare, despite the efforts of the media to conceal this.

Wherever the economic and political borders end up after Brexit, it will be the ruling class of Britain and Germany that decide, and it will be in their own class interests. Dublin will have little say, and the Assembly in Belfast even less.

British big-business interests will be king; and, despite what Arlene Foster might think, the big-house unionists in Counties Fermanagh and Tyrone will have little influence either. They were and are good for maintaining the Union but are irrelevant when talking about British capitalist class interests.

The EU is designed for the benefit of big business and for its interests alone, to the detriment of the working class. It was set up to build a capitalist United States of Europe, to rebuild the European industrial monopolies after the Second World War, and to transfer power from national parliaments to a supranational European entity, so restricting the ability

of states to make laws and direct policy decisions in their own interests.

The EU was deliberately designed to strengthen the European monopolies, the ruling class of the member states, and to marginalise the citizens. This has been achieved over the years through the plethora of treaties and, more recently, trade agreements, such as CETA and TTIP, that have been imposed on our people.

These agreements are constructed to restrict and reduce the ability of working people to effect change in the economic and social policies imposed on them and to further erode democracy and accountability at the national level. Along with the institutions of the EU, they are major weapons in the class war.

Capitalist interests

At the end of the war there was a kind of truce between capital and labour. Capital needed the working class for rebuilding its industrial base; it also needed to defend and protect European capitalist interests from the challenge posed by the rise of socialism as it efficiently and quickly rebuilt itself after the war. Socialism was now seen as a real and viable alternative.

This had to be stopped, at all costs, to keep the elite of Europe in their position of power and privilege. Their imperial project of globalisation, neo-liberalism and a race to the bottom in workers' rights was all the time being designed and planned in

the background. Since the defeat and overthrow of socialism in Europe, coupled with the completion of the rebuilding of the infrastructure and industrial base, capital no longer feels the need to accommodate workers. This has led to workers' rights being savagely attacked all around Europe and austerity being imposed on our people to pay the debts of finance capital.

We need only look at the decisions made in the EU Court of Justice, in the Luxembourg, Laval and Vaxholm judgments, coupled with all the anti-union laws that have been introduced.

These have had a serious effect on workers' rights. The judgments have given priority to the market over workers' rights, and the anti-union laws have most certainly tipped the balance of power from labour to capital.

Now the people of Britain have voted to leave the EU – despite the best efforts of big business, the Conservative Party, the Labour Party and others to get the people to vote to remain.

We here in Ireland need to show solidarity with the British working class and all those who continue to push for a full exit from the EU and to campaign for a left-alternative exit. If this happens it may be the spark that lights the flame for an Irish exit.

We need to rid ourselves of the dominance of our imperial masters in Britain and Europe and to build the unity of our people and country. Only then will we be on the road to economic independence, which will allow us to achieve the socialist republic that James Connolly fought and died for and finally have freedom and independence for all our people, Catholic, Protestant, and Dissenter.

Clarion call for change: Jimmy Doran at a recent protest in Dublin



“ We here in Ireland need to show solidarity with the British working class and all those who continue to push for a full exit from the EU and to campaign for a left-alternative exit ”



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.

Venue: Mandate Training Centre, Distillery Road, Dublin 3

Date: 20th/21st/22nd November 2017 **Time:** 9am – 5pm

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

Time for us to build and forge a new and better Republic

MANDATE General Secretary John Douglas has called on left progressives throughout Ireland to resist the tendency to “divide, splinter and attack each other” and instead build a movement to convince citizens of “what is possible”.

He made the comments while giving the main oration at the Bodenstown United Commemoration on August 20th. “Our task now is to build from the ground up – to educate, to agitate... we need to build a movement that is capable and confident and which grows with every victory.”

He told those gathered for the annual event in Sallins, Co Kildare, that he believed there was a “real thirst” for change and justice in the country as capitalism sank further into crisis.

“It must be the revolutionary principles of



Mandate General Secretary John Douglas speaking at Bodenstown United Commemoration in August

Liberty, Equality and Fraternity that emerges triumphant.”

The island of Ireland, John Douglas pointed out, was divided by sectarianism, inequality and exploitation which did not happen by “eco-

conomic accident”, he suggested, but through “economic design”.

Ireland had been “subjugated by neo-liberalism and global capitalism” and its sovereignty “sacrificed on the altar of Capital”.

Mr Douglas continued: “Our recent experience in the Republic of Ireland of EU-imposed austerity and the plunder of our national wealth, the stripping bare of our social provisions should be a lesson to all, and a rallying call to all – to unite and mobilise.”

Blasting Ireland’s “weak and subservient” politicians, he said the Dail had shown itself to be no match for a “neo-liberal Federal EU” that dictated that “banks were too big to fail” and that Irish citizens should “shoulder the burden of 40% of all European bank debt”.

The result of this approach, he said, could be seen “every night in the doorways of shops and the back lanes of Dublin where thousands huddle for shelter and food and in the cheap hotels and B&Bs where the growing numbers of homeless families are exiled to exist out of sight and out of mind.”

Claiming there was a necessity to unite around a clear Socialist Republican vision, he concluded the oration by quoting Wolfe Tone: “We will free ourselves by the aid of that large and respectable class of the community – the men of no property.”



Theobald Wolfe Tone

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

www.joinmandate.ie

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

Illustration: Daniel Huntley (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Ryanair boss 'humbled' by worker power

RYANAIR'S high-flying Chief Executive Michael O'Leary, right, has had his wings clipped – thanks to worker power.

The low-cost airline's outspoken CEO was forced to concede large pay hikes to pilots and changes to their roster patterns after a large number of his staff threatened to take-off to rival carriers.

And according to Mandate Organising & Campaigns Co-ordinator Brian Forbes it all goes to show what can happen when workers stand up and fight back.

He told *Shopfloor*: "This very public

climbdown by O'Leary is symptomatic of what happens when bully bosses are on the receiving end of collective organised worker power.

"To be treated with decency and respect during your working life should not be optional for employers although some bad employers believe that it is optional and treat workers disgracefully."

He said the humbling of O'Leary, a poster boy for muscular management, was an important lesson for workers.

"Every single workplace in this country would survive and flourish without these bullies and workers could and would be much better off when standing up collectively and fighting back."

"If you feel your company isn't treating you with respect in retail and bar trades then you know what you need to do – join Mandate and get organised and discover the real untapped power of workers gaining back control over their terms and conditions."



Picture: WTTCC (CC BY 2.0)

ECONOMICS



Another crash is coming!

...this time triggered by nations dubbed the 'debt zombies'...



Stevie Nolan

NOW THAT we're in recovery and house prices are rising I suppose it doesn't matter that another financial crisis is coming.

The fact that we're even less prepared to deal with a crash than the last time doesn't matter too much either, because GDP is up and 'the fundamentals of the economy are sound'.

It's probably irrelevant that the IMF has predicted a financial crisis in their latest Global Financial Stability Report and that central bankers across the globe are, to put it colloquially, bricking themselves.

It is likely that the world will face another global financial crisis in the near future partly because many of the problems that led to the 2008 crisis remain unsolved. The fragility of the shadow banking sector, high indebtedness and the growing weakness of emerging

markets is pointing to a crash. Indeed even the half-hearted attempt at the regulation of financial institutions since 2008 has shifted some of the riskier financial activities back into the shadow banking sector beyond the scrutiny of a supposedly stronger regulatory framework.

Cheap money

While massive monetary policy stimulus has rekindled some weak growth, the cheap money created by low interest rates and quantitative easing aimed at rescuing developed economies has inflated asset bubbles, flooded out into emerging markets, and encouraged states and private corporations to borrow and load up on debt.

Corporate debt levels in emerging markets alone have quadrupled between 2003 and 2014. And if I remember correctly, massive levels of debt had something to do with the last crisis.

All eyes of course look to China which helped prevent a second Great Depression in 2008 only by making credit so cheap it set off a huge property boom resulting in empty office blocks and ghost cities. Now it's trying to manage a slowdown while at

the same time attempting to deflate the massive credit bubble it created.

The Bank for International Settlements has warned that Chinese credit growth since 2008 represents one of the largest expansions in modern financial history. It is likely that China will respond by devaluing its currency flooding the global economy with cheap goods leading to deflation in the west.

Australia also delayed its crisis by subsidising mortgages leading to the emergence of a huge housing bubble that is months away from collapse with private debt levels up to 210%

of GDP (when a debt-to-GDP ratio of 60% is quite often noted as a target for developed countries).

Biggest threat

The renowned economist Professor Steve Keen who predicted the crash of 2008 spoke at a Mandate-sponsored event in partnership with Trademark in 2016.

In a recent publication, titled *Can We Avoid Another Financial Crash?*, he identifies China as the biggest threat. But China has good company – other countries with a high level of private debt and a reliance on debt to fuel economic demand. He labels

these countries "debt zombies" – Australia, Belgium, Canada, South Korea, Norway, and Sweden.

In sum the influence of China and these smaller economies is simply too great for the world to avoid a financial crisis.

The almost complete failure of policymakers to put manners on global finance capital since 2008, and the ongoing use of debt as a model for growth might suggest that any moves to save the global economy from another bust, will be too little, too late. It's time to stock up on beans.

“ The influence of China and these smaller economies – Australia, Belgium, Canada, South Korea, Norway and Sweden – is simply too great for the world to avoid a financial crisis... It's time to stock up on beans... ”



Picture: Tnarak Innael (CC BY-SA 2.0)

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>

PLATFORM



... why workers deserve better

Picture: Matt Schilder (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)



Gerry Adams

OUR PARTY has long recognised the vital role played by trade unions in providing social cohesion and a voice for workers in Ireland. Republicans believe in a society in which the rights of workers are protected through legislation and we recognise the importance of collective organisation and bargaining to defending those rights.

Trade unions are to the fore in ensuring that workers are properly paid and that they have decent working conditions. Decent pay and working conditions are good for society, good for the economy and good for workers. Sinn Féin is committed to the use of social dialogue in order to resolve the disputes and grievances of workers in a fair and just way.

Employers should be compelled by law to negotiate with trade unions. There is also a need for strong anti-victimisation laws, and an end to low pay and the exploitation of vulnerable workers.

Used austerity

The three establishment parties in this state are essentially anti-worker. They have happily used austerity to dilute the rights of workers and the standing of trade unions. Investment in vital public services was slashed and the state's industrial relations mechanisms have been weakened to favour unscrupulous employers.

The Fianna Fáil leadership cut the minimum wage, encouraged the proliferation of agency staff and the use of short-term contract employment. The Labour party, during its time in government, betrayed workers and failed to defend the rights of organised labour against greedy employers and the pro-market, right-wing political elite. Fine Gael's natural anti-worker instinct requires very little commentary.

Sinn Féin has consistently called on the Government to introduce collective bargaining for all workers in line

with Ireland's obligations under international law. Workers have been denied their rights and have been forced to engage in strikes and sit-in protests to achieve justice.

The Ireland of 2017 is a place where people go to work while living in emergency accommodation. Workers cannot afford to go to the doctor and their children languish on waiting lists for services which are available on demand in other European countries. This is the legacy that successive Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and Labour governments have imposed on working people who have nothing more to give.

Workers deserve better. They should not have to jump through hoops and go through lengthy proce-

“ Workers should not have to jump through hoops and go through lengthy procedures in the Labour Court to secure their basic rights ”

dures in the Labour Court to secure their basic rights. These are the very same rights that successive generations of Irish men and women fought and died for down through the decades.

Sinn Féin wants collective bargaining that makes it mandatory for employers to recognise and negotiate with trade unions. We want robust anti-victimisation workplace legislation and an end to the exploitation of low paid and vulnerable workers. Low pay and poor working conditions are a reality for a significant number of workers for whom the race to the bottom is an everyday reality. Government action must drive the changes that are needed in these areas. It is a matter of political choices.

Sinn Féin is calling for an increase in the minimum wage to €11.70 per hour. We also want the Workplace Relations Commission to be provided with additional resources. Our Workers Rights Spokesperson, David Culli-

nane, has been campaigning for the appointment of a Super Junior Minister for Labour Affairs. This a measure Sinn Féin would introduce in government to guarantee that workers' rights are heard at the Cabinet table and to oversee the introduction of our legislative agenda in terms of trade union rights and worker protection.

In government we would also legislate to provide trade unions access to their members in the workplace. We would effectively ban zero-hour and if-and-when contracts. We would tackle the disgrace of tactical insolvencies.

After years of attack we need to legislate to protect workers' rights and social cohesion. Our work while in opposition proves our commitment to such an agenda. In 2016 and 2017, Sinn Féin brought three separate pieces of workers' rights legislation to the Dáil covering these areas.

Exploitation

As an example, to tackle the exploitation of people on low hour contracts, especially in the retail sector, we introduced the Banded Hour Contracts Bill 2016. This legislation allows workers to apply for a contract that is reflective of their actual working week. Unfortunately, there have been far too many instances of workers who were on 15-hour contracts for perhaps 10 years working 30 hours and 40 hours week in, week out. This is a way for companies to exploit their workers.

The Bill was passed by the Dáil at second stage and has gone through pre-legislative scrutiny and is now ready to go back to Committee for amendments. If the Taoiseach was serious about tackling the issue of precarious work, he would simply support this Bill. His proposals will not address the key issues at the heart of precarious contracts.

Through our work in the political institutions and through our wider campaigning, Sinn Féin is demonstrating our commitment to working with an independent and progressive labour movement to bring about change.

Working together, our task is to create a true Republic that can deliver equality and justice for all our people and strong and robust workers' rights are a fundamental cornerstone of this project.

Ged Nash



TWO years ago, and just weeks before I narrowly lost my Dail seat, I published radical proposals to effectively ban 'zero hour' work practices and to provide more certainty over working hours and security over income for the tens of thousands of Irish workers who are in unacceptably precarious working arrangements.

Too many of you who are reading Shopfloor today are still, almost two years on, going to bed on a Sunday night not knowing how much money you will earn from one end of the week to the next. And all because you can't be sure how many hours you will be asked to work from week to week or even from day to day.

I know from my own experience and from the work of Mandate, SIPTU, ICTU and the detailed research I asked the experts at University of Limerick to do that these practices – which are akin to the old hiring fares – are particularly prevalent in retail and in hospitality.

Now, the new Minister for Employment Affairs & Social Protection, Fine Gael's Regina Doherty has said that she will bring in new laws to effectively prohibit zero hour contracts and to better regulate precarious work. This is welcome news. And action is urgently needed.

While her proposals are by no



Illustration: Xoan Baltar (CC BY 2.0)

New legislation is set to herald some festive cheer for precarious workers

means perfect and fall short of my original recommendations and indeed the ambitions of the separate pieces of legislation published by the Labour Party and Sinn Fein in 2016, these proposed new laws will make a

big difference to the working lives of thousands of Irish workers.

At its simplest, the Government's proposals will ensure that after an 18 month reference or 'look back' period, you will be entitled to have the

reality of your working hours reflected in your contract and be placed in a band of hours.

You will also be entitled to receive the top five terms of your employment within a week of taking up a job.

Critically, this will include the hours you are expected to work.

While acknowledging that the Government's proposals have the capacity to make life much better for people in precarious work, my Labour colleagues and I will work with Mandate and other colleagues in the trade union movement and indeed all interested parties in Leinster House to improve and enhance the legislation as it comes through the Dail and Seanad.

It is only fair too that we acknowl-

“ The best present those of us who believe in fairness and decency in the workplace can get is to see this legislation passed by the Dail and Seanad before Christmas ”

edge that the Government has travelled a journey and come to the realisation, albeit belatedly, that the status quo is not acceptable.

The best present those of us who believe in fairness and decency in the workplace can get is to see this legislation passed by the Dail and Seanad before Christmas.

We should all work together towards that common goal for the good of our society and our economy.

Senator Ged Nash was Employment Minister between mid-2014 and early 2016. He is currently the Labour Party Spokesperson on Workers' Rights & Equality

What type of Ireland do you want to live in?

IF YOU THINK you deserve a better life, then join the *Another Ireland is Possible* conference on Saturday, 4th November 2017.

The Right2Change campaign is about putting people and policies first. It's about a vision for an Ireland where 3,048 children don't have to spend Christmas in hotel rooms because their parents have been evicted by international vulture funds. It's about ensuring everyone has access to a well-funded public healthcare system and we don't have to wait 24 hours on a trolley to be seen by a doctor at times of emergency.

It's about making sure that Irish children are no longer packed into the largest class sizes in the EU, denying them the opportunities and the future they deserve.

And importantly for Mandate Trade Union members, it's about ensuring decent work and ending low pay across the country. Essentially, it's about driving a vision for a new Ireland that would bring us closer to the Republic imagined by the 1916 rebels. An Ireland of equality, social justice and prosperity for all.

Ahead of the 2016 elections, Mandate and a number of other trade unions launched the Right2Change policy platform, developed by activists from within the trade union movement, political parties and independent community activists.

We wanted to have a rational discussion about housing, healthcare, education, water, debt, the environment, democratic reform, national resources, equality and employment.

Too often our media focus entirely on personalities and political parties, instead of policies. Instead of allowing space to discuss the important policies of the day, they tried to misrepresent

the Right2Change campaign, portraying it as an electoral pact or a front for a political party.

It doesn't suit many political parties and many media outlets to discuss policies, because once you do, people may realize that an alternative is available, and then they may vote and mobilise for it.

As a result of the Right2Water campaign, which Mandate Trade Union was heavily involved in, Mandate members are in a much better financial position. In a recent report

presented to the National Executive, it was shown that for every €1 our union spent on the campaign, the return for members in money saved reached €533 per annum. Now that's value for money. It means that instead of Mandate members having to cough up €28m every single year to Irish Water for a metering programme, advertising revenue and overpaid consultants, that money is in our members' pockets.

This was achieved through collaboration with other trade unions that shared our perspective, through cooperation with political

parties who agreed that water is a human right and in partnership with community activists across the country.

The question now is, can this be reproduced on a larger scale in a more formal setting to achieve progressive social change.

If you want to be part of that process, and want to mobilise for a fairer, more equal Ireland, come to the conference in the Mansion House, Dublin 2, at 9.30am (registration) on Saturday, 4th November 2017. You can purchase your ticket at www.right2change.ie for €5.

Playing the game, paying the price

Some thoughts on the commodification of sport...

By Mel Corry
Trademark

MANY people who know me might be surprised to know that in my youth I was quite the sportsman. Yes, I hear you, but it's true. I took part in a number of sports between the age of 12 and 18 and kept myself reasonably fit well into my thirties.

I was a good competitive swimmer, a decent boxer, captain of the school cross country team and a bad hurler. I was such a bad hurler that my team mates often remarked, "He plays for the love of the game". At the time I thought it was a compliment.

I was brought up in an age when kids were encouraged to take part in a wide range of sport and we often experienced the disappointment of losing. "It's not the winning, it's the taking part that's important" was the mantra from parents who had to console their children – and we believed it.

Sportsmanship was a value that preceded gamesmanship, always take defeat gracefully and shake hands with your opponent. As sports fans we could always watch the Olympic Games, the World Cup, Winter Olympics and other global events and marvel at the achievements of the various athletes and teams; we were able to differentiate between amateur and professional.

Playing fair

Looking back on those days now of course it's hard to know who was playing fair and who was cheating. The Olympics now seem to have been an arena of battle in a Cold War where the ideas of collectivism and individualism fought out a battle for cultural supremacy.

One thing's for sure, today, we know that all athletes at elite level are professional and couldn't compete at that level unless they were. Sadly as we watch a dominant athlete win, our thoughts often drift to the question, "Are they cheating?"

Professionalism leads to commodification and the values of the sport adjust to that reality. When rugby union became professional in the mid-1990s, money flooded in and in a few short years the infrastructure of the game had changed beyond recognition.

Professional rugby players became bulkier, the training regimes became more scientific and the various leagues adapted their structures to facilitate new Sky TV deals.

New stadia emerged with better facilities for supporters and the numbers watching the best clubs increased. You can now get a pint at the match and enjoy a burger while you watch.

In Ireland if you played for one of the old local clubs you could aspire one day to get a call up to the provincial panel, if you worked hard and showed some talent. Now playing for your province of birth doesn't matter anymore – you can buy players from anywhere in the world.



Snapshot from a past era: when the pursuit of glory not gold was the object of sporting competition...

Picture: Simple Insomnia (CC BY 2.0)



This sporting life... Mel Corry, above, singing the Internationale at a recent Bodenstown commemoration and, left, in his younger days as a 'decent boxer'

I often wonder what has been the impact on local clubs. What about the coaches who give up their free time to teach kids how to play, but more importantly, give them a sense of purpose and belonging?

"Don't panic," I hear you say, in Ireland we have the GAA, proud of its amateur status and roots in communities.

This in many respects is true. One of the last bastions of community spirit in this country is the GAA but it hasn't been unaffected by the consequences of capitalism. Many small rural clubs are facing difficulties fielding teams as our young people emigrate in search of a better life.

No-one can deny though the passion and commitment on show as we watch the football and hurling championships every summer, we are proud of our athletes who shed blood

“Today the talking point is more often about how much money was spent during a transfer window than the result of the team you support... The win-at-all-costs mentality is the antithesis of the sporting values of representation, participation, pride and humility. Sport for the many, not for the few”

sweat and tears for their county colours.

I'm a long-suffering Armagh supporter and have only a fading memory of one All-Ireland glory. I long for a good championship run and maybe another crack at "Sam". The reality is if that was to be achieved then significant resources would have to be given to the county team and the elite players would have to be looked after and groomed in a more professional way. The commitment they show during their training while holding down jobs is immense but worrying at the same time.

RTE contrarian Joe Brolly has been warning for a long time now of the creeping commercialisation of the national games. He understands that if an elite tier is created then the local club must suffer. He has articulated the concerns of many players who

have given up on the game because they don't enjoy it anymore. These concerns are real and valid.

There is no greater marker of how international capital can manipulate and commodify culture than when a GAA supporter has to have a subscription to Sky TV to ensure that they can watch all of the county championship matches in our national games.

This year you can attend a pre-All-Ireland breakfast in the Ballsbridge Hotel with a Q&A with various GAA stars, a signed Dublin jersey for a snip at €2,500. Those who purchase tickets have access to bundles of tickets for the final.

Changing values

These changes are reflective of a changing world and changing values. A time when sport was the pleasure a person could gain by watching or participating in after a hard week's work. It gave us something to aspire to, something to look forward to and a talking point on our return to work.

Today the talking point is more often about how much money was spent during a transfer window than the result of the team you support.

As we face the reality of people dying on our streets, when our young people have nothing to aspire to, when war and destitution is endemic across the world, it's hard to listen to tales of multi-millionaires and their First World problems.

The win-at-all-costs mentality is the antithesis of the sporting values of representation, participation, pride and humility. Sport for the many, not for the few.



Brian Forbes

Disgraceful ploy to hobble banded hours Bill that can transform workers' lives

IN A recent sitting of the Oireachtas workers on insecure hour contracts became collateral damage in a cynical game of power-play politics by the Government. A disgraceful ploy to block Sinn Fein TD David Cullinane-sponsored Banded Hours Contract Bill was concocted by raising a spurious money message mechanism which government conveniently uses to halt the progress of opposition bills that have a genuine chance of succeeding in the Dail.

It seems almost irrelevant to the Government that in halting the progress of this important piece of legislation many workers on precarious and insecure contracts who are struggling day and daily to plan their lives and to pay their bills will be the losers by this insidious political chicanery.

Over the past 18 months Sinn Fein has worked closely with Mandate in developing the Banded Hours Contract Bill to allow workers to achieve some security in their income and their hours.

Witnesses

The Bill was passed by the Dail at Second Stage on July 17, 2016, with a deferral for 12 months pending legislative scrutiny in the Jobs Committee. This committee heard from more than 40 witnesses – including Mandate, ICTU, IBEC and academics – and it produced a 52-page report with 21 recommendations on strengthening and improving the legislation.

David Cullinane, the original mover of the Bill, told the committee that he was happy to see all those recommendations incorporated into the Bill. Subsequently, on September 20, 2017, the Business Committee agreed to allow the Bill to return to committee for amendments.

Given the intense scrutiny applied to this Bill over a protracted period and its broad cross-party support, pending the amendments, on the Jobs Committee chaired by FF TD Mary Burke, it is truly incredible that all this time, effort and excellent work can be destroyed at the stroke of a pen by Government mandarins intent on denying opposition parties from having good protective legislation en-



Government plays power games in the Dail while low-hour contract workers have little chance of planning their lives... Picture: Kent McConnell (CC BY 2.0)

acted. In April 2015, Dunnes Stores workers took industrial action to achieve income security in their employment. They want and need banded hour contracts which would allow them the ability to better plan their lives.

This Bill took on much greater urgency for workers when the Labour Court agreed to suspend a case between Mandate and Dunnes Stores for a period of six months pending the passing of the Bill as its incorporation into law would settle the issues raised by the case.

This six-month hiatus ends in February 2018 and the Government's hatchet job imposed now on this important Bill means that the likelihood of getting any decent legislation to protect workers enacted before that date is looking increasingly unlikely.

Given the time-sensitive nature of the suspended Labour Court case, it almost defies belief that the Government would put its own narrow political self-interest above that of low

paid workers in precarious type employment. Shame on them for doing so. Following David Cullinane seeking leave to refer the Bill to committee for implementation, which was granted by the Dail on October 3, 2017, the money message barrier was dropped on it.

The reason given for delaying this Bill was that it would increase the workload of the Workplace Relations Committee, thus requiring additional resources. Government Bills with a money message can be turned around in less than three weeks but opposition Bills do not receive any attention whatsoever. In fact, every single opposition Bill passed at second stage by the Dail this year is still awaiting developments on the money message issue.

If this Bill was about bailing out a failing bank or to help the Government refuse to accept billions from their friends in multi-national companies who aren't paying their fair share of this country's tax burden, then the

legislation would be delivered wrapped in a gold bow in the morning.

The fact that this Bill was trying to assist workers on low-hour contracts to achieve a fairer deal from their employer would appear largely irrelevant to the Government and their faceless and nameless bureaucrats who assist them in regularly screwing workers in favour of profitable businesses.

Workers on low-hour contracts cannot get a mortgage. They cannot adequately plan their lives as they live in limbo with uncertain hours. They cannot guarantee they will be able to pay their bills from week to week and must make stark choices on what they can purchase with the little money they have at their disposal.

These workers needed urgent action and the genuine concern is that the recent promise by Government Minister Regina Doherty to deliver soon on banded hour contracts will be a much more watered down and

frankly useless piece of legislation that will further enslave these down-trodden and forgotten workers who deserve much better.

Mandate has serious reservations that the Government's intended banded hours legislation will either now be delayed with the absence of the Sinn Fein Bill or that it will be an ineffective and dangerous piece of legislation that doesn't protect workers whatsoever.

We have concerns that the Government will not implement strong and robust legislation because the draft Heads of Bill produced so far indicate a real lack of understanding about the predicament many of these workers face.

Minister Regina Doherty's recent public utterances also indicate no intention whatsoever of banning zero-hour contracts and "if and when" contracts. That is a national disgrace and we will not stand idly by and allow that to happen unchallenged.

Well-balanced

The Sinn Fein Bill is a strong, well-balanced and highly-scrutinised piece of legislation that deserves to be adopted and made into law. Unfortunately, good and sound legislation is not a major priority for this Government based on their actions.

Sinn Fein, and in particular David Cullinane TD and Parliamentary Advisor Conor McCabe, are to be commended for their dedicated and hard work over the past 18 months towards developing legislation that would actually do something to protect vulnerable workers.

Mandate will continue to campaign vigorously and lobby intensively over the coming weeks and months to challenge any attempt by this Government to implement weak and bad legislation. Any watered down alternative to the Sinn Fein Bill will be challenged robustly by our members and we will support them with everything at our disposal.

We are committed to the principles of Decent Work and refuse to accept anything less. Mandate's Decent Work campaign roadshow will be coming to a venue near you over the coming months, so make it your business to get along to hear about what's really happening in Irish society today and join collectively with many other like-minded workers in fighting back and delivering a better Ireland. www.joinmandate.ie

- Are you skint? Would you like to know why?
- Are you fed up being treated badly by your employer?
- Are you interested in hearing why unions are so important today?
- Do you want to know why **DECENT WORK** is so important?
- Do you want to help campaign and really make a difference?
- Find out why you are being shafted by capitalism every day of your life...



All this and so much more at Mandate's **DECENT WORK ROADSHOWS** which are coming to a venue near you soon. Contact your local union office for further details.

IF NOT US, THEN WHO? IF NOT NOW, THEN WHEN?

Gerry Light

Assistant General Secretary
Mandate Trade Union

VIEW *from the* SHOPFLOOR

When legislation is not enough...

SINCE the launch of Mandate's report titled *Decent Work, the Impact of the Recession on Low Paid Workers*, back in 2012, your union has been to the forefront of driving the campaign for an end to exploitative work practices and precarious employment contracts.

By profiling the issue in this way references to decency in the workplace and decent work have become more commonplace not only within trade union circles but also within society in general.

On a regular basis we now hear many politicians and political parties express a desire for an end to bogus and unfair work practices.

However, getting them to recognise that something needs to be done is one thing, actually getting them to do something about it is the task that lies ahead.

Just in case there are those who doubt that the problem is not real and only confined to smaller workplaces, you only have to look at a number of recent high-profile examples to see how widespread it is.

In the case of Sports Direct in the UK, they were found guilty of operating draconian work practices. In fact, they were prosecuted under Britain's little-used Slavery Act. The current troubles being encountered at high-flying Ryanair is yet another example of how a successful business can quickly run into difficulties and suffer reputational damage when they are exposed in the use of exploitative work practices driven by greedy pursuit of even more profits for already wealthy shareholders and senior management.

Another case in point is the recent strikes in McDonalds in south east London where workers went on strike over low pay and the use of zero-hour contracts. Every time there is a potential of employee unrest in businesses such as these, the

workers are quickly told that they will not beat the system or the will of the owner and to leave if they do not like it. Another throwaway remark is, "Aren't you better off in a job than being on the dole?"

As a result of the persistent work of Mandate and others who continue to maintain the campaign for decent work, there are some tentative signs that things are changing for the better. Figures published in the UK last week by the Office for National Statistics show that the number of workers on zero-hour contracts has fallen to its lowest level in more than three years.

From an Irish perspective, at the moment there are three different pieces of potential legislation attempting to deal with the introduction of banded hours contracts. If the end product is anyway worthwhile, it should have the effect of bringing about greater earnings certainty particularly when it comes to vulnerable workers. Rest assured your union will continue to lobby hard for the best piece of legislation possible.

All workers deserve this – not least our members in the likes of Dunnes Stores who have fought bravely for years in the fight for better and more secure working hours.

While the promise of new legislation is to be welcomed, it must be clearly understood that legislative rights on their own will never deliver the full range of entitlements that many workers not only desire but rightfully deserve.

The law will only take workers so far in their pursuit of proper, decent and sustainable working conditions. The hard lifting to get across the gain line must be done by the workers themselves.

Of course, the most effective and secure way of achieving this desired outcome is through workers joining a trade union and combining their collective strength to win the advances they seek. For many the contemplation of taking such an approach is full of uncertainty and risks – many of which have been exacerbated by the modern society, norms and values that we have inherited and now encounter in our daily lives.

The fight for decent working conditions and meaningful worker democracy has never been easily achieved and probably never will. However, the human desire for decent treatment and to be properly rewarded for the fruits of your labour in order that you and your dependents can socially and economically participate in the society you live in should never be discouraged, always nurtured and vindicated where possible to its fullest.

More than ever the best place to do this is in a trade union.



FROM WHERE I STAND...

Let's get



'The strike is like any other muscle, you have to keep it in good shape or it will atrophy'

– Jerry Browne

WHILE no worker wants to go on strike, it is the most powerful and necessary tool in achieving the best possible pay and conditions at work. Even the threat of industrial action tends to lead to better collective bargaining outcomes for union members.

The first historical example of a strike took place 3,000 years ago in ancient Egypt when artisans constructing the Valley of Kings walked off the job after they weren't paid, incidentally leading to a pay increase. The modern strike, however, was developed on the back of the industrial revolution and has won major achievements, not least of which was the legislated eight hour day, first won on 21st April 1856 in Melbourne by construction workers, many of whom were Irish emigrants.

In recent years, Ireland has seen a resurgence in strikes with high-profile disputes in Greyhound Waste, Bus Éireann, LUAS, Dunnes Stores and Tesco, to name a few, but the level of action is still nowhere near where it once was. By comparison, 2011 had the lowest number of days lost to industrial disputes in the history of the state with only 3,695 days lost compared to 1,464,952 days lost in 1979.

Industrial action

However, since 2011 the number of days lost to industrial action has increased with 8,486 lost in 2012, 14,965 in 2013, 44,015 in 2014, 32,964 in 2015 and 71,647 in 2016 – an increase of 1,838% on the 2011 figure.

Does this mean workers are getting their voices back? If they are, it's long overdue.

Inequality in Ireland has grown enormously in recent decades. Ireland has the second highest prevalence of low pay in the OECD behind the United States. We also have the second highest level of 'underemployed' workers. Our pay is so low that, for a retail worker in Ireland to achieve an equal income with their peers in the EU15, they would need a 20% pay increase.

Wages as a proportion of GDP in Ireland has reduced since it peaked at 69% in 1975 and is now down at 44%. This marks the second highest drop in wage share out of 37 OECD countries, behind only Romania. Now only Mexico and Turkey have lower wages to GDP ratios than Ireland out of 39 OECD countries.

During this time, a number of countries have actually increased their wage share – notably Sweden and Denmark, both of whom have much

higher trade union density levels than Ireland. Furthermore, eating into the wage share pie is senior management who have enjoyed much higher wage increases than their workers. Albert Manifold, Chief Executive of building materials giant CRH, the largest company on Ireland's Iseq 20 index in 2015 had a total remuneration of €5.53 million that year. It marked a 32% rise on the previous year. Manifold's compensation – including pensions and bonuses – was 87 times greater than the average €63,516 cost of the company's 78,106 employees. Had Manifold maintained his very generous €3.76 million salary and the difference been shared between all workers, they would have achieved a €22 pay increase each, but instead it all went to one individual – the CEO.

Then there are profits and dividends. In the banking sector, an average employee in Ireland generated €409,000 in profits in 2015, more than nine times the average for employees worldwide.

One major retail outlet in Ireland paid out €96m in dividends to shareholders at the height of the economic crisis (2010-11), but had that dividend instead been awarded to those who generate the profits for the company, all of their workers in Ireland would have received a €71,000 bonus on top of their pay.

All of the above – low pay, insecure employment, reduced wages as a percentage of GDP, higher pay for managers and larger dividends for owners – has occurred while trade union density levels have been falling drastically. In 1978, Ireland had a trade union density level of 57.5%. That figure is now lower than it has ever been at 27.4%.

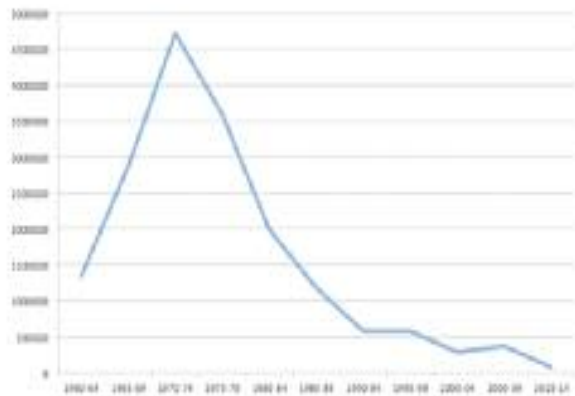
It's not hard to identify the correlation: the two decades when we had the highest wages-to-GDP ratio – the 1960s and 1970s – are also the two decades with the highest trade union density level and the highest amount of days lost to industrial disputes. It's obvious that trade union membership and militancy leads to higher incomes and better conditions at work.

If this is the case, why does trade union membership continue to decline? The answer to this is complex but no doubt the 'social partnership' era played its part. Strikes tend to increase not only wages, but also trade union membership and activity; social partnership had the dual effect of discouraging industrial action and shifting power from the trade union base to the leadership.

Most trade unionists are familiar

ready to RUMBLE!

Total days lost to industrial disputes 1960-2014



Trade union density levels 1960-2014 (%)



Wages as share of GDP 1960-2014 (% of GDP)



with the concept of the freeloader: someone who is happy to accept the wage increases, annual leave, redundancy agreements and all of the other benefits achieved by trade unions, without contributing to the costs. When a strike is called, however, they can no longer operate as freeloaders. They have to make a choice. Do they join their union, and the battle for improved conditions for everyone, or do they scab and pass the pickets?

Camaraderie

When workers join a picket line, there is a sense of camaraderie that was manifest during the Tesco dispute. Workers who had never socialised together before went on strike for the very first time and ended up spending 11 days together on the picket lines – time spent away from management and getting to know one another.

Within a matter of weeks those workers had a new-found trust in their union and their place within their union, and in some instances were organising social events together. It was an educational experience, and not only for the workers.

For a generation of workers and customers, this was the first strike they'd ever encountered. And the support was tremendous, not only from customers refusing to pass the pickets – 80% of customers at striking stores didn't pass – but also from the 30% of customers in non-striking stores who refused to spend their money with the company while it

was in dispute with the union.

Principal reasons workers in Ireland won't take action include the belief they cannot afford to strike and worries over the impact the strike will have on their employment in the future.

Employers and governments know how damaging industrial action can be and they adapt to minimise the impact, going so far as to ensure that workers cannot take action in the first place.

Since 2008, we have seen extraordinary growth in precarious part-time contracts. Workers are now receiving 10-hour or 15-hour contracts, sometimes less, even if they regularly work 35 hours each week. Employers argue that these contracts are about 'flexibility'. However, 85% of Dunnes Stores workers have reported that allocation of hours is being used as a mechanism of control.

With such low hour contracts, an employer can reduce a worker's hours to the bare minimum as a punishment for failing to

toe the line. With most retail workers on between €10-€13 per hour, an employer can reduce a worker's earnings from €350 per week to €150 per week at the drop of a hat, and there's nothing illegal in it.

This tactic was deployed by Dunnes Stores immediately after its workers went on strike against precarious employment practices on 2nd April 2015.

Also, an employer can spread a worker's 10 or 15 hours per week over four or five days thereby denying access to supplementary social welfare such as Family Income Supplement, or part-time social welfare, which many low-paid workers depend on. Effectively, an employer has the capacity to reduce a worker's income to a level so low that they cannot feed or clothe their family.

Tactic

Another tactic employed by Dunnes Stores after the strike was to change workers' shift patterns around so they had difficulty manag-

ing childcare and other family responsibilities. They also decided not to renew contracts for any workers who took part in the strike but had less than 12 months' service – and did so without impunity because unfair dismissal does not apply in this case.

If strike action is the most powerful and necessary tool in achieving the best possible pay and conditions at work, then we need to examine why workers are so reluctant to participate in industrial action in recent years, and address those issues.

Firstly, and obviously, we need to ensure workers have security of incomes and guaranteed working hours. Mandate Trade Union has been negotiating 'banded-hours contracts' in recent years – contracts ensuring that workers receive a minimum number of hours per week.

Secondly, we need to ensure that when a worker decides to

'struggle' and take industrial action, the financial impact is minimised. This was seen during the Tesco dispute (and others including Greyhound, for example) when the ICTU established a strike fund to which all unions would contribute in order to keep the workers out as long as necessary.

Still, what's really needed is a more solid commitment to permanently increase strike fund contributions and strike pay if we are to encourage workers to take action.

Incidentally, it is increased competition across almost all markets – retail in particular – that makes every company vulnerable to industrial action, as customers can move their spending elsewhere and may not return very easily.

Many companies spend millions of euro establishing a brand, promoting that brand and protecting it from negative media and social media attention. We must use this vulnerability to our advantage, both during disputes and as a tool for organising workers.

Onslaught

When the economic crisis hit in 2008 and the onslaught of austerity came, arguably one of the biggest challenges facing workers was the inability to strike back. This was a result of decades of relative inactivity on the industrial front from trade unions. Put simply, many workers didn't have any experience of, or know how to take effective strike action.

During the same period, ICTU, along with most other civil society groups, regularly put forward alternative economic proposals that would have protected living standards and conditions at work. They were, for the most part, ignored by successive governments. Had we a strong, vibrant and effective trade union movement to back such proposals with the threat of collective action, it would have been difficult for governments to ignore us.

Without question, industrial action and the threat of action increases trade union activity. That increased activity tends to swell union membership levels, which – in turn – generates greater incomes and better conditions at work.

While trade unions must take account of changes to the industrial environment, including the anti-union tactics of many employers, legislative restrictions, online activity, the 'gig economy', indebtedness as a form of discipline, and a whole range of challenges, they must be brave in their approach to industrial action. They must prepare for an era of increased strikes and the negative media attention that that will attract.

If workers are to win a larger share of the profits they generate, then we have to ensure workers are given the tools and the capacity to take action when necessary. Alternatively, unions and workers can face the prospect of continued low pay and deteriorating conditions of employment, with a corresponding decrease in trade union membership levels.

Dare to struggle, dare to win.

I've had enough of Pharaoh's c**p, let's down tools!

VALLEY OF THE KINGS
1,300BC



Illustration: QuickReflexAndKits (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Failed by a Republic of Exclusion



Dr Rory Hearne
Maynooth University

THE latest figures from the Department of Housing show there are now 3,048 children (and their 1,442 families) homeless in Ireland. That is a 282% increase on the number of children homeless in August 2014 (when there were 385 families and 796 children homeless).

This level of increase in homelessness shows the complete failure of current policies to address the crisis. It is disgraceful and a shame on this government, previous governments and the entire nation that we are destroying the dignity of our most vulnerable citizens – our children – by leaving them without their most basic of needs, and fundamental human right, a secure home.

A recent report I co-authored with Dr Mary Murphy, entitled *Investing in the Right to a Home: Social Housing, HAPs and HUBS*, shows the reality of the difficult conditions faced by families in emergency homeless accommodation, including the new 'Family Hubs'. Using a human rights and capability framework we find these hotels and hubs restrict the capacity of the homeless families to live normal family lives and negatively affect their parenting, child development, education, and employment, with devastating impacts on family and child well-being.

That report reveals the structural causes of the crisis of family homelessness in Ireland as resulting from the shift away from local authorities directly building social housing to neoliberal policies that have marketised, privatised and financialised the delivery of both social and private housing.

These have shifted housing towards being a speculative commodity rather than a basic need and human right. Austerity dealt social housing

a fatal blow – as the state went from building more than 7,000 local authority housing units in 1975 to just 65 in 2015. Delivery of social housing was shifted primarily to the private rental market in 2014 with the introduction of the Housing Assistance Payment – and then cemented in the Government's 2016 housing plan *Rebuilding Ireland* – where private rental housing is to provide 65% of planned new social housing.

In contrast, just 15% (21,300) of the 134,000 'new' social housing outlined in *Rebuilding Ireland* are new builds by local authorities and housing associations.

From a cost perspective, direct build social housing presents a far greater return than the private rental HAP approach for state investment. Our cost-benefit analysis shows that over a 30-year time frame, HAP will be €23.8bn more expensive than local authority provision. This €23.8bn could have funded the building of 132,495 permanent social housing units (at a cost of €180,000 per unit) over this period.

State subsidies

If the approach in *Rebuilding Ireland* continues there could be in excess of 120,000 households in receipt of various state subsidies in the private rental sector by 2021, requiring state spending of approximately €1bn a year, and most of which will be going to private landlords, including REITs and global investment funds.

Providing these 120,000 social housing units through HAP will be €32.9bn more expensive than local authority provision over a 30-year period.

The headline social housing figures disguise the reality of an extremely low level of planned new-build social housing and the over-dependence on the private market to provide social housing.

Not only are such targets insufficient but they are also unlikely to be met because of the over-reliance on the private market.

In 2017, on the basis of Q1 construction figures of 235 new-build so-



cial housing units, it suggests the state will build around 1,000 units in 2017 – which is just a third of the *Rebuilding Ireland* target.

The resulting low level of social housing coming through in the coming years is deeply worrying and indicates a lack of institutional and political will that ensures positive targets and commitments become a reality and not just empty promises and rhetoric.

For example, in the four Dublin local authorities, there are just 1,000 units on site and a further 1,900 at various stages of procurement/planning. Over the coming three years that's under 3,000 new-build units which won't even house all those who will become homeless and those currently in emergency accommodation.

With waiting lists of 40,000 in the Greater Dublin area, it will be 40 years before the state houses those on the housing lists there.

At the core of the crisis is the absence of the right to housing for Irish citizens. The 2015 Constitutional Convention recommended that the right to housing should be enumerated in the Constitution. A human rights approach to housing would lead to practical policy changes – for example, the requirement of the state to provide access to adequate and secure housing for all citizens, and it would provide an over-arching philosophical and value frame to guide housing policy to ensure that the right to housing is prioritised over other interests – such as property investors' profits.

This housing crisis will continue



Picture: ChrisRubberDragon (CC BY-SA 2.0)

for many years to come. Given the ongoing mortgage arrears crisis, the private rental crisis, and the lack of private supply, HAP, even with reconfiguration, is unlikely to provide a stable and secure home for these families. Families in hubs will remain

inadequately housed and exposed to institutionalisation. Hidden away, the homeless in 'Family Hubs' may be forgotten and ignored.

We are destroying the lives and dignity of thousands of our most vulnerable citizens – children, in partic-

With lists in at 40, current will years they



Picture: Sally Bateman (CC BY-SA 4.0)

ular. This Republic has failed these families. For these homeless children and their families this is a Republic of exclusion.

The housing crisis, which is an emergency, and should be declared officially as such, has grown to affect a very large proportion of society and jeopardises our economy. Only a radical change in direction will solve the crisis for our citizens.

Naomi Klein writes in *Disaster Capitalism* about the way in which a crisis, such as an economic crisis, or natural disaster, opens up opportunities for new ideas that were before considered impossibilities, unnecessary or unworkable. Thus, within a crisis is the opportunity to reshape society and economy in a radically different way.

Seized by vultures

She highlights that in recent decades it has been the corporate elite that have profited from such crises. And so too in Ireland we have seen it with the economic and property crash and bailout – the crisis was seized as an opportunity by vultures and property investors to buy up distressed loans, land and property and reap huge profits from rising land, house prices and rents – as the crisis continues their profits increase.

These financial investors also see the private rental sector as the key area for investment growth. Thus they have pushed for the continued support of this 'profitable' sector (and the consequent undermining of affordable housing provision).

A succession of Irish governments over the crisis took the opportunity

to push through an even deeper process of undermining, marketising and privatisation of social housing – exemplified most strongly in the savage decimation of the local authority housing budgets in austerity, and then implemented in Rebuilding Ireland with its almost complete reliance on the private market for providing social housing and various schemes orientated at the private sector to make building 'profitable' for them.

But the crisis has not been solved. It is still getting worse and is likely to continue to do so in the coming months and years as the private sector will not provide affordable housing, the state is building an inadequate level of social housing and the state will not intervene to control rents and remove the ability to evict by putting tenants' rights to housing before landlords' and investors' profits.

But it is not inevitable that the interests of the 'property industry complex' of finance, investor and real estate landlord will determine the outcome of the crisis – and continue the transformation of our housing system towards greater commodification, unaffordability and social exclusion.

Alternative narratives

The space is open, at least temporarily, for alternative 'narratives' and ideas based around the state building affordable and social housing, putting a right to housing first before investor and property interests, to challenge the dominant neoliberal housing paradigm.

An alternative 'right to housing' plan would include the state moving away from the failed private market and speculative investment approach to housing and implement an emergency housing plan based on four key aspects:

1. Put the right to housing as the guiding policy objective and hold a referendum to insert the right to housing in the constitution.

2. Change the Private Tenancy Act to provide tenant security from eviction.

3. Increase state funding for housing to €2bn a year to provide a state lead housing programme building of 30,000 social and affordable homes per annum (combining local authority construction of 10,000 houses and various housing co-ops, a new housing agency, and associations building 20,000 affordable rental and purchase homes).

4. Within this we should redirect the use of state owned land in for emergency social and affordable state-lead house building rather than marketing and privatising it to developers in various Public Private Partnerships and 'Lands Initiatives'.

Given the extent of the crisis, and the failure of the establishment to respond adequately, it is possible if enough public and political pressure is exerted, to force a change of path to deliver the right to housing for all.

A unifying campaign around the right to housing for all is essential in order to coordinate the diverse groups currently active in housing and reach out to involve the much, much larger numbers of people that are required if we are to create a housing movement that has the power to bring about transformative change.

ANALYSIS

Houses... too few being built to meet our needs

By Tom Healy
NERI

SIX months ago the NERI published a working paper entitled *Ireland's Housing Emergency: Time for a Game Changer*. Regrettably, but not surprisingly, the depth and scale of the housing emergency has increased over the summer months.

While much publicity has focussed on homelessness (as measured by families in temporary accommodation), another crisis is developing in relation to affordability for those renting as well as for those seeking to buy. This has major long-term consequences for wage-bargaining, spatial planning and community development.

Left to itself, the market regulates supply and demand through price. If there is a blockage on the supply side associated with excess demand (which there is) then prices goes up in the form of rents or average asking prices.

However, in the concrete conditions of post-crash and debt-laden construction in Ireland supply is not responding as quickly as it needs to. Moreover, there is some evidence of land-hoarding for speculative gain which is not helping either.

This Government, including the previous one, is seeking to come to terms with this crisis through a number of initiatives and continuing policy developments. However, the scale of the crisis is not matched by the policy response to date.

Targets are vaguely set, timelines missed, earlier announcements recycled into new ones and 'plans' presented as announcements.

Matters are not helped by the lack of reliable and timely data on new housing output. For what it is worth, the most up-to-date estimates of 'new housing output' (read numbers of Electricity Supply Board connections including reconnections of already built but vacant property over two years) show a very, very slow recovery in residential housing output.

Completions proxied by ESB connections is likely to reach 19,000 in 2017 going by trends in the first half

of this year. This is at least 10,000 below what it should be just to meet demographic change, never mind the build-up in unmet demand over recent years.

The projected output proxied by ESB connections this year is still well below what it was in 2009 when the construction industry had already begun to severely implode and the country was in a deep recession.

Clearly, no government can solve this crisis in the space of one or two years. However, there has been a marked lack of concrete and specific action on a sufficient scale to begin to shift the problem. At the core of this situation is the lack of ambition and courage in addressing particular sacred cows such as:

- The role of NAMA;
- Ownership of land especially that which is vacant;

● The association between land hoarding and housing cost (a point completely overlooked by those advocating VAT tax cuts for developers);

● The role of local authorities and other public agencies in providing housing.

At this point, the help-to-buy tax relief scheme announced in Budget 2017 has been widely discredited and proven to be part of the problem rather than a partial answer.

There are at least two positive signs that all is not bleak. These are:

● A media report of consideration of a 'semi-state company' to build and deliver houses. (*Has someone been reading the recent NERI research paper?*)

● Continuing reference to 'cost-rental' as part of an overall solution to the housing crisis.

Now, put these two points together and fast-track money, legislation and other provisions and we might begin to see faster progress. The 'European Cost Rental Model' – advocated in a NERI research paper last March – would not, if it were implemented in full over a number of years, solve all of the housing crisis. However, it could be a 'game-changer' over time, for the following

six reasons:

1. It would deliver a significant number of quality housing units rather than rely almost exclusively on the private sector.

2. It would fund itself in the medium-term by means of full economic cost rents.

3. It would put downward pressure on rents (or at least constrain further increases) by building, delivering and renting just below average private commercial levels (removing the profit margin of 10% plus on most developments).

4. It would provide new options and choices by way of mixed-community, high-quality, affordable rented accommodation for young couples, singles, the elderly, migrant workers, etc.

5. It would begin to put an end to ghetto-isation of social housing by integrating different groups into a single affordable housing strategy.

6. It would provide Local Authorities with the means to lease out housing for social purposes from the proposed Housing Company of Ireland.

All of this would take time and would involve some significant upfront exchequer outlays in the period leading up to the establishment of the Housing Company of Ireland. Such initial investments could not come out of 'net fiscal space'. Some short-term flexibility on 'net fiscal space' would probably have to be negotiated and agreed with the European Commission.

No doubt objections including reasonable ones can be raised. However, if the right to accommodation is seen as a fundamental human right, then society must take the necessary steps to address the acute market failure that lies behind the emerging emergency. Otherwise the crisis will not abate and another lost generation locked into debt or rental crunch will emerge. The social and political consequences of that could be considerable.

Tom Healy is Director of the Nevin Economic Research Institute

“If the right to accommodation is seen as a fundamental human right, then society must take the necessary steps to address the acute market failure that lies behind the emerging emergency. Otherwise the crisis will not abate and another lost generation locked into debt or rental crunch will emerge”

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TESCO MEMBERSHIP SURVEY – THE RESULTS ARE IN...

MANDATE conducted a wide ranging and comprehensive Tesco Membership Survey to ascertain the views of our membership in their employment at Tesco. The response to the survey was truly incredible with excellent engagement and participation from 95% of all Tesco stores.

Many thanks to everyone who took the time to complete the survey as your responses will determine how we collectively and effectively meet the challenges facing us all in this employment. We must respond robustly to Tesco's union busting, failure to engage and aggressive punitive actions against our members and your views will greatly assist us towards that objective.

Check out the survey results as we strive to increase on the 93% of those surveyed who valued their union membership and the 95% of our members surveyed who are committed to supporting the Tesco Workers Together Campaign.

- 1** The survey was completed by more than **95%** of all stores
- 2** Average length of service is **11.2 years**
- 3** Almost **20%** of all workers say they have not been provided with a contract of employment
- 4** More than **90%** of Tesco workers want to move all staff to the highest Tesco pay scale (top point € 14.89)
- 5** Percentage of workers on each point of the existing pay scales (excluding night worker premium or team leader adjustment):




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

Venue: Mandate Training Centre Distillery Road Dublin 3
Date: 13th/14th/15th November 2017 **Time:** 9am – 5pm

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 to secure your place

Rates of Pay	Percentage
Post 2006 Point 1 - €10.15	9%
Post 2006 Point 2 - €10.55	6%
Post 2006 Point 3 - €12.45	44%
Retail Security Officer (RSO) - €13.55	2%
Pre 2006 10-Year Service Rate - €14.89	25%
Other	14%

- 6** **34%** of all Tesco workers say they didn't know that the Banded Hours Agreement was negotiated by Mandate Trade Union
- 7** **43%** of Tesco workers who have been working above their hourly band threshold have not requested a change in their band
- 8** Those surveyed said they worked the following patterns:

Hours pattern	Percentage
I work set days and set hours	29%
I work set hours but not set days	19%
I work set days but not set hours	3%
I work neither set days nor set hours	49%

- 9** More than **33%** of workers want to move to a higher band
- 10** Tesco workers surveyed said they worked in the following bands:

Band	Percentage
Less than 20 (voluntarily)	3%
20-25	21%
25-30	15%
30-35	24%
35+	18%
Full Time	16%
Other	3%

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

11 **35%** of workers say that hours are not allocated to existing staff despite this being an agreement between Mandate and Tesco

12 Despite Tesco agreeing to advertise jobs internally in the first instance, **32%** said the company is not abiding by this agreement

13 **35%** said they are not receiving their roster as per union and company agreement (one week for day workers and four weeks for night workers)

14 More than **87%** said they believed more notice of their roster would lead to an improvement in their work-life balance

15 **90%** said better rostering would enable them to organise doctors, dentists, etc on their own time

16 **72%** of workers are not a member of the Tesco Ireland Pension Plan

17 A pay increase and pay equality was ranked as the most important item for Tesco workers, closely followed by improvements in work-life balance and an increase in hours and more full time jobs

18 Almost **70%** of all workers did not agree that the company treated them with dignity and respect in the workplace

19 **93%** said they valued their Mandate membership

20 **95%** said they are willing to engage and support the Tesco Workers Together campaign to enhance and defend T&Cs.



LABOUR COURT

Contracted hours victory for Dublin Tesco worker

A MANDATE member employed by Tesco on the Northside of Dublin has been successful in a recent claim over contracted working hours. She claimed that she should be issued with a 39-hour contract because she had worked 39 hours consistently over a period of 16 weeks.

Tesco and Mandate had agreed in 2006 that if members of staff worked hours in excess of their bands for 16 weeks consistently they would be issued with a contract that reflected the work that they did.



Brendan O'Hanlon

While welcoming the decision, Divisional Organiser Brendan O'Hanlon said it was "alarming" that it had been necessary to have to go to the Labour Court to get the retailer to observe an issue that had been dealt with clearly in an agreement between both parties.

He continued: "The bigger issue here is about non-compliance with agreements and the serious implications that this will have for members. Over the course of the recent industrial dispute, Mandate has been very clear that the pre-1996 issue is only a small aspect of a bigger agenda with Tesco.

"Non-compliance with agreements is now becoming commonplace, examples of which include the failure to attend the Labour Court and not deducting union subs."



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. Check out 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 to confirm your place

We will fight tooth and nail for our members at Tesco

TESCO is currently engaged in a pre-meditated and totally unacceptable attack on your union, on your right to be a member of Mandate. They are knowingly and provocatively ignoring the industrial relations mechanisms for resolving industrial disputes in the Republic of Ireland and are intent on damaging long-standing relations with your union.

Tesco has for 18 months obstructed good industrial relations and aggressively waged a war of attrition with your union. They have adopted devious tactics akin to many US retailers who engage in deliberate and vicious "union-busting" tactics to undermine unions that represent the best interests of workers.

Tesco's intention is to undermine your union at every opportunity and to prevaricate and be obstructive towards the best intentions of your union. They have devised a devious plan for non-engagement with Man-

MANDATE COMMENT

date which at this stage is tantamount to a declaration of industrial war.

Concerted attack

Never before in the history of Mandate's dealings with Tesco have we witnessed such a concerted and determined attack on your union. As sure as night follows day, if Tesco get their way in undermining Mandate then they will be coming after your terms and conditions next.

We are in a constant struggle to maintain and improve your terms and conditions and Tesco is only con-

cerned with improving profits and smashing your union in the process.

Many of these British employers are hiring aggressive US-style "union-busting" consultants at extortionate rates of pay to persuade workers against joining trade unions. Tesco has now clearly initiated a union-busting campaign against Mandate, entitled "Project Black", that is insidious in nature and will have devastating consequences further down the line for workers – but only if it's successful.

We must ensure Project Black is

defeated. The underhand tactics employed in the dark and shadowy world of union busting is proving increasingly attractive to retail employers in the UK and now, through the disgraceful actions of Tesco, it has finally arrived in the Republic of Ireland retail sector.

Direct threat

Collectively, and in complete solidarity with all Tesco workers, we all must stand against the direct threat of Tesco's union busting. Your terms and conditions, despite what Tesco might say, are under direct threat and your union will not stand idly by while Tesco attempts to dismantle

decades of hard fought and won terms and conditions of service. We are collectively now engaged in a battle, a war of attrition, not of our making. Project Black is now exposed for what it is – union busting and anti-worker.

We proudly declare our intention to fight tooth and nail to defend every single member of our union in Tesco – both current and future members. We realise your value and commitment to this company as Mandate members even if Tesco don't.

Mandate members built this company up to where it stands today as one of the leading retailers in Ireland. Without your hard work and Mandate's long association and collaborative working with Tesco, the retailer would not be as successful in the Republic of Ireland as it has been.

Tesco senior management would do well to remember that fact before it's too late.

“ We proudly declare our intention to fight tooth and nail to defend every single member of our union in Tesco. We realise your value and commitment to this company as Mandate members even if Tesco don't ”

DO YOU HAVE A MANDATE-THEMED STORY OR PIC? Email us at 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

Venue: Mandate Training Centre, Distillery Road, Dublin 3

Date: 6th/7th/8th November 2017 **Time:** 9am – 5pm

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



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

Thanks for your solidarity and support



MANDATE wishes to acknowledge and sincerely thank the overwhelming solidarity shown by the wider trade union movement during the recent Tesco dispute.

Unions from both the public and the private sectors delivered significant and very much appreciated online and physical support, including significant financial backing.

This clearly signals the appreciation for the issues at stake by Irish trade unions and indeed, the wider trade union movement around the world.

Mandate Assistant General Secretary Gerry Light said: "On behalf of all the Tesco workers I want to thank all trade unions for their support during the dispute, and also for their promise to continue supporting the Tesco workers in the future."

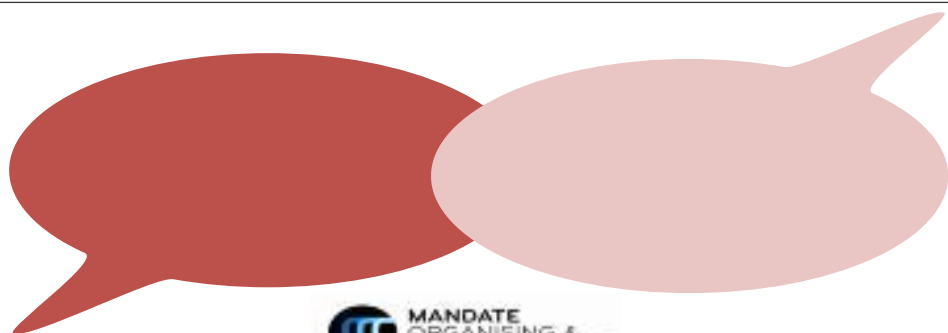
He continued: "We also want to thank all of the

unions who wrote to their members explaining the disgraceful attitude of Tesco Ireland towards Mandate and our members. This type of cross-union solidarity is the best way to tackle multinational companies like Tesco who think they can bully their longest serving workers in Ireland.

"The wider trade union movement is clearly interested in what's happening at Tesco and have expressed a determination to collectively, if required, stand shoulder to shoulder alongside Mandate in our ongoing struggle with this increasingly anti-union company," added Mr Light.

He concluded: "We salute each and every fraternal union, their members, their union executives, all union General Secretaries and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions for their invaluable solidarity and support. We shall overcome!"

Picture: OEA (CC BY 2.0)



Learn English with Mandate for free!

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:
Mandate's Training Centre
 on **01-8369699**

Places are limited and are allocated on first come, first served basis



Information Technology Skills QQI Level 5

What you'll learn...

- **Word Processing: Document Formatting, Graphics, Mail Merge**
- **Create documents applying a range of processing features**
 - **Use proofing tools such as spell-check, thesaurus & search/replace**
 - **Learn File Management**
- **Use Windows Explorer**
- **Open, edit, and print a document**
 - **Enter, edit and sort data**
 - **Insert and delete rows and columns in a worksheet**
- **Enter formulae**
- **Microsoft Outlook - send and receive emails.**
 - **Excel - create spreadsheets**
 - **PowerPoint presentations**

Venue: Mandate Training Centre, Distillery Road, Dublin 3

Date: Tuesday 16th January – Tuesday 17th April 2018

Time: 6.30pm – 9.30pm

Cost: Free of Charge **Eligibility:** Mandate members

If you are interested in taking this course in 2018, contact Mandate Training Centre on **01-8369699** before December 11th, 2017 by email mndateotc@mandate.ie to secure your place

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



Stevie Nolan

ONCE again Ireland finds itself at the centre of British politics, not just over Brexit and the border but also the grubby deal done between the Tories and a party, some of whose senior members believe that the pyramids were built last week and that dinosaur bones are a hoax perpetuated by atheists and lefties.

Others have suggested that the DUP's support for Brexit has done more for Irish unity than 40 years of conflict, as the border is now front and central to British politics and discussions about Irish unity are a topic of mainstream political discourse.

Sinn Féin have at the same time shifted from a historical anti-EU stance to a EU critical 'remain and reform' position, or as a friend put it to me recently, "We'll win freedom from Britain first, then worry about the EU."

Market failure

It is clear that Brexit does hold the potential to undermine the Good Friday Agreement. There are currently 150-plus areas of collaboration between the north and south in education, health, transport, and agriculture and there are dozens of cross-border peace projects and local networks that could be affected.

There are also the very real changes that have taken place on the border itself - particularly the complete removal of the British military infrastructure of checkpoints and watchtowers. The invisibility of the border is in itself a crucial element of the peace process and for many there is a deep emotional attachment to the permeability of what many see as an illegitimate border to begin with.

Recently a DUP minister unhappy at the absence of any marker indicating that you were now entering a different jurisdiction had erected a 'Welcome to Northern Ireland' sign. Within hours someone had taken an angle grinder to it.

As regards the actual negotiations, the only achievement thus far is a broad agreement around maintaining the bilateral Common Travel Area between the Republic of Ireland and the UK. On the wider discussion, the EU has stated that it is eager to deal



Brexit and the Irish border

with the 'Irish question' before going into the terms of Brexit. The only problem is that the 'Irish question' is entirely reliant upon the terms of Brexit, two of which are whether the UK will stay inside the Single Market and the Customs Union.

One possibility flagged early on was the shifting of the border of the EU Customs Union to the Irish Sea and the tightening of frontier controls at Belfast and Dublin. This solution

was suggested by the Irish government earlier in the year but was dismissed by Northern Ireland's unionists who will never agree an option that creates a border between one part of the United Kingdom and another.

The one that forms the basis of the current Irish government's position is that UK has to commit long-term to remaining in the Customs Union but Britain has stated that it wants to end

its membership of Europe's Customs Union. In her speech last week in Italy, British PM Teresa May suggested that Britain could stay in a Customs Union for a transitional period after which there should be no new infrastructure or personnel deployed along the border.

EU Chief Negotiator Michel Barnier has already laughed at the absurdity of the suggestion, which seems to suggest that with no Irish border

controls, goods can enter Belfast, be transported south and exported into Europe tariff-free.

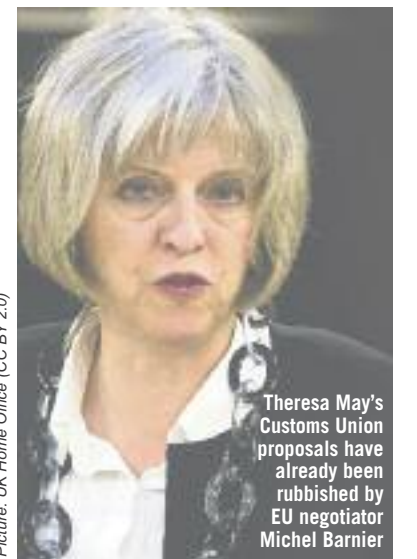
The only solution offered so far are imaginary high-tech solutions that will track goods, people and cattle as they move backwards and forwards at 300 crossing points on a border that meanders for three hundred miles across the countryside.

Meanwhile, Sinn Féin has asked for special status for the North, a call echoed in part by Fianna Fail who are suggesting 'Special Economic Zone' status for the North and border counties.

When the EU rejects the call for the North to be granted special status and imposes restrictions on the border, where does that leave Sinn Féin's strategy of pursuing a united Ireland within the EU?

Will they then revert back to their anti-EU position and support an Irish exit? Which at the moment is unlikely given the overwhelming support of Irish people for the EU (70%).

This, therefore, leaves only one possibility - that the UK commits to staying in a Customs Union not just for a transitional period but for the long term. However, such a move is unpalatable for the Conservatives



Picture: UK Home Office (CC BY 2.0)

Theresa May's Customs Union proposals have already been rubbished by EU negotiator Michel Barnier

and Labour as it would preclude UK from making its own independent trade agreements with the UK's five largest export markets outside the EU (the US, China, Japan, Australia and the Gulf states).

So it seems we're back again to a hard border, but if the UK refuses to impose it, it will be down to the EU to insist that the Irish government protects the external border of the EU.

Dr Stevie Nolan is co-director at Trademark



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SHOP STEWARDS TRAINING PROGRAMME 2017

Course Title	Course Dates	Duration	Location	Closing date
Trade Union Representation QQI Level 5	November 6/7/8	3 days	OTC Dublin	25/09/2017
Union Representative Advanced Senior	November 13/14/15	3 days	OTC Dublin	02/10/2017
Union Representative Introductory	November 20/21/22	3 days	OTC Dublin	09/10/2017

If you are interested in attending any of these courses, please contact your Mandate Union Official or Mandate Organising & Training Centre on 01-8369699.
OTC = Mandate Organising & Training Centre. Please note venue dates may vary.



LEFT: Union Representative Introductory Shop Steward Training, 18th-20th September 2017 Mandate Training and Organising Centre, Distillery Rd, Dublin 3. Pictured (not in order) are: Emma Smith, Sinead Singleton, Jennifer O'Neill, Katie McEvoy, John Murphy, Tara Noonan, Joshua Gribben, James Rabbitte, Niamh Faulkner, Sara Murphy, Philomena Lyster, Ursula Dunne, Catherine Murphy, Martin Mahony and Keith Pollard

BELOW: Trade Union Representation QQI Level 5, 11th-13th September 2017, at the Clayton Hotel, Galway. Pictured are: Maureen O'Donovan, Consilia Gillespie, Darren Downing, Mark Kavanagh, Shane Brennan, Valerie Kelly, Maureen Walsh and Yvonne Grey



LEFT: Members who took part in the IT Level 5 Evening Training course held at the Mandate Training Centre in September



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.

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.

- This course helps you to improve your Irish language communications skills.
- 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



Debts, inequality and industrial action

FIG 1 Union density



Source: UCDDUES; CSO QNHS

Teasing out the evidence from the data

By Ed Teller

IS THERE a link between declining union power, increasing household debt and inequality in society? Well, statistics would certainly suggest there is...

The declining power of unions...

Although power can be measured in many ways, union density and industrial action are strong indications of union power in society and both have been declining since the early 1980s.

FIG 1 shows union density peaking at over 60% of the workforce around 1980 and then declining year on year to just over half that at 32%-34% today.

Using the CSO's series of days lost [FIG 2], workers involved [FIG 3] and number of firms measurement [FIG 4] going back to 1985, we can just about see that on all measurements that industrial action has been declining from the mid-1980s to the present day with a slight peak in 2009 due to public sector action. We will again see a peak early 2017 with the updating of the series.

However, the trend is clear – worker militancy and union power are in decline.

Rising household debt...

It is well documented that household debt, most significantly mortgages, has been on the increase in Ireland for some time – most markedly from the mid-1990s on.

FIGS 5 and 6 demonstrate this – firstly, in money lent and, secondly, in debt to disposable income. But both clearly show the rise.

Rising inequality...

While the top 1% average income has gone four-fold, and the top 10% significantly, the average income has not grown at the same rate and largely stagnated at the same time that house prices were rocketing [see FIG 7]. Obviously if average incomes stagnated in the 2000s and house prices increased, then household debt will climb as shown above.

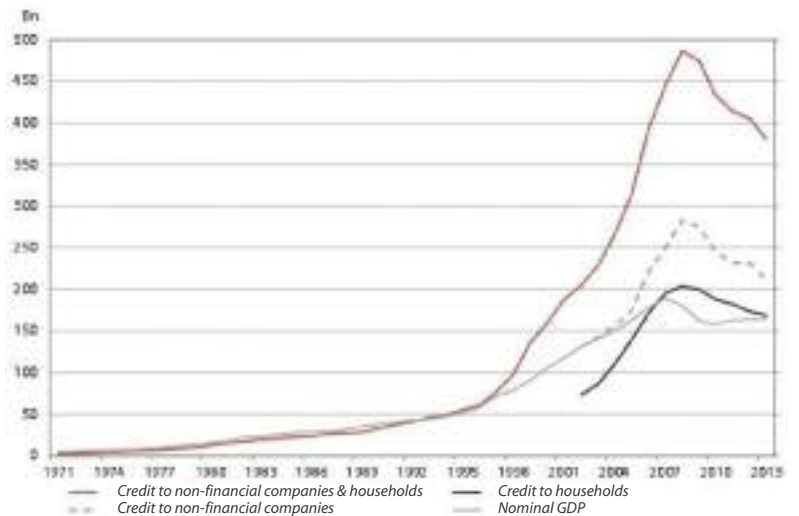
Why we need to strengthen the trade union movement...

Trade unions remain the most tangible and effective way to reduce inequality. Unionised workplaces tend to have fairer, more transparent and more equitable pay models which deliver pay increases year on year for workers above inflation.

They redistribute wealth from the surplus value created by workers that would go to profits (or dividends, executive pay) to workers' wages.

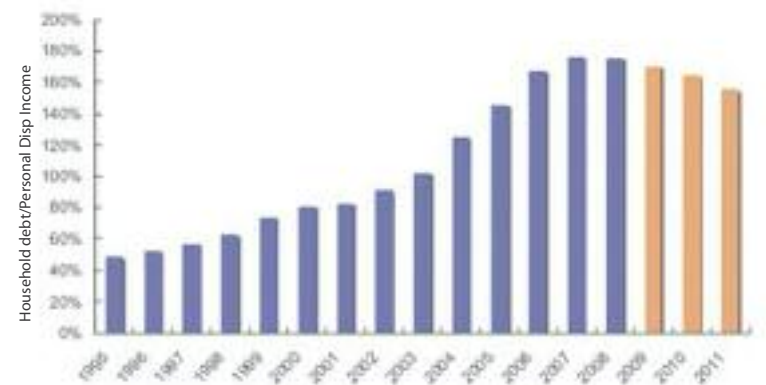
However, as unions have weak-

FIG 5 Irish households and corporate debt*



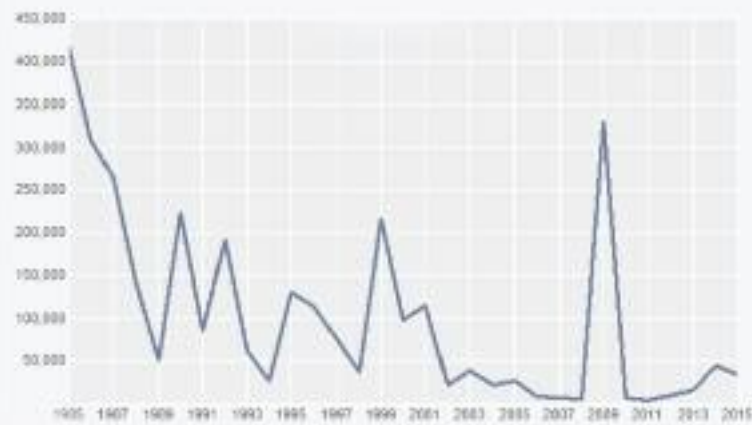
*We have adjusted non-financial corporate debt data for rising liabilities relating to the multinational sector. Source: CSO

FIG 6 Household debt as a % of disposable income has peaked



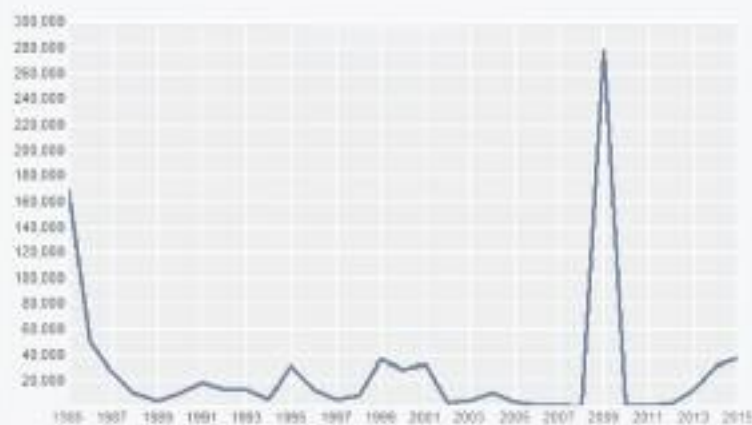
Source: Central Bank of Ireland; Goodbody estimates

FIG 2 Total days lost due to industrial disputes



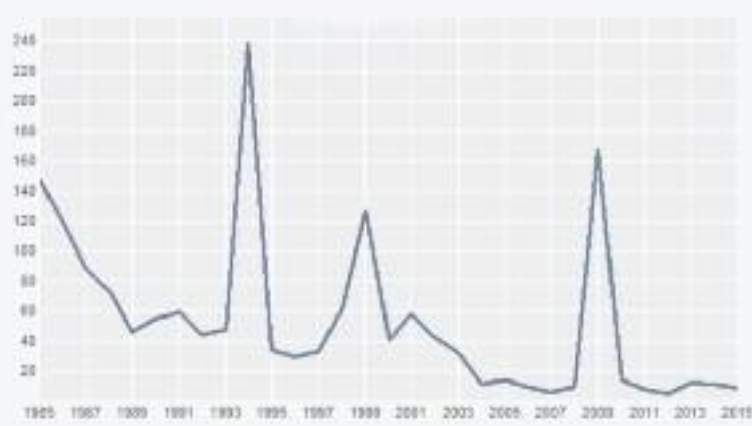
Source: CSO

FIG 3 Number of workers involved in industrial disputes



Source: CSO

FIG 4 Firms involved in industrial disputes (by year)



Source: CSO

FIG 7 Income data

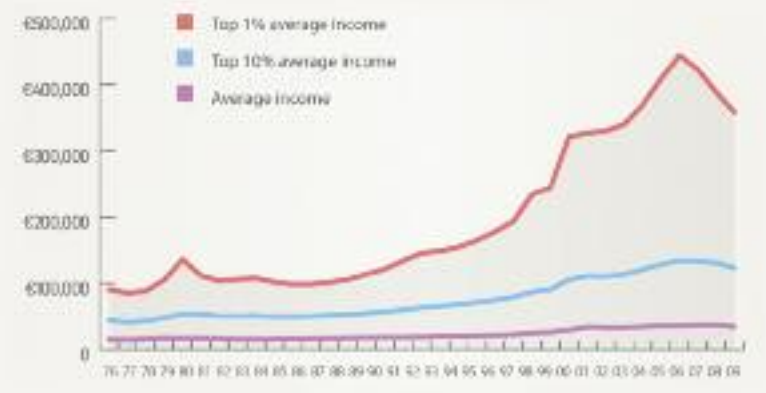


Illustration: Xean Bellar (CC BY 2.0)



ened, and union density across the economy has weakened, all workers have suffered. Low pay has become more prevalent, inequality has grown and contracts have returned to the more 'flexible' model of the 19th century.

There is no one reason for the weakening of the trade union movement and much has been written about the partnership model, the neo-liberal offensive of the last five decades and more recently offshoring, monopolisation and the global labour arbitrage.

But all progressives need to make this link and start rebuilding and strengthening the trade union movement today so we can rebalance power toward workers and really begin to redistribute wealth in society.

THE HOUSING CRISIS

“ The right to housing is the most basic fundamental human right, because without proper housing, the other basic human rights are inaccessible ”

Crisis of Government inaction

THE homelessness crisis was born out of Government inaction. It was a choice. It was man made. Fine Gael have held their conviction that the private sector would provide the most basic human need for housing to every individual in the country. Call it naivety, call it pure stubbornness, but this conviction has caused one of the worst social crises ever seen in Ireland.

At the time of writing, homeless figures have reached 8,270 people in total with the number of homeless children exceeding 3,000 for the first time since records began. People are watching in horror, while the Government stares perplexedly at the private sector which has so obviously failed to deliver on its building promises and on people's fundamental need to be housed. Who knew?

Well everyone knew, except the Government. Those of us on the opposition benches in the Dáil had been calling for a national social and affordable housing programme in anticipation of this crisis, but to deaf ears. However, it is beginning to dawn on the Government the devastating impact their policy decisions are having on vulnerable people and they are beginning to realise they can no longer ignore it.

Unfortunately any decisions made now will be too late for those already in homelessness or threatened by it and will only serve the interests of the Government who will attempt to manipulate statistics in time for a General Election. Already the Government is inflating statistics of new house builds, signalling yet again the continuation of the cycle of bad decision making. How do we end this



Thomas Pringle

cycle? We need a rights-based approach to policy making starting with the recognition of housing as a fundamental human right. But not as a stand-alone right, it should be recognised as part of a larger suite of rights known as socio-economic rights.

Market failure

Socio-economic rights include the right to housing, education, health among many others. My Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Bill, which I introduced twice in the Dáil during my tenure as TD, called for a referendum to include these rights in our Constitution with the right to housing as its central tenet. As Peter McVerry, of the McVerry Trust, said during a launch of my Bill: “The right to housing is the most basic fundamental human right, because without proper housing, the other basic human rights are inaccessible.”

Enshrining these rights in our Constitution will not change things overnight, we have to be reasonable. It may not translate into an Act, a Statutory Instrument or even a circular but it will compel decision makers to vindicate these rights as far as they can, subject to the availability of resources. These rights are recognised in 81 constitutions around the world,

most recently with Canada enshrining the right to housing in their constitution. So it's time we also acted on this.

Fundamental rights are increasingly coming under threat. If you don't feel that way, it's because it's imbedded in subtle changes in government policy. Over successive governments, social housing policy has moved away from the physical provision of housing and on to the provision of housing benefits: money which ends up in the hands of the private sector through landlords and hostels.

It's all part of an encroachment of the commercialisation of many aspects of our lives, most vitally, the public services that provide basic security for people in this country. Constitutional protection would thwart attempts to change policy in the direction of private sector interests over those of the individual, no matter who was in government.

One positive development is that the Government has recently referred the report of the Constitutional Convention on economic, social and cultural rights, to the Finance Committee for consideration with a special focus on housing, even though the report has been sitting on a shelf for more than three years.

I do hope that this is the start of a sincere reflection on the part of the Government of its own policy mistakes and recognition of the State's responsibility to its people to provide for the most basic needs, including housing, inherent to us all.

Thomas Pringle is
Independent TD for Donegal



A home is a basic human right: Peter McVerry, of McVerry Trust, with ESC Rights Initiative's Aiden Lloyd and Donegal TD Thomas Pringle



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Youth: not just the future but the present too!

IN HER opening speech to the conference, UNI World President Ann Selin told delegates how vital it was for them to be pro-active and not reactive as unions had tended to be for the last number of years.

She highlighted for the conference the potential for 90% growth in employment over the next decade in the areas covered by UNI Global Union. This is an extremely promising figure for the entire movement and for us in Mandate. It is also a call to action. We must build a union movement ready for new challenges.

We were then given a detailed presentation on sexual harassment in the workplace. This presentation included a very thought-provoking and powerful video. The room was visibly moved. It is absolutely vital that this issue is brought to light at all conferences as it is startling how few people know how serious an issue sexual harassment in the workplace has become, and how much of it goes unreported for fear of reprisal.

The conference was then briefed on various youth activities throughout UNI Global Union and UNI Europa and how instrumental the Youth Steering group has been in helping recruit more young members into unions, and turn them into fully engaged members and activists.

Following this, conference broke into working groups to consider a number of different topics related to increasing youth activity and encouraging growth in all our unions. Below is a break-down of the key points from each group's report.

Organising:

- We need to work more closely with teachers' unions to begin the conversation about trade unions earlier. This will provide greater recruitment opportunities.

- We need to use the young activists we have to recruit and organise

Mandate President **John O'Donnell** attended the UNI Europa's bi-annual youth conference in Helsinki, Finland, in late September, along with shop stewards Samantha Farrell (Tesco Monaghan) and Eoghan Fox (Marks & Spencer Galway). This is his report...



instead of using officials because they relate better to other young people.

- We need to increase the level of youth involvement on all affiliated unions' executives to a proportionate level.

- Pressure should be put on all affiliates to send more youth delegates to all conferences –not just youth events.

We need to become more pro-ac-

tive on social media with youth-specific campaigns.

Inclusion:

- Affiliated unions should be encouraged to have more young shop stewards in the workplace.

- Young members should be encouraged to run for positions within their respective unions instead of what is currently happening in a num-

ber of unions.

- We should be finding young and enthusiastic members to run and take control of their respective youth committees.

- Young people should also have proper representation on the European Works Councils.

- Affiliates should lobby governments on specific youth issues as well as all the other lobbying we do.

Visibility:

- UNI Youth and all affiliated youth committees have to become more visible and active on their respective websites.

- Create a UNI Youth-specific YouTube channel to allow affiliates to contribute videos of youth activity.

To close the first day of the conference we were briefed on ever-growing casualisation within the labour market. This issue is more prominent than ever in our own sector and if we do not unite to stop it we can wave goodbye to job security.

One of the main messages out of day one was the need to stop saying the youth are the future! While there is truth in the statement, it has often been used as an excuse to dismiss the importance of current youth involvement in trade unions.

Many felt the message can be perceived as a negative one – the youth can wait, they are the future! The sooner we all realise that the youth are here now – working, organising and leading the fight against the race to the bottom – the better.

On the second day, delegates concentrated on the theme of organising with detailed presentations on the rise of the far-right in European and global politics, its threat to the trade union movement and how we can organise effectively to counter it.

The involvement of young activists in campaigns involving building

unions and fighting for decent work was to the fore again, particularly in the Fight for Fifteen campaign in the US, the hugely important struggle in JD Sports in the UK and, closer to home, in our own recent dispute with Tesco.

In all these campaigns and more, young members and youth activists played vitally important roles.

Following an election on the second evening of the conference, I am pleased to announce that Mandate is now represented on the UNI Europa Youth steering group. We will hold this seat for the next two years and this will mean that Mandate will be involved in the growth of the youth and entire trade union movement in Europe for the foreseeable future.

After discussing the issue with Samantha and Eoghan, I firmly believe that we are right to continue sending delegates to these conferences.

Conferences such as these provide a vast amount of knowledge and networking opportunities to help us build the knowledge and confidence of our members. This will help grow our union and build a solid base for the development of a pro-active movement ready for all the challenges facing us.

Mandate has a lot to be proud of. We do not restrict young members to just sitting on youth committees. We currently have four sitting NEC members who fall under the youth criteria. That's 20% of the NEC, which is already meeting the target set by UNI Youth for youth involvement at all levels of our work by 2022.

Mandate is one of the most progressive unions when it comes to youth involvement, but it can't stop there. If we can use some of the ideas generated by this conference, and encourage ICTU and all its affiliated unions to do the same, we will secure a stronger and brighter future for our union and the movement as a whole.

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Courses are delivered by the Education and Training Board in a location near your workplace.

IRELAND BEWARE OF MACRON-ECONOMICS

By Tommy McKearney

THERE was a time when we might have been forgiven for taking a relaxed view of labour-related disputes in France or even smiling at mayhem caused occasionally by angry French farmers. Remember the old guy who demolished a number of McDonald's burger joints because the company was outsourcing beef supplies?

However, this is something we can no longer afford. What's happening at the moment in France, as trade unions struggle with President Macron's attempt to emasculate organised labour, is of real significance to working people here.

Using the now familiar neoliberal-speak, Macron disingenuously describes his attack on working people's rights as reforming labour relations. More transparent was his tendentious boast that his project would "not yield anything, either to the lazy, the cynics or the extremes". Slandering the unemployed and the Left has a familiar ring. While there is no report of him asking to lead a party for people who get up early in the morning, Macron comes from the same stable.

So-called reforms

His so-called reforms will have devastating consequences. Among a programme of measures, he plans to limit unfair dismissal payments, make it easier to implement redundancies, de-unionise small businesses and encourage short-term contracts. Nor are the ramifications of this dispute confined solely to France because Ireland's membership of the European Union ensures that we are not mere spectators.

Speaking recently in his annual state of the union address in Strasbourg, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker endorsed many proposals made earlier by Emmanuel Macron. Specifically, the French president had called for the creation of a new office of a single economics and finance minister for the whole European Union, a proposal that fits into a wider package of changes to the EU outlined by Juncker.

Pushing for ever greater integration, the Commission president also advocated enlarging membership of the euro zone and merging the European Commission and Council presidencies. The Macron and Juncker proposals are



Anti-Macron demonstrators in Paris last month

Picture: Jeanne Menjoulet (CC BY 2.0)

also meeting with approval among powerful EU bureaucrats and more significantly in Germany too. European Central Bank President, Mario Draghi, has long argued for increased economic integration within the euro currency union.

Towards the end of August, German Chancellor Angela Merkel added to this momentum revealing that she would support a "small" common budget for the euro zone along with a regional finance minister to steer economic policies. The recent election may delay her plans but she has a habit of quietly getting her way and this issue is still very much alive.

The point about all this is not just that we in Ireland would lose still more control over our day-to-day affairs but we will also find ourselves forced to adhere to the reactionary, ever harsher neoliberal agenda currently being planned by EU power-brokers.

Not that the relationship we have with the European Union at present is benign for working people. We can't forget the devastating so-

cial and economic impact on Ireland of an EU-imposed €70 billion bailout of capitalism's gambling speculators and bankers.

The current housing crisis is directly attributable to the detrimental effect of EU regulations. Irish governments have been prevented, under the terms of the Stability and Growth Pact, from borrowing the funds needed to launch a major house-building programme.

Yet in spite of the all-too-obvious punishment being inflicted by Brussels, there remains a difficulty to understand support in Ireland for the European Union and its various institutions. Many people conflate the Republic of Ireland's emergence from decades of dire economic hardship with membership of the EU. Moreover, Ireland's place within what was then the EEC certainly gave Dublin

governments a hitherto unknown feeling of separation from Britain. In later decades, foreign multinational companies found Ireland a convenient port of entry to the wider European market and laid the foundations for what came to be known as the Celtic Tiger. Nevertheless, nostalgia should not get in the way of reality. The global economy, and with it the EU, has undergone significant changes since the economic crisis that began with the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008. In order to maintain profits, capitalism is now relentlessly reducing working people's share of the cake. Consequently, every aspect of the social wage (public housing, healthcare, old-age pensions etc) is being cut back.

Misleading stats

Meanwhile the personal wage is also being effectively reduced. Misleading statistics about falling unemployment merely disguise the raft of scams to screw down income through practices such as: bogus self-employment practices, part-time jobs and zero-hour contracts.

Hence the programme being spearheaded by President Emmanuel Macron. While its impact may only be visible in France at the moment, it has EU-wide intent. Employers, speculators and right-wing politicians across the union will use EU regulations as an excuse to ratchet down workers' incomes and break the organised labour movement.

The challenge for working people becomes one of whether this can be prevented by reforming the EU or abandoning the union entirely. In reality, since the enactment of the Maastricht and Lisbon Treaties it is incredibly difficult for a small state such as Ireland to influence or reform the EU. Rationally the option of withdrawal should be considered but done so in a measured and constructive manner. We certainly do

not want or need a discussion corrupted by racism or xenophobia. Nevertheless, we must consider our options. Macron, after all, has his admirers and imitators in Ireland.



Macron: attacks on workers' rights

Picture: Official LeWeb Photos (CC BY 2.0)



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Venue: Mandate Training Centre, Distillery Road, Dublin 3 **Date:** Wednesday January 16th – Wednesday 18th April 2018

Time: 6.30pm – 9.30pm **Cost:** Free of Charge **Eligibility:** Mandate members

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

We need to forge a new 'common sense' in the battle of ideas

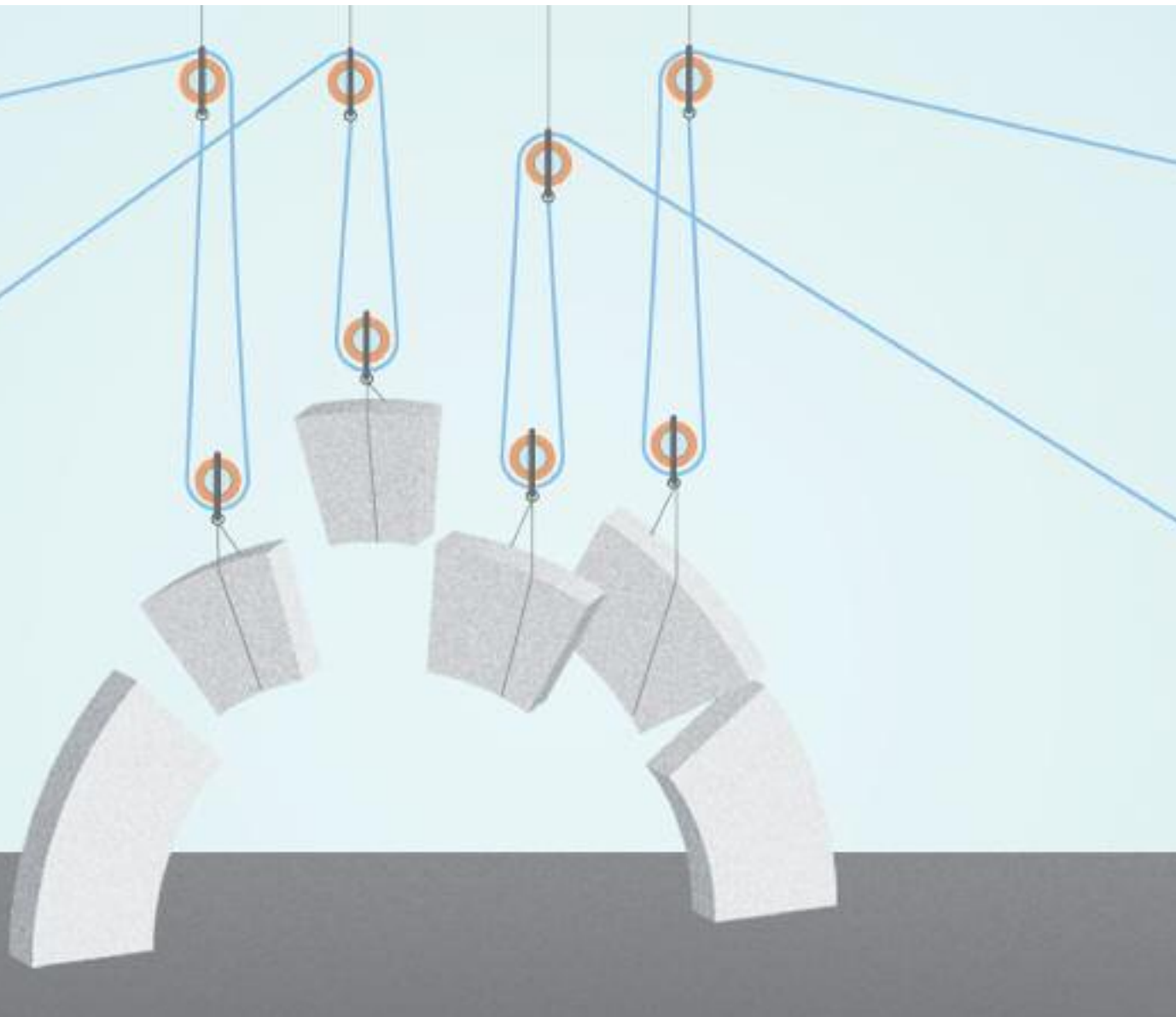


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Conor McCabe

ON September 28th, Regina Doherty appeared before the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Social Protection and proceeded to defend proposed new laws that will further erode the livelihoods of ordinary working people.

The Minister said that she wanted to bring in new measures to ban zero-hour contracts, but that she would also ensure that "work of a casual nature" was exempt from the legislation.

John Brady of Sinn Féin challenged the Minister on the bizarre logic of having a law that allows 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 declared, before going on to berate "the opposition" for being so negative.

The proposed new bill the Minister's department is currently drafting has other flaws in it, including an 18-month lookback provision for calculating any updated work contracts, and bands of hours that are wide enough to fly a Ryanair 737 through them.

That is the intent, of course. The law is not a neutral space, and ministers, along with their officials, will reflect the bias of the class interests they serve and protect. It is currently not within the job description of any

Irish minister to pass employment law that benefits employees.

Now, trade unions and civil society groups can lobby government and hope to influence the outcome, but in general unless there is a directive from Brussels stating otherwise, Irish state departments will protect the interests of business, with nothing but the weakest of sops to fairness and social cohesion.

Fit of giggles

So, we get a minister that will ban zero-hour contracts except in cases where bosses want to use them, and will allow workers to apply for a banded hour contract under terms that would give IBEC a fit of the giggles.

The alternative to the current situation of seeing bad ideas pass into law is quite straightforward: we need to make the laws ourselves. We need to shape our own future. But whereas the solution is quite simple, the pathway to it is fraught with tensions,

contradictions, sidesteps and compromises.

Businesses and bosses are able to get the laws they want because the Irish state is on their side. There is a common class interest at play. Furthermore, these class interests are rarely articulated openly.

There is no meeting room in the bowels of some castle in the midlands where the great and good of Irish society meet and discuss how to screw us over. They don't have to meet up, as they already think the same way and our legal system and taxation measures already reflect that way of thinking.

In other words, their common class interest is simply 'common sense' to them. And you do not need to create a conspiracy when you have common sense to do the job for you.

In order to protect workers we need a form of organisation that is able to take on not only business class interests but state class interests as

well. And to do that we need to develop and articulate our own 'common sense' - not just in terms of ideas but in terms of an organisational framework that will give that common sense genuine transformative power.

It is not possible for trade unions alone to build a more progressive society. Nor is not possible for civil society to do it on its own. And any political project divorced from the two will flounder the moment it is in power.

The bureaucrats will get hold of the politicians and no matter how radical they were going into government, they'll be singing from the 'ah but you have to understand' hymn-sheet within six months.

A better Ireland

The pathway to a better Ireland is to a commonwealth of these three elements: trade unions, civil society, and political representation. The purpose is to make our ideas real, to make our 'common sense' the law - in the workplace, in health and housing, education, and in terms of social, gender, and minority rights. None of that is going to be easy. All of it requires a plan.

In November there will be a Right2Change conference in Dublin. It will be an opportunity to discuss and reflect on these types of ideas.

With the indulgence of the organisers I hope to be able to speak at the event and articulate a bit more on what I mean by a commonwealth and the radical implementation of our 'common sense' as national state policy.

Any commonwealth of a national structure has no space for individual

membership. I do not believe in the indulgence of the personal action. To be quite honest, I do not care one whit for your own expression if that expression stays at the level of the personal.

What is important is how your own personal action articulates itself through some form of collective organisation - be it industrial, civil, or political. There can be no space for individual membership of the type of commonwealth that as envisioned here.

I am not interested in an Irish version of Momentum. I am not saying that there is not a space for such a movement, but if Momentum is set up here, then it joins the commonwealth of industrial and political: it is not the commonwealth itself.

Unless you are organised in your community - and your community can be a community of ideas as much as a spatial community - then you are not civil society.

If we want to take on the Regina Dohertys of this world, and the class they represent and protect, then we need to do it through cogent ideas and organisation.

We are in the midst of a battle between different views of the world that are in part the result of different class interests, one side of which has taken on an institutional form in Ireland through the state apparatus.

At one level this is a battle of ideas - and such a battle is never won through ideas alone. It takes the articulation of a common sense through organisation that protects and defends our class interests and not of those who wish to exploit us to further their own.



Momentum supporters at a rally in London

Picture: Flunk Dooby(CC BY-SA 2.0)



Mock hearing in Lab Court training

PARTICIPANTS from seven Congress-affiliated unions have completed a three-day course on how to take Employment Law (Termination of Employment) cases through the WRC and Labour Court. The course was delivered by former Labour Court Chair Kevin Duffy and by barrister Michael Halpenny, a former legal expert with SIPTU. The course included a mock hearing before a full division of the Labour Court.



Picture: Brian Turner (CC BY 2.0)



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- Media ownership – who is telling you what and why
- Social Media – What it is all about?
- How to write a good application form and CV

Venue: Mandate Training Centre, Distillery Road, Dublin 3 **Date:** Tuesday January 16th – Tuesday 17th April 2018
Time: 6.30pm – 9.30pm **Cost:** Free of Charge **Eligibility:** Mandate members

Evening Courses take place one evening per week for a duration of 12 weeks.

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Catalonia and Ireland: Republics interrupted

Tom Stokes



ONE OF the most important aspects of the current struggle between Catalonia and the central Spanish government in Madrid is, I believe, being overlooked.

It is the battle of ideas between the dark ages of monarchism and hierarchical control of the people by a distant elite and the establishment of a progressive enlightened republic in Catalonia owned and shaped by the people and fit for their life in the 21st century.

It is not the first time the people of Catalonia have explored the potential of such a republic, but the fifth. On four previous occasions a Catalan republic has been proclaimed: in 1641, 1873, 1931 and 1934.

We know that on the last occasion the republic was brutally put down by Franco's fascist forces with the assistance of Hitler, Mussolini and, less overtly, of Britain and other western governments. Shamefully, one of those was the Irish government.

Parallels

There are parallels between the Catalan experience and the Irish experience. In 1916 a serious attempt was made to establish the Irish Republic with an armed revolution directed against British rule followed by the War of Independence which brought about negotiations in 1921.

Unfortunately for the Irish people, those negotiations were led by proto-fascists on the Irish side who, following a civil war in which their side was supported by the British, established a counter-revolutionary government in 1922.

We in Ireland have lived with the consequences of that for 95 years. Five years of seeking to build a modern republic, and 95 years of seeking to destroy that dream. But the struggle is not over.

I arrived in Girona in late Septem-



People waving Catalan flags gripped by a sense that national freedom is within their grasp... Picture: Joan Campderros-i-Canas (CC BY 2.0)

ber on a short visit, excited by the prospect of observing the preparations for the Catalan Referendum, and wanting to get some sense of the mood of the people.

In my backpack I had a book I wanted to revisit, *Labour in Ireland: (Labour in Irish History & The Reconquest of Ireland)* by James Connolly, a principal architect of the 1916 revolution, a socialist-republican who was executed for his part in that great enterprise in which my paternal grandparents were also involved.

By night I read his people's history of my country, by day I watched part of the Catalan people's history playing out. There was no doubt of a defiant mood about the place. The Catalan flag was visible everywhere in Girona - on buildings, draped across the shoulders of students on the street, in shop windows, attached to cars.

Large banners supporting the referendum and *Democràcia!* were strung from balconies. Posters proclaimed *república no monarquia* - 'republic not monarchy', or *Hola república* - 'Hello republic', or announced an assembly of young people of Girona to 'flirt with a decent future', or invited people to join the

'struggle for the Catalan republic'.

I have never seen such a well-organised, street-level use of propaganda, and it matched the freely-expressed opinions of a range of people I spoke to, from workers to students to small-business owners, all with the exception of one being firmly fixed on their right to vote regardless of it being for 'Yes' or 'No' to independence; the one exception explaining her reluctance as being based on having family in Madrid.

Street-propaganda

But of course there is a precedent for that use of street-propaganda, and it is in the similar use of posters and flags during the 1931-39 struggle for the republic and against fascism. That struggle seems to be playing out again.

Spain's prime minister, Mariano Rajoy, leads the Partido Popular which has direct links back to the People's Alliance party founded in 1976 by former Francoist minister Manuel Fraga. The PP is a member of the European People's Party in the EU, as is Ireland's ruling party Fine Gael which had its roots in the Irish fascist Blueshirt movement in the 1930s which avidly supported Franco, Hitler and Mussolini.

In Girona, I was conscious of those historical facts, and envious of the more advanced position of the Left in Catalonia than in Ireland. Like Spain, Ireland has been savagely assaulted by the austerity-gang led from Brussels, aided and abetted by the corporatist-kleptocratic political class in each country.

In Spain, that provoked a reaction, first the Indignados movement, later Podemos, now the Municipalities movement and its call for the feminisation of politics.

In Ireland, the people largely caved in and suffered egregious cuts in living standards until the attempt, encouraged by the EU, to privatise the provision of water began. That led to the Right2Water campaign that brought hundreds of thousands on to the streets and forced the Government to stall the plan, although that struggle hasn't yet been decisively won.

It remains to be seen if that Right2Water movement can be harnessed as a political movement. Meanwhile, parties of the Left in Ireland refuse to cooperate fully to end the corporatist regime despite the obvious signs of real suffering endured by at least 25% of the people.

Back in Ireland, I have followed events in Catalonia via social media. Rajoy's inner fascist has emerged, his authoritarianism knowing no bounds, even of basic common sense.

He can hardly have imagined that his attempts to subdue the people of Catalonia would succeed. He has provided the pro-independence referendum side with PR they couldn't have dreamed of. He must be an idiot. They want *Democràcia!* He wants to deny them that.

And what of the Catalan Republic? According to Catalan regional government officials, 90% of the 2.26 million Catalans who voted cast a ballot in favour of independence.

The referendum was not about the creation of a republic, but about independence. However, bearing in mind the massive 'Yes' vote, it is difficult to see the people of Catalonia not opting for a republic in preference to a monarchy. Freedom, equality and solidarity surely trumps rule from afar by a self-perpetuating 'elite'?

Independence

Announcing the result, and a short process for a declaration of independence, Catalan President Carles Puigdemont added that independence would take the form of a republic.

That would represent a complete break with the Spanish constitution, the monarchy, and therefore the Spanish state. It would also align the new republic along Left-progressive lines, a radical break with the political norm in Spain where the residue of Franco's fascism is still very active.

Catalonia and Ireland have both flirted in the past with the republic as the preferred form of government - and in both cases having that dream interrupted by fascist coups before the republic could be properly established.

Now that Catalonia has decisively voted for its independence, I hope that we on the Left in Ireland - republicans and socialists - can follow that lead, can get beyond petty differences, and can organise to give the same option to the people of Ireland.

They desperately need it.

Tom Stokes is a journalist

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