



**2012 – 2018**

John Douglas  
General Secretary  
Maritime Trade Union

**STRAIGHT TALKING**

**Tesco's day of shame**

John Douglas  
General Secretary  
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**Why we have Right2Change..**

John Douglas  
General Secretary  
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**Time to stand up and be counted**

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General Secretary  
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**Housing and workers' rights. Govt's failure is no accident**

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General Secretary  
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**Cragging on the gig economy**

John Douglas  
General Secretary  
Maritime Trade Union

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**Decent jobs and a living weekly wage**

John Douglas  
General Secretary  
Maritime Trade Union

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

John Douglas  
General Secretary  
Maritime Trade Union

**STRAIGHT TALKING**

**The year past, the year ahead**

John Douglas  
General Secretary  
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**STRAIGHT TALKING**

**New politics, same old tune**

John Douglas  
General Secretary  
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“The General Secretary stated that Mr. Douglas was instructed to do a job as Collector, due to the resignation of Mr. Seamus Mulhall. He did the job for a couple of weeks and then informed the General Secretary that he didn’t go to Trinity College to become a Debt Collector. He didn’t report for work on Thursday, Friday, 12th & 13th June, – the car he was driving broke down in Bray. The Secretary informed the Committee that Mr. Douglas, as a Junior Official, should be prepared to do all types of work and that collecting money was one of the most important functions of any trade union as no trade union would exist without subscriptions. He stated that Mr. Douglas’s timing in the morning was also very bad.”

Excerpt taken from minutes of the Irish National Union of Vintners, Grocers and Allied Trades Assistants (INUVGATA) National Executive meeting on 30 June 1980. Check out the minutes of August 1980 on page 45 to find out how the story developed.

# Introduction



The ten years since the global financial crash have had far-reaching implications for the Irish labour movement. The suddenness of the crash, the speed of the bail-out and the impact of austerity left many in a state of shock, meanwhile businesses with the assistance of the state saw opportunities for a renewed assault on organized labour.

The trade union movement's response was for the most part ineffective, mired as it was in the status quo of corporatist social partnership. However, Mandate, under the leadership of John Douglas travelled a different road, one based on campaigning, industrial action and the introduction of political education that has sought to mobilise its members and their communities in ways that challenge the status quo and deliver real change.

Alongside a small number of other unions, Mandate's involvement in the Right2Water campaign set it outside the mainstream of the labour movement which failed to adequately respond to the relentless attacks on workers and communities. Mandate, with John central to the campaign, introduced structure and strategy to an organic community-based campaign that has had a significant and positive impact on politics in Ireland.

John understands that it is only through everyday struggle that workers begin to develop the capacity to understand the world in which they live and identify where real economic and political power lies. Industrial action, together with trade union campaigning on broader social issues such as water, provide workers with experience of confronting power and at the same time demonstrate the importance and efficacy of collective action.

In order that these levels of politicisation do not give way to apathy or a growing disconnect between trade union hierarchies and their members, Mandate has sought to reinvigorate local councils structures as they believe it is essential that the labour movement recommits itself to the long-term development of class consciousness among the workers and communities it represents. These articles published in the best trade union paper in the country track the evolution of Mandate's position and the vital contribution this union has made in fighting for a fairer more equal society.

— Dr Stephen Nolan

# Govern for us not for the bankers



POLITICIANS have no right to close emergency services in hospitals, or close schools, they have no right to remove the services of special needs assistants and they have no right to fill the airport departure lounges with our brothers, sisters and friends.

The hospitals, schools and other services belong to the Irish people. They are not the property of the political elite either here or in Europe.

There is no justification for these cuts, Ireland is awash with money and wealth, but our politicians elected here and in Brussels have decided to give the money to the banks, bondholders and speculators. They have decided that the wellbeing of bankers, bondholders and speculators takes priority over the wellbeing of its own citizens.

Government is about policy priorities – it's about prioritising those on welfare, or those facing eviction or those unable to pay bills or put food on the table, it should never be about balancing the books regardless of the consequences and pain for citizens.

This new government needs to prove that it understands the hurt and pain of the Irish people, it needs to stand up for workers and for jobs, it needs to tell the Troika that their austerity agreement is unacceptable and that the Irish government is going to put Irish citizens first.

The Irish trade union movement also needs to reinvent itself, it needs to get back to basics, it needs to reconnect with members and their communities and it needs to give a voice to those suffering in silence.

The trade union movement needs to smash the myth that “We are all in this together” because clearly we are not all in this together, the wealthy and those with assets are not being asked to pay.

What is needed is a redistribution of wealth through a progressive taxation system which targets those on high incomes and those with assets.

As we approach the centenary of the 1913 Lockout, when union-busting bosses locked out and starved thousands of Irish workers, we must ask ourselves, has much really changed? Today, we have 450,000 workers locked out of employment, denied respect and a decent income. Workers still do not have a right to have their unions collectively bargain on their behalf.



Jim Larkin's words in 1913 are equally appropriate today: "The great only appear great because we are on our knees ... let us arise"

**MARCH 2012**

## Doing nothing is not an option...



The Irish economic/social policy is now effectively ruled by the Troika whose fiscal austerity measures have wreaked havoc with our economy and social infrastructure and face us into the potential of a lost decade with mass unemployment, personal/national debt mountains and mass emigration.

The crisis in capitalism which is reflected in the international banking and debt crisis and the euro debacle will have profound impacts on the world economy and social order.

The so-called developed world is experiencing unprecedented levels of unemployment, the banking systems have all but collapsed and in political terms we are seeing a marked move to the right across Europe.

On a human front, Irish citizens, Mandate members and their families are struggling to get work and to earn a decent living wage and the welfare infrastructure which many of the most vulnerable sections of any society depend on is under attack.

The present government seems to be stuck on the same "treadmill" of appeasement to our Troika masters as the previous government did to the detriment of our economy and our society.

While all this poses very serious and immediate questions for the broader trade union movement both home and abroad, each individual union must get its own house in order.

There is a pressing need for leadership at all levels of the trade union movement. While the movement in Ireland has been consistent in putting forward alternatives for a Better Fairer Way, we have not been able to mobilise mass opposition and sustained support.

In fact, the Irish people – union members included – came within a whisker of giving Fine Gael an overall majority.

If we are serious about a better and fairer way, then we need to organise, educate and mobilise around a vision for a different economy, for a new society. For if we do nothing, history will write off the trade union movement as the "dog that did not bark". The task ahead is daunting, but again I say, doing nothing is not an option.

MAY 2012

## Make your vote count on May 31



MANDATE makes no apology for calling on its members to vote No in the May 31st referendum on the Fiscal Treaty.

If passed, this treaty will not create a single job. Instead, it will choke the life out of our domestic economy pushing it from recession to depression.

It will impoverish the Irish nation for generations to come and will lead us into permanent austerity.

Don't listen to those who claim this is about 'good housekeeping' or 'managing the household budget' – they are wrong, this is about locking our country into an internationally-binding agreement driven by and for the needs of a corrupt and immoral banking system.

This anti-democratic treaty will mean that any future Irish government pursuing progressive economic and social policies that fall outside the narrow fiscal limits set out in this treaty will face international court proceedings.

In essence, this treaty constitutes a derogation of sovereignty and is an attack on our basic hard-won freedoms.

But make no mistake, you can be sure the bankers will continue to profit out of the continuing Market misery of Europe's economies – out of the pain of Greek, Spanish, Portuguese and Irish workers – they will make billions on the way up and will make billions on the way down.

And the EU's political class seems in servile thrall to this madness – and they have engineered this treaty to build a firewall around the banking system to protect the rich and powerful at the expense of Europe's peoples.

Decades of social exclusion, mass unemployment and emigration – and further attacks on workers' rights and the welfare system – lie ahead, unless we act now.

Say No to permanent austerity. Vote No on May 31st.

## Yes, ministers, time for change



WELL, the silly season is in full swing with summer holidays, flash floods, football, financial crisis, Sean Quinn avoiding jail for contempt of court for attempting to transfer €500 million worth of assets and householders threatened with prison over the €100 household charges – crazy!

Your union Mandate campaigned hard for a 'No' vote during the Fiscal Treaty referendum debate. The subsequent result of 60% 'Yes' and 40% 'No' was hardly a resounding endorsement of the Treaty, and it is generally accepted that many of those who voted in favour did so with a heavy heart.

Mandate argued that the weight of the bank debt heaped on the Irish taxpayer is unsustainable and would plunge the Irish economy into a permanent recession which, in turn, will undermine the welfare

and social services that many Mandate members depend on.

While Spain and Italy may have taught Ireland a lesson in football, they also taught us a lesson in dealing with our European partners, particularly Germany.

When Spain and Italy faced the prospect of Europe (Germany) heaping hundreds of billions of euros in bank bailouts on to their taxpayers, they said enough is enough.

They realised that it had not worked in Ireland and they were not prepared to see their economies and welfare structures destroyed. To be fair to the Irish government, we have now got in under the wire with Spain – our bank debt will now be reviewed respectively but the devil will be in the detail.

At the very least, this opens the opportunity to undo the disastrous decision of the previous government's blanket guarantee scheme, including Anglo Irish Bank's €47 billion debt.

However, much damage has already been done, there are still more than 400,000 workers without jobs, 50,000 leaving Ireland each year and tens of thousands of householders in serious mortgage debt.

Austerity Budget Number 6 is due in December 2012 which will take at least another €3.5 billion out of the Irish economy causing more misery, hardship and unemployment.

Mandate and the trade union movement has consistently pointed to the failure of endless austerity policies, every day we see and deal with the impacts of falling consumer spending, shops and pubs closing, workers' hours and wages being reduced and their struggle to survive.

We are calling on the Government to change policy, to invest in infrastructure, services and jobs and to give Irish people back hope.

The December 2012 Budget should be the beginning of a new era of investment growth, jobs not dole, decent work and decent incomes.

**OCTOBER 2012**

## Have we lost our moral compass?



The events of the past weeks remind me of the title of the novel and film No Country for Old Men, except in Ireland's case you can also read Women into the title.

There is something seriously and morally wrong when the Irish government can write a cheque for €1 billion on 1st October to unsecured Allied Irish Bank's bondholders and at the same time cut

home help hours for the most vulnerable old people to save €23 million.

The financial speculators in Switzerland, Germany and across the world will get their cheque in the post amounting to their original investment in full plus interest for a bet they made in Irish banks at the height of the boom.

At the same time tens of thousands of old age pensioners in Ireland – many of whom are frail and in need of personal assistance – will be getting letters telling them there will be no home help calling today, which may mean they have to lock their doors, stay in bed and sort out their personal needs on their own.

Regardless of the rights and wrongs of the bank guarantee scheme and the debate about the consequences of paying or not paying bondholders, the recent decisions to attack the meagre benefits of those citizens who are old and or disabled is a new low in Irish politics.

The decision was not imposed on the Irish government by our masters in the Troika, it is clearly a political policy decision of the Minister for Health and his department, supported by all political parties in government.

The subsequent part U-turn in restoring personal assistants' hours to care for those with disabilities was achieved only after a small group of brave disabled citizens parked their wheelchairs overnight in front of government buildings.

All this at time when our disabled athletes were doing this country proud in the Paralympics in London.



The Health Service Executive (HSE) announced that there are more than 340,000 citizens – many in chronic pain and with deteriorating conditions – who are waiting years to see a consultant doctor as an outpatient in our public health system.

At the same time we are bombarded daily by advertisements from private hospitals offering “walk-in” consultant care for those who can afford to pay.

We are told that the December 12 budget must find €3.5 billion in cuts and increased taxes, and given that health and welfare are currently the biggest spenders, are we to expect that – once again – those who are sick, disabled, unemployed and in receipt of basic welfare payments will be targeted once more by the political policy choices of our government.

Are we really such a sick society that we will put the interests of wealthy financial speculators ahead of the needs of our most vulnerable citizens?

Have we any moral compass left?  
Time will tell!

DECEMBER 2012

## Retailers have gone too far...



ASK yourself these questions: why should it fall on the Irish State and Irish taxpayers to subsidise low wages and sub standard contracts of employment to the tune of tens of millions in welfare payments each year to workers employed by major profitable multinationals?

Is it not the responsibility of employers to offer decent jobs and decent incomes to workers who do a fair day's work?

Is it not reasonable to expect that employers – particularly large profitable ones – offer contracts of employment which allow workers a decent standard of living?

Is it not reasonable to expect that workers know what their hours are and how much they earn each week, and that this income

is constant and does not vary at the whim of a local manager or budget diktat from head office?

Surely major retailers should give something back in the form of decent jobs to the communities in which they trade? Surely, it is the socially responsible thing to do?

If workers are given decent jobs and a decent income, they too can become consumers and spend their money in local businesses, thereby creating even more economic activity and even more jobs.

But, sadly, it seems that the majority of major retailers have no interest in giving workers decent jobs and or decent incomes. Their actions over the last decade in casualising their workforce into the lowest-common-denominator jobs has meant that for the majority of retail workers employment does not offer a living wage.

Shareholder value and profit margins have been put far ahead of any concern for workers and their families.

The culture of demanding maximum flexibility across working days and working hours while offering minimum commitment to workers is shameful, and is causing untold misery and financial strain to retail workers.

Scheduling workers' hours like some "just in time" delivery system means not only do workers not earn a decent income from that employment, but they are unable to seek a second job to supplement their earnings, trapped by an employer who only sees them as a cost to be controlled 24/7. In short, it is a modern form of slavery.

We must go back to the future, we need to demand decent jobs and decent contracts, decent training and career prospects.

The flexibility agenda has gone too far, workers deserve and demand respect, they are entitled to know in advance when they work and how much they earn – they are entitled to be able to plan for the future.

A decent job and a decent income are basic human rights. In Mandate we intend to put these rights firmly on the agenda with Government and with every employer.

**MARCH 2013**

## The Anglo deal: smoke and mirrors or a game changer?



If at this stage like me you have had it up to the “eyeballs” with spin and counter spin on the Government’s Anglo Bank promissory note deal, then read on and we will try and give you some simple facts.

First, the cost of bailing out the Irish banks as of 2013 is just over €64 billion, this equates to more than €9,000 per Irish citizen, as opposed to the EU average of €190 per EU citizen. Ireland is shouldering over 40% of the total European banking debt.

Of the €64 billion, over €29 billion is debt related to Anglo Irish Bank and €5 billion is Irish Nationwide Building Society. And yes, you might well ask what has this banking debt got to do with me?

The answer is nothing whatsoever – it is not your debt, you did not run it up, but the Irish Government chose to guarantee all private banking debt, thereby making it a debt on every citizen of Ireland.

The Government in the case of the Anglo Irish promissory notes previously decided to repay all of Anglo’s debt to the tune of €3.31 billion per year, each year up to 2023 plus interest.

This money has to be found, and both this government and the previous one finds this money either through borrowing, cutting services, welfare, increasing taxes/charges, attacking wages and conditions of workers in general but, in particular, public sector workers.

These austerity policies are crushing the Irish economy, forcing tens of thousands to emigrate, condemning thousands more to a life of poverty and ensuring that the 400,000 workers unemployed remain unemployed for the foreseeable future.

Now back to the promissory note deal. The main point to note is that Ireland/ we will still have to pay back every cent of the €30 billion debt which was not ours in the first place, but we can now spread the payments over a longer period – 40 years. This gives us some short-term relief but the debt will be passed on to our children and grandchildren so that they may face the prospect of living in austerity.

During the talks on a deal at no time did the Irish government seek to write off the debt or threaten not to pay or stall payments. They fully accepted responsibility for it and, in doing so, have turned this private banking debt into a debt owned by the Irish State and Irish people.

So this is the scenario as I see it, your neighbour buys a house on your road for €500,000 financed by a bank mortgage over 20 years, with monthly repayments of €1,000 per month. Unfortunately, your neighbour dies, the bank calls you in and tells you that you must take over the neighbour’s mortgage and guarantee the mortgage of all your other neighbours and you agree (the bank guarantee scheme).

You are now faced with paying your own mortgage and your neighbour’s mortgage and you sign up to promise to do so (the promissory note). After a number of years scrimping, saving and going without it all gets too much for you so you go to the bank and tell them you can’t afford to pay both mortgages anymore. They offer you a “deal” which spreads your neighbour’s mortgage over 40 years, the repayments on which are reduced to €500 per month, but – critically – you must still pay off the total cost of your neighbour’s mortgage. You go home and tell everyone that you got a great deal.

Now that is what the Government did with the Anglo Irish promissory notes – the sting in the tail is that after 40 years of scrimping and saving to pay your neighbour's mortgage, you will not even own his house and furthermore, in the case of Ireland's €64 billion banking debt, you are not only paying for one neighbour's mortgage but a whole road of neighbours' houses and their mortgages.

The banking debt heaped upon Ireland is simply not sustainable and not fair. It is undermining our society, destroying our jobs, living standards, welfare and services – enough is enough, it is not our debt.

I ask you – smoke and mirrors or a game changer? You decide. I did, and that is why I marched and my children marched on the trade union Jobs Not Debt demo on February 9. Did you???

MAY 2013

## 1913 to 2013: the struggle continues...



ONE hundred years ago in August 1913 the employers of Dublin led by William Martin Murphy, the owner of the Tramways Company and the Irish Independent newspaper set out to destroy the fledgling union of Big Jim Larkin, the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, which was attempting to organise and mobilise workers on the docks, coal yards and the transport system.

What ensued is referred to as the Great 1913 Dublin Lockout, when employers supported by the establishment (Church and State) locked out more than 20,000 workers from August 1913. These workers were locked out because they refused to sign pledges to leave the union.

The workers and their families were brutalised by employers, blacklisted, starved and baton-charged by police in O'Connell Street, Dublin. Two strikers were killed as a result of the baton charge, referred to as Bloody Sunday (not the last such Sunday this country would witness). James Plunkett in his novel *Strumpet City* graphically describes the poverty and brutalisation of the workers and their families at the time.

Eventually after six months the strikers were starved and beaten back to work. But Murphy and the other employers might have won the battle, but they did not win the war. They did not succeed in destroying the union and working class resistance – the trade union movement continued to grow and win better pay and conditions for workers from the employers and government.

This very same struggle continues to this very day, the battle between labour and capital – the struggle of workers to achieve a decent living wage for a fair working week.

Today's William Martin Murphy employers are still trying to destroy workers' power and worker solidarity. They are opposed to workers securing the right to join and be represented by trade unions, they still intimidate workers and harass unions and organising drives.

The modern day William Martin Murphy is today's anti-union employer – such as Aldi, Lidl, IKEA RyanAir etc – supported by a so-called “free” press such as the Irish Independent and “independent” radio stations owned by the elite and powerful whose interest is to have weak worker power and weak trade unions.

Add to this a right-of-centre government party which panders to their tune of flexibility and competitiveness and a low-wage economy.

Be in no doubt that the war which begun in 1913 still rages today. It may not be in the form of baton charges on O'Connell Street, but behind the closed doors of government, the legal system and the intimidation of workers by well-resourced employers and consultants.

One hundred years on we are still fighting for the right for workers to be fully represented by unions and the employers are just as vicious and as hostile as they were back then. More than 400,000 unemployed workers in 2013 are locked out of the economy and locked out of providing a decent income for their families because of the reckless actions of a golden circle of senior bankers, speculators and politicians.

The income of those in employment is being robbed to pay banking debts which are not theirs and social services are being curtailed to the most vulnerable in our society.

The only credible red line against these actions is organised labour and social solidarity.

Like William Martin Murphy, today's elite – employers and government – know that they must destroy workers' resistance and workers' solidarity. That is why unions, union members and their fight back are being demonised in the press and on the airwaves.

That is why they seek to divide and conquer – public sector workers against private sector workers, Irish workers against foreign workers, workers against



welfare recipients, teachers against nurses etc.

They must not succeed; we must unite and say enough is enough. We demand only what is right and just – decent jobs and decent income for all. The struggle continues – you must take your place and fight for a better future for you and your family – GET ANGRY, GET ACTIVE AND WIN.

**JULY 2013**

## Be aware, Shop Fair



THE trade union principle of an injury to one is an injury to all is as valid today as it was during the 1913 Lockout. Workers' solidarity is the glue which bonds the trade union movement together into a force for change.

In 1913 the struggle was for the right to join and be represented by a union;

rights which the employers of the day saw as such a threat to their elite positions, that they locked out tens of thousands of workers from their jobs.

In 2013 there are still major employers in Ireland who deny their workers these basic human rights – they too have locked out their workers through fear and intimidation.

Mandate's Fair Shop campaign sets out to identify those major retail employers in Ireland who respect the rights of their workers to join a union and collectively bargain. We ask you, our trade union family to show solidarity with these fair shops by spending your union wage where workers count.

Together we can make a difference,  
Think Union, Think Fair Shop.

## Dare to dream again



Exactly 100 years ago this month, over 20,000 workers in Dublin were locked out of their jobs by an employer class supported by Church and State determined to smash the emerging trade union movement.

Workers of Dublin combined under the leadership of Jim Larkin to fight for decent jobs, a living wage and an end to life in the slums. It was a class war, workers demanding a fairer share of the wealth they created while employers were determined to hold on to their privileges which had as its foundation exploitation, casual labour and low wages. Against all the odds, the workers of Dublin held out for nearly six months until finally starvation, scabs and police brutality forced an end to the strike. They returned

to work not beaten but determined to fight another day.

And so they did, over the next decades they won many victories – better conditions, better contracts, social housing, pensions, sick pay schemes and most of all they created a value system based on solidarity which at its core had the principle “an injury to one is an injury to all”.

So, today have we forgotten the lessons of 1913? Are the values of 1913 as relevant today?, or are we so consumed by our own personal survival that we ignore the plight of our neighbours, fellow workers or the future shape of society for our children and grandchildren. Over the last five years, Irish people have endured many sacrifices and hardships in an attempt to right the wrongs of the political and economic elite which brought this country to its knees.

Yes, these are different sacrifices and hardships than those endured by the citizens of Dublin in 1913, but nonetheless, they are severe.

There are over 400,000 of our brothers and sisters locked out of employment, forced to exist on the dole, tens of thousands of families have been divided through emigration and more than 100,000 citizens are in fear of losing their homes through eviction by the very banks they helped save. The most vulnerable, the sick, disabled and the elderly have suffered cut after cut in the name of austerity policies.

And the employer groups of today are no less determined to snuff out workers' resistance than they were in 1913.

Employer groups, such as the Fast Food Alliance and others have systematically targeted workers' rights and the basic decency thresholds that underpin the value system of a fair society. The Joint Labour Committees once set basic minimum wages and conditions for workers in the most vulnerable sectors, such as hotels, restaurants, cleaning, retail and farming – the Fast Food Alliances armed with deep pockets drove a coach and horses through these minimum conditions in the High Court. The construction employer groups did the same to the Construction Registered Agreements in the High Court, prompting a race to the bottom.

The same Irish media which cheered on the employers of 1913 are cheering on the employers of 2013 and those who dare to speak out and stand up are branded anti-jobs or loony left. Their sole objective is to drive down the share of wealth created which goes to labour in favour of capital. The net result of their actions is that large sections of the Irish economy no longer provide workers with a decent job or a living wage, instead offering part-time, low hour contracts on the minimum wage.

Workers are seen as commodities to be abused, hired and fired at will and their earnings determined solely by the employer. The casual labour of the 1913 Dublin Docks has re-emerged in the fast food outlets, hotels, shops and offices throughout Ireland.

The annoying fact is that it need not be like this – these sectors of the economy are profitable and can support decent jobs and decent wages. So what's missing?

The belief among workers that coming together in solidarity can make a difference, they can fight and win, they are not on their own and they can dare dream again of a fairer society for themselves and their children. There are more of us than them, but we are not organised and they are.

We must once again come together bonded by the glue of solidarity, never again allowing them to divide us, never again allowing them to pit private sector workers against public sector workers, workers against unemployed workers, Irish workers against foreign workers. They put us all in a race to the bottom while they sit comfortably in the viewing stands. The time has come to fight back to organise to make a stand, to create a trade union movement for change. In the future, the question will not be why does a public sector worker have a pension, but rather why can't ALL workers have a pension? In future the question will not be why a teacher or a nurse can earn a living wage, but rather why can't ALL workers earn a living wage?

These are the questions that frighten the ruling elite because these questions are underpinned by a value system of fairness, justice and solidarity.

For a glimpse of a world without solidarity you need go no further than to read the words of anti-Nazi Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller, he said...

First they came for the communists/  
and I didn't speak out because I wasn't  
a communist./Then they came for the  
socialists./and I didn't speak out because  
I wasn't a socialist./Then they came for  
the Jews./and I didn't speak out because  
I wasn't a Jew./Then they came for the

trade unionists/ and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist/Then they came for me/ and there was no one left to speak for me.

Let us ensure that when they come for us, we will not be alone – an injury to one is an injury to all.

Let us organise.

**DECEMBER 2013**

## **Bosses must show more Xmas spirit...**



It's that time of the year again, the run into Christmas and all the madness that goes with it, the rushing around, the last minute presents and the short break with family and friends.

For shop and bar workers the Christmas period means more pressure at work,

longer hours and the shortest of breaks off work (Christmas Day).

Over the past years, retail sector employers have turned what was a busy time of the year followed by a decent short break (December 25, 26, 27) into a busy time of the year with virtually no time with family and friends for retail workers.

Retail employers in their quest to chase every last single Christmas euro engaged in a bidding war of opening hours at the expense of the health, safety and well-being of retail staff.

The irony of the current situation is that none of the retailers are any better off, they have cannibalised their own consumer spending and now have to resort to phony pre-Christmas sales and pre-emptive New Year sales.

The very same false economy drove the same retailers down the cull-de-sac of 24-hour trading and unlimited Sunday trading when like sheep they followed each other until the economic rationale of opening all these extended hours disappeared.

# Ireland needs decent jobs & decent wages



You could be forgiven for believing that Ireland is “fixed” following all the official hype and fanfare which accompanied our exit from the Troika bailout agreement.

The sad reality is that Ireland's economy and society is severely broken, we are stuck in a quagmire of low growth, debt and poor consumer sentiment. The scourges of unemployment, poverty, emigration and inequality are still stalking the country.

One area which is contributing to Ireland's failure to recover is depressed domestic demand due largely to lack of disposable income. Household incomes have been under attack from high unemployment, stagnant real wages and increases in taxes and charges.

Lack of disposable income itself has fuelled unemployment and under-employment in the local economy, such as retail and other local services.

Wages for workers at best have been stagnant for the last five years while powerful, vested employer groups have attacked the minimum wage, the sectoral minimum wages (JLCs) in retail and other sectors, working hours have been cut, premiums slashed and precarious employment such as temporary and part-time working is increasing.

All of this has meant that ordinary Irish citizens have less money in their pockets to spend in the local economy, thereby causing more job losses, more business closures and further pressure on wages and conditions – a race to the bottom.

If Ireland Inc., can afford to pay a golden circle of consultants, law firms and accountancy firms €50 million in consultants' fees to establish Irish Water, €35 million in consultants' fees to set up an incinerator in Ringsend, Dublin, and millions of euro to bankrupt property developers to run their failed NAMA property portfolios, surely a decent living wage for those hard-pressed workers is not too much to ask for?

In 2013, Mandate pursued a policy of winning real wage increases and decent contracts for retail workers – a course we will continue in 2014 with even more vigour.

We are also calling for an increase in the minimum wage which has been frozen at €8.65 per hour since 2007 and the re-establishment of the Joint Labour Committees.

A Decent Wage, A Decent Job, A Decent Future.



## Make work pay



For too many workers the reality today is that work does not pay, because an increasing number of jobs fail to provide them with a

decent basic income on which to provide for family and self. The old adage no longer holds true – a job is the best way out of poverty.

Employers in many sectors – including retail – are maximising profits by attacking the quality of employment contracts they offer.

Over the last three decades there has been a sizeable shift away from full-time quality jobs with set hours, decent conditions and decent wages towards more part-time, casual, zero and flexible hours' contracts of employment.

These jobs do not offer any security or certainty around week-to-week income levels and they are often used by employers as a control mechanism or disciplinary sanction. The local manager has total control over the livelihood and wellbeing of workers.

Because of the growth in this form of employment, the Irish taxpayer/State is left to pay the price caused by the misery that follows workers not earning enough to live on by paying hundreds of millions of euro each year in Family Income Supplements, supplementary benefits, rent supplements etc.

While these State transfer payments are right and proper, given the misery inflicted on workers, one must ask “why”?

Why should the taxpayer/State be made subsidise low wages, poor contracts and bad conditions so that huge profitable corporations can reap higher profits to pay massive bonuses to executives, avoid corporation tax and return millions in dividends to shareholders?

The cost of this to the Irish taxpayer/State runs into hundreds of millions each year – this money could be better spent on local communities or State investment in services such as health and social housing. The Government needs to wake up and smell the coffee. We are being ripped off.

The State should legislate to promote decent jobs and decent contracts. We are calling on Government to ban one-sided zero hour/flexible contracts of employment, to introduce legislation which would give workers on such contracts a legal right to claim additional working hours in situations where these hours exist or become available.

The Government should also make it less attractive and profitable for employers to sub-divide jobs, this could be tackled through employers' PRSI or other taxation measurers.

Mandate says "offering workers the opportunity to work flexible hours is one thing, but cheating and exploiting large sections of the working population is another".

Workers in retail, hospitality, cleaning, security and agriculture have one message to our legislators ... Walk in our shoes!!

As a result today we have seen some retraction of opening hours. While successive governments have said they cannot legislate for shop opening hours because of constitutional issues, the rest of Europe still protects and recognises the rights of retail workers to free time at Christmas and other important times so as to afford retail workers decent breaks.

Retail by and large is not such an essential service that it cannot close for two or three days over the Christmas period. The world for customers will not end if they cannot buy that shirt or blouse on St Stephen's Day. Mandate calls on all retail employers to show some common sense and concern for their hard working staff.

A decent job equals decent wages and a decent break.

JULY 2014

## Smoke and mirrors to hide the truth!



The ritual political budget dance has begun in earnest before the Government announces its October 2014 budget proposals for 2015. The political band is playing some old favourites such as tax cuts, welfare cuts and efficiencies in services to the backdrop of an election drubbing of the Government parties in the recent Local and European elections.

Their choice of mood music is designed to win back public support and to repair their image before the 2016 general election. A word of caution, do not let them lead you on a merry dance of promises and false choices. Government is about choices and the values that underpin these choices – at budget time these values are clearly exposed for all to see, they shape our

society and the well being of our citizens.

As part of our Troika bailout agreement, this October 2014 Budget should continue in the same vein of a long line of austerity budgets by making a €2bn adjustment through tax increases and cuts to public spending, thereby reducing Ireland's borrowing below 3% of GDP by 2015.

The IMF, the EU and our own national austerity hawks, the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, are insisting that the Government delivers on the two billion in cuts, while the trade union think-tank NERI says that two billion is not required because of our slight economic improvement and because of the domestic damage two billion in cuts would cause, particularly to those dependent on state services.

Some of the choices have already been made and the value systems that underpin them clearly exposed for all to see.

For example, this Government has already made the choice that Irish citizens regardless of means will pay property tax on their home; they have decided the citizens will have to pay for water – a basic human necessity; they have decided not to invest in capital expenditure such as social housing projects; they have decided to cut welfare for the under-25s; they have decided that the unemployed are a problem and should either be banished from these shores or forced into largely futile work for free schemes such as JobBridge.

They have decided that multinational corporations are a privileged and protected species who must never be asked to make a contribution to the repair of Ireland's economy or fiscal condition.

Our Taoiseach has pandered to the multinational corporations and their threats of capital flight – his reassuring words, “You can ring me anytime”, rings hollow in the ears of those citizens struggling to put food on the table or keep a roof over their heads.

The facts are that this Government continues to facilitate multinational corporations avoid and minimise their social contribution (Tax). The existing corporation tax rate of 12.5% (headline) is low by international standards but the “real effective rate” (what they actually pay) is closer to 4%.

For example, Apple paid only €36 million in corporation tax on profits of €7.11 billion. Social Justice Ireland ([www.socialjustice.ie](http://www.socialjustice.ie)) has proposed in its pre-budget submission to Government that all corporations must pay an “effective rate” of corporation tax of at least 6% an increase of a mere 2% in the effective corporation tax rate for most major companies.

This proposal could yield up to €500 million per year. Mandate has called for similar changes in the past and we fully support this policy as the very least the major multinational companies contribute to the repair of our national finances.

But, alas, the Irish Government has already indicated that it is not prepared to upset its corporate friends. Instead the Government would rather impose water charges on every household to collect the €500 million to balance the books.

Water charges will start at circa €240 per year and, no doubt, go only upwards from thereon. The imposition of these water charges on top of the already regressive property tax will have a devastating

impact on consumer spending, and lead to more retail job losses and pressure on workers' terms and conditions of employment as a consequence. In one fell swoop the pay increases won by Mandate and other unions over the past 12 months will be wiped out.

Mandate members intend to pursue our pay policy with renewed vigour so as to ensure that ordinary workers see a real benefit in their wage packets.

Making Work Pay is our rallying call – this can only be achieved through joining unions and taking collective action to win. But if the fruits of our collective industrial struggle are stolen through the imposition of unjust, unfair charges when other options are clearly available, then workers must continue to mobilise both industrially and politically to ensure that those making the policy decisions have the values of social justice and a fairer society at the centre of all their decisions.

The next time a politician tells you we are all in this together, tell them you don't believe that bull and that you are organising and mobilising to fight back for choices, choices which support workers, a decent living wage – a future in your own country.

SEPTEMBER 2014

## Injustice must be fought by all means at our disposal...



MORE than 16 weeks ago workers at the Greyhound Waste Disposal Facility in Clondalkin, Dublin turned up to work to be met by their employer at the gate. Their employer gave them a stark choice: either sign new contracts reducing their weekly earnings by 35% or go home.

To their credit, all 70 men refused to sign the new contracts and as a result have been locked out of their jobs since then. In the meantime, their employer, Greyhound, has taken on temporary agency workers (scabs) to perform the work of the locked-out crews and has engaged in a high-profile media campaign designed to discredit the locked-out workers.

It has also resorted to the High Court to curtail the workers' peaceful protest outside the facility and has obtained High Court injunctions preventing local communities around Dublin taking action in support of the locked-out workers.

This Greyhound Lockout is systematic of everything that is wrong in Ireland today – an Ireland where wealthy businesses that have resources can employ the full weight of the legal system to suppress workers' rights and entitlements and where workers are constrained from fighting back.

This is an Ireland where unions are restricted from taking effective action to protect their members and where local communities are prevented from fighting injustice.

This is an Ireland which knows the price of everything but the value of nothing, an Ireland of shady deals, nods and winks, where employers can go on the public airwaves and berate workers for defending their wages and their families' wellbeing.

This is an Ireland which believes that €15 an hour is a well-paid wage for doing one of the dirtiest jobs in the country – an Ireland which believes that workers are lucky to have jobs.

Well, this is not our Ireland, it is not the vision that workers and their families and their unions have for themselves and their children – we believe in dignity and respect, in a decent living wage and a future for all – not just the elite class. Every time we see an injustice we must fight it by whatever means at our disposal.

All workers are entitled to a decent job and a decent living wage. The Greyhound

Lockout seeks to create the very opposite. It is a race to the bottom, it is the attitude of, 'you're lucky to have a job', 'if you don't like, it then leave or emigrate' – and it's the view of an ever increasing number of influential employers, politicians and commentators.

This poisonous view must never be allowed to prevail, for if it does, Ireland will become a country of gated mansions for the few while the majority struggle to provide food and shelter.

Greyhound-type employers must never win – we must fight back using all means at our disposal. Visit [www.facebook.com/greyhoundworkers](http://www.facebook.com/greyhoundworkers).

DECEMBER 2014

## They can't spin us any more lies...



Unemployment is down to 10.7%. GDP growth is expected to be 4.6% – the



highest in the Eurozone. Emigration is lower than in previous years. Government is implementing tax cuts. Looks like we've turned another corner and we're on the mend. So why is combined support for the government parties (Fine Gael and Labour) down to a record low of 25%? Because we can all spot the spin.

It's easy to list off positive statistics and tell people that all is good and that the worst is behind them. It's harder to prove it. Especially when the very people they're selling spin to are living through the reality.

If truth be told, most of us don't feel the effects of GDP growth because it's obscure and we don't feel it impacts on our day to day lives. But here are some of the real statistics that do affect us and our families:

I The real unemployment rate – when you remove JobBridge and other labour activation measures – is 13.2%.

I Earnings are down by 1% while rents have increased by 11%.

I One in four tenants fear losing their homes from rent increases.

I Underemployment (workers seeking more hours but have no access to them) is up by nearly 60% from 2008.

I Ireland has the second highest prevalence of low pay in the developed world, behind the United States.

I There has been a 21% rise in the number of people sleeping rough in Dublin.

Over 480,000 people have no money at the end of the month after paying

essential bills. More than 1.7 million people across Ireland say they have less than €100 at the end of the month after essential bills are paid.

Try telling them all is OK because GDP is up.

Yes, there are more jobs coming on-stream. But what type of jobs are they? They're low paid, precarious contracts where employers control hours and workers have to kow-tow to every unreasonable demand that is made of them. Sometimes waiting on the end of a phone for 24 hours hoping to get that call to tell them they have a day's work ahead of them.

People are struggling to get by and they're losing patience, and no amount of promises of growth and manipulated statistics will appease them. Hence the water charges protests taking place right across the country.

As Donna Hartnett, a mother from Cork, said: "The legacy of Bertie Ahern and Brian Cowen has resulted in our two children being raised in childcare centres like caged hens while we work, breaking our necks and our children's hearts trying to keep up with tax after tax with nothing left by month end. We never financially over-extended ourselves or left a bill unpaid, but still my two very young children are daily out of their home longer hours than the average industrial worker... as we work to meet another tax to our incomings. Our reasons for not protesting before – exhaustion, anxiety, fear and not a minute to spare. But this is where it ends."

There are tens of thousands of Donna Hartnetts all over this country who are

not fooled by the finely polished utterances of politicians telling them we've turned the corner.

When homeless people are dying on the streets and couples are forced to live in their cars, and when still, despite losing a quarter of a million people to emigration, unemployment is unacceptably high, it should be abhorrent to even consider cutting taxes for the wealthy, but that's just what happened in the last Budget.

That's why we have to continue to fight back both in the industrial field and the political one. If workers want better terms and conditions of employment, then the solution is simple – join a union and get active in it.

If we want a fairer political and social system, we have to fight for it politically. We have to take a stance and say we will not accept any more austerity. We've paid enough for the crisis that was caused by others and is being cast on to our shoulders and our children's shoulders.

As Audrey Clancy from the Edenmore 9 said at the recent Right2Water rally: "The power of the people is greater than the people in power." But only if we show solidarity and unity in our endeavors for a better and fairer Ireland.

And as Donna Harnett said: "No one will ever stand over my grave and say, 'Wasn't she great at paying her water tax?', but it will be at that exact moment that my children will evaluate the quality in the years I gave them."

In Mandate, our members haven't been fooled by glossy statistics, promises of growth and smart-talking political representatives and all their spin.

That's why we're all fighting back and Mandate and our members have been – and will continue to be – at the forefront of that fight back.

**MAY 2015**

## The fight is on...



THE old saying "a fair day's pay for a fair day's work" is as relevant today as it was one hundred years ago. Work should pay, a job should be a route out of poverty and a job should mean that workers are able to provide for themselves and their families.

But today it's hard to exaggerate the extent to which work no longer pays. The extent to which large companies have passed on the responsibility of providing their workers with a living wage to the State/Taxpayer and indeed charities beggars belief.

At the same time, these large companies – many of which are household names here and abroad – pay their shareholders ever-increasing dividends and their CEOs exorbitant salaries and bonuses which are hundreds of multiples of the average wages of their workers.

Ireland, for example, is second only to the US in the proportion of overall jobs which are classified as low paid – meaning we are now officially a low-wage economy. The share of the economic pie going to labour is falling. It is now lower than it was in the 1940s with the ever-increasing productivity and the corresponding increase in wealth going to shareholders, investors and senior management.

While at the same time a growing proportion of working families cannot provide for the basic needs of their families and are depending on State Welfare such as FIS (Family Income Supplement) or part-time social welfare, or, in many cases, depending on charities.

One of the main causes of this situation, aside from pure greed is that there has been an ongoing attack on labour standards and trade unions across the world. The elite of this world are very aware that a strong labour movement makes sure that workers get a fair share of the economic pie they create, so they attack unions, they attack workers' rights and they bully governments to remove protections against exploitation.

This story is all too familiar here in Ireland – we have seen Ryanair attack workers' rights to organise, Dunnes Stores and the German discounters refuse to recognise unions, the Hotels' Federation and the Restaurant Association attack the Joint Labour Committees for hotel and restaurant workers, the Grocery

Employers' Organisations refusing to partake in the Joint Labour Committee for retail workers, the electrical contractors and building contractors attacking minimum terms and conditions in the construction sectors and so it goes on. Any measure of decency, which provides fairness and dignity for workers is seen as fair game – their motive is a race to the bottom where workers will work for the lowest possible wage and tip the forelock, afraid to organise. This is the sad reality in many sectors of the Irish economy today, and globally the picture is no different. In the UK and the US, large sectors of the workforce are surviving on poverty wages subsidised by the State through welfare or food stamps.

It does not have to be like this, we can create a vibrant economy and society that treats all citizens fairly and provides for their needs. But there is a number of things we as workers and as citizens must take responsibility for, many of the things that impact most on our wellbeing as workers or as citizens are political choices made by our politicians – we deserve what we get if we don't vote for change.

Governments of the past have willingly allowed themselves to be bullied by Big Business and on many occasions they have indeed often become willing participants working in unison with Big Business to dismantle workers' rights and halt progressive legislation.

Just listen to the end-of-the-world scaremongering of Big Business when there is talk of increasing the minimum wage, or introducing collective bargaining rights for workers, just listen to the puppet politicians who are all-too-willing to join in the chorus of business concerns and ask yourself is it in your or your families'

best interests to return these politicians to power?

The very same politicians have facilitated Big Business in avoiding paying all but the very bare minimum of corporation tax both here and abroad thereby starving our public services of basic resources to provide for our most vulnerable citizens, ensuring that each night there will be another 400 Irish citizens suffering in pain on hospital trollies for lack of facilities.

But not only have these Big Businesses' lobbying minimised their own tax contribution, but also they have created low-paid jobs in which workers do not earn enough to pay tax themselves.

So the Welfare State is being bled of financial resources from both ends – so who is going to pay for schools, hospitals, roads, houses, welfare etc?

The whole Welfare State is in real danger of collapse, but the 'one per cent' won't care, they will have their private health care, private schools and live in their gated communities.

This is their vision of the future, a future for the few, as Warren Buffet (one of the wealthiest men in the world) put it, "There's class warfare alright, but it's my class – the rich class – that's making war and we're winning." It does not have to be like this, we must organise and mobilise to create our vision of a different society, of a fairer society, a society that cares for all its citizens, an economy which distributes wealth created fairly.

We must fight back against the cancer of low pay and poor contracts which is eating at the very fabric of our value system. So on June 6 get out on the streets of Dublin and fight back against greed, fight back

for decent jobs, fight back for decent wages – economically and politically we must win this class war for our future and future generations.

June 6, 2015: D-DAY

**AUGUST 2015**

## Why we have a Right2Change...



OVER the last seven years, we've been hammered by austerity. Some more than others. For instance, some billionaires have had hundreds of millions of their debt written off (only to be picked up by taxpayers) while the rest of us are told that if we don't pay our water bills, we could end up in Court and have money taken directly from our wages.

One rule for them, one rule for us.

We've lost approximately 250,000 of our children to emigration – just to keep

the unemployment figures down, while politicians and economists warn us of the dangers of capital flight when we simply mention corporation tax.

We've bailed out developers and bankers to the tune of €65 billion, while 40 families lose their homes every month.

We've given €400 million in tax cuts to the top earners in our society – with more promised in the next Budget, while one in 10 of us suffer from food poverty.

We have the largest class sizes in Europe while millionaires and billionaires use Ireland as their tax avoidance hub.

We could go on and on and on...but the point is, we have created one of the most unequal countries in the developed world where hundreds of thousands of us struggle to just get by – yet a relatively small few flourish in wealth we could barely imagine.

We don't deserve that. None of us do. So we have to change it.

The Right2Water campaign has been one of the largest mobilisations of popular people power in the history of the state. One that has united the Left and brought the broadest possible coalition of people under the one banner proclaiming that water is a human right and water charges are an infringement of that right. Our experience shows that if we work together, we can mobilise and we can make enormous change in this country.

The Right2Water Trade Unions have been engaging with communities, political parties and other unions in recent months. We produced a Policy Principles Document for a Progressive Irish Government document in May 2015 and sought feedback through a submission

process where everybody had a chance to have their say.

That resulted in almost 150 detailed submissions on areas as diverse as education, healthcare, housing, the arts, trade agreements (TTIP), natural resources and workers' rights.

It is clear the society that has been carved out for us is not the one that people want. Since the submission process, we have held a conference with 220 activists who made amendments to the policies identified.

What's obvious is, people feel we have a Right2Change. A right to change the type of society we live in. No more corruption, no more cronyism. Everyone should pay their fair share, including employers. Our society should be based on decency, equality and respect, not inequality, profit and greed.

With an election looming, the Right2Water Trade Unions will be asking election candidates to sign up to our policy principles. We have produced a fiscal and economic blueprint which could raise more than €9 billion in revenue over four years, giving us scope to tackle homelessness, hospital waiting lists, A&E trolley numbers and lower class sizes, among other areas that benefit us all.

If we want to change Ireland, it has to begin with us. We need to get involved in the change we want. That begins on Saturday 29th August in Dublin where the Right2Water campaign will be hosting another major demonstration.

We're asking all Mandate members to come along, bring your family and friends, ask your neighbours to come and let's make this the biggest demonstration yet.



The event will be another family-friendly event with balloons and face painting for children. There may be an exciting announcement made on the day – so don't miss out!

Go to [www.right2water.ie](http://www.right2water.ie) for more information.

**OCTOBER 2015**

## Right2Change for a better Ireland...



As we approach the centenary of 1916, and the upcoming general election, we as active citizens will be faced with choices.

These choices cannot be made in isolation from what is happening in our workplaces and our communities, we must join the dots, we must realise that political promises and policies have consequences, some immediate, but some delayed.

We must also realise that those with power and influence desperately want to hang on to that power and influence, so expect an early outbreak of good news, giveaways, promises and spin, because in their eyes your vote has a price.

But, please Join the Dots – tens of thousands of Mandate members and their families depend on the social wage, i.e. good schools, health care and welfare payments such as FIS and rent allowances, all of which should be paid from the proceeds of a progressive tax system.

So parties promising big tax giveaways in the budget or in their political manifestos are undermining the State's ability to provide a decent social wage – hence the class sizes will get bigger, the A&Es more over-crowded, more homeless, welfare payments reduced or capped and the introduction of further indirect and unfair charges such as water charges.

But, of course that is of little concern to them or those who they really represent, they will try and buy your vote, but their real supporters – the powerful and the elite – will still be able to afford private schools, private housing, private health care and private transfer of wealth via pension schemes and low wealth tax.

So do not be fooled by statements like “making work pay” or “putting money back in workers’ pockets”, this is all a scam to create one of the most unequal societies in Europe.

If they really want to make work pay, they should introduce legislation to force employers to pay a decent living wage, a decent contract with decent hours and stop the madness of Government subsidising employers paying low wages

via Family Income Supplement and homelessness via rent supplements to private landlords.

Irish workers and their families have a right to a decent job and the right to a home. Did you know that the Irish State last year spent nearly €300 million in topping up poverty wages because employers refuse to pay a Living Wage to their workers? And this is on top of the €500 million spent on various rent supplements to private landlords because this and previous governments have abandoned families seeking a home to the private markets of landlords and emergency accommodation of B&Bs and hotel rooms.

There are now over 130,000 Irish families on Social Housing waiting lists and 5,000 families in emergency accommodation. And the only policy it would appear is to continue to line the pockets of landlords and hoteliers.

In Dublin alone 1,200 children and their parents are forced into emergency accommodation [a B&B or hotel room] every night because they have no home. Thousands more are in fear of losing their home to banks and vulture funds to whom NAMA sold their home loans, and whose only interest is in flipping a profit from the misery of others.

That is why Mandate, your union, is proud to be a member of the Right2Water Campaign and now a founding member of the Right2Change Movement ([www.right2change.ie](http://www.right2change.ie)).

Because there is a vision for a better Ireland, an Ireland where basic human rights – like a decent job, housing, health and education – are equally and freely available to all citizens regardless of their

ability to pay. Right2Change is a political policy platform for change in society and we urge all Mandate members, families and friends to lend their support and get involved in their local community groups and by supporting progressive political parties and progressive independents who support the Right2Change principles.

Please ensure that you, your family and friends are registered to vote at [www.checktheregister.ie](http://www.checktheregister.ie) and that you all vote and vote strategically for change and a vision for a New Republic as we enter the centenary of 1916, your voice, your vote is the most powerful driver for change – please use it.

**DECEMBER 2015**

## Decent jobs and a living weekly wage



THE RECENT announcement by Musgraves/SuperValu of the closure of their stores in Clonmel and Carlow was a hammer blow for the 100 plus Mandate members and their families employed in these stores with the announcement coming as it did in the mouth of Christmas.

Mandate officials have met with all the members involved and they are understandably angry at the company's decision to cease trading following heroic efforts by staff across the old "Superquinn chain of stores" to keep all locations viable and open.

Mandate will be meeting with the company in the coming weeks to negotiate a package of measures which will give our members real options for the future and every opportunity of rebuilding their lives post closure.

It is hard to overstate the importance of these 100 plus decent jobs to the local communities and economies of Clonmel and Carlow – both are towns which in the recent past have seen major closures of well-paid industrial employments.

The announcement of the closure of the SuperValu stores follows on from this year's announced closures of Clerys and Boyers with the loss of almost 600 jobs in Dublin. Again, these were decent trade union jobs that provided workers with secure incomes and a decent standard of living and it is a devastating blow for the workers and their families.

### **Spearheading the battle**

In the retail sector the fight for decent work and a living wage is a battle which Mandate and our members have spearheaded for the last number of year. We have made substantial progress

on banded hour contracts, rosters and certainty of earnings, but much more needs to be achieved.

We believe that every worker in the retail sector is entitled to a decent job and a living weekly wage, which affords them the basics of life.

Too many retail employers are happy to create part-time flexible jobs with no certainty of hours or income. Too many retailers are prepared to grab media headlines – such as Aldi, Lidl and IKEA – by committing to paying the hourly rate of the Living Wage, i.e. €11.50 per hour.

While the hourly rate is important, the amount of hours and the scheduling of those hours is also vitally important to the quality of retail employment – what use is there in getting the hourly living wage if you are only scheduled for 10 to 15 hours each week?

Mandate demands that all workers have a right to a decent weekly living wage. This means workers have access to full-time hours and decent scheduling. Recently the University of Limerick in a report to the Minister with responsibility for Enterprise and Employment, Ged Nash TD, called for legislation to curb the abuses of low hour contracts and scheduling.

Mandate has called for the recommendations in this report to be implemented as a matter of urgency.

Retailers in Ireland can afford to pay a decent living weekly wage – the reality is that they choose not to.

But we can all make a choice ourselves this Christmas. We can choose to support Fair Shops where workers are afforded

their basic human right to be represented for collective bargaining purposes, thereby allowing workers access to decent, fair contracts of employment.

Let us make 2016 the year of decent work and a living weekly wage in retail and for all workers.

I wish all Mandate members and their families a Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year. Thank you for standing up and fighting back during 2015...

**FEBRUARY 2016**

## Tesco's day of shame



WHAT a difference a day makes, at 11am on Tuesday, January 26, the lives and hopes of more than 1,000 long-serving and loyal Tesco employees were turned upside down in an instant.

For on this day, in a co-ordinated announcement across the country,

Tesco management informed all these employees that they were not fit for purpose and that there was no future for these employees on their existing contracts in a company they helped to build through good times and bad.

The message was delivered by local managers at precisely 11am, their script was prepared for them, they duly read it out to their colleagues, many of whom they have known for over 20 years, many are friends and neighbours. The human impact and sense of betrayal is impossible to express in words, the anger and sadness quickly turned to strength and resolve to fight this shabby treatment.

These workers who have given the best years of their working lives to Tesco are now seen as a problem rather than a solution. Their comparatively meagre earnings and benefits gained over the years are described as out of line and inflexible, the subtext is if only these loyal workers would go away the company would return to its former glory.

How more wrong can a multi-national corporate be? A company that does not value its employees, values nothing.

For it was not these workers who inflated profits, not these workers who made global expansion decisions now gone bad, not these workers being sued by investing institutions and under parliamentary scrutiny, not these workers who walked away with multimillion golden handshakes.

No, their only crime was to stay with a company through thick and thin, to serve the Irish public to the best of their ability, to earn a living wage to feed and shelter their families.

At 11am on January 26, all that changed – many had to go home to their families and discuss the very real possibility of not having enough wages to pay for the bare essentials in life, food clothing, rent etc.

The conduct of the company should be an eye-opener for all Tesco employees, whether or not affected by these measures, for all you have to ask yourself is when will my wages, my hours, my sick pay become a problem. Unless we all stand together united against this unwarranted attack on workers, you can be sure of one thing, the next call to the office will be for you.

Your union is with you, the Irish public is with you and retail workers across Ireland are with you, we only demand justice and fairness, a just and fair recovery at national level and corporate level.

JUNE 2016

## Respect is a union virtue



UNIONS are groups of workers who come together as brothers and sisters to improve and protect their pay and conditions of employment and to campaign on social and political issues. Workers form unions because they rightly understand that they are stronger together, particularly when faced with a powerful employer.

But for unions to be successful, it requires unity and activism by which we mean that workers are active in their union locally and nationally and support their shop stewards and officials. In the absence of this unity unions are weak and are no more than a collection of self-interest groups, often dictated by those who can shout loudest.

The last eight years have been difficult for Irish workers faced with the biggest economic crash this country has ever witnessed with many losing their jobs, emigrating or having their terms and conditions reduced. In the last two years there have been signs of a very tentative economic recovery, unions are attempting to restore and improve workers' living standards. In recent years, Mandate, for example, has secured pay increases across all major retailers on an annual basis, removed incremental freezes and secured certainty of earnings, while socially and politically campaigning for an end to zero-hour contracts, water charges and seeking investment in housing etc.

Have we achieved everything? No, but we have made a start thanks to the brave stance taken by retail workers across Ireland who on many occasions have stood on picket and protest lines to win a just and fair settlement.

Central to our campaigns and negotiations are the unselfish shop stewards and

house committee members who volunteer to work on behalf of their fellow workers to improve the lot of all. Together with you, they have engaged with management negotiating teams to secure the best proposals possible at the negotiating table.

It is important to understand that the “best proposals achievable at the negotiating table” are not necessarily the “best proposals”. Every set of negotiations has two sides – the employer and your representatives and rarely in a set of negotiations does either side achieve one hundred per cent.

But what your representatives do is bring back for your consideration and decision the best proposals they could achieve at the negotiating table. It is then up to the members to make the decision – after hearing all the facts – about whether or not these proposals are acceptable. This decision is made by way of a secret ballot – it’s called the democratic decision of the collective membership. Undoubtedly as in any ballot there will be those who will be happy and unhappy with the outcome, but that’s how the collective works and this goes to the very heart of trade unionism.

In cases where members reject a set of proposals – which is their right – then there arises a number of options (besides doing nothing): you can go back to the negotiating table to see if there are any more, you can go to the Labour Court to see if they will award more and, of course, if all else fails, the members in a secret ballot can decide to take industrial action to win more.

## **Personal attacks**

All of the above is normal and acceptable, but what is not acceptable and is becoming far too common is the unwarranted and often deeply personal attacks on the members of the national negotiating team, both officials and shop stewards who you have asked to go out and get the best deal possible for you for your consideration.

In good faith and often on their own time, your representatives engage with management on your behalf. What they bring back is in their opinion the “best proposals” achievable at the negotiating table. As I pointed out earlier, these are not necessarily the “best proposals” but they have fulfilled the task you have charged them to do. Once this is done, it is up to you and fellow members to make the final decision after listening to all the facts, debating and probing the circumstances, certain in the knowledge that you have the right to vote ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

The workers we send out to do this often thankless job deserve our respect. It is grossly unfair and cowardly to attack them at work, at meetings, or on social media etc. You are attacking your union, your collective, you are doing the job of the employer – divide and conquer. Bullying and intimidation have no place in trade unionism. So, yes, have a certain view, express that counter-view, canvass support for that counter-view, partake and vote in your democratic ballot, but always respect and support those whom you have asked to work on your behalf.



OCTOBER 2016

## New politics, same old tune



THE present construct of government, Fine Gael and the Independent Alliance minority government supported from the sidelines by Fianna Fail is often described as “new politics,” an era of open, transparent and consensus government.

Well so far it's the same old, same old self-interest and vested-interest politics played by the same political class in support of their class dressed up to con the masses in an effort to get reelected.

The powerful still call the shots and the media daily report half-truths and spin to the public as news stories, when in fact each story is politically loaded and biased to support the status quo and attack all dissenters.

So our “new politics” government told the EU that Ireland did not want the €13 billion Apple tax and that they were prepared to spend tens of million euros in legal fees in appealing the EU ruling. Whether the €13 billion Apple tax is totally due to Ireland is really irrelevant, the fact of the matter is that Apple and many multinationals have been attracted to Ireland by our corporation tax regime which facilitates corporations paying little or no tax either here or abroad.

To have a functioning welfare state, all citizens and corporations must pay their fair share of tax (social contribution to a decent society), be that in Ireland or in another country.

The fact of the matter is, Ireland (and we are not alone) facilitates multi-national corporations avoiding their social contribution thereby depriving Ireland, France, Spain, Africa, Asia of schools, hospitals, health care, housing and welfare, etc.

Ireland, like some other countries, has been complicit in providing “stateless corporations” with a route to pillaging scarce social resources in the name of profits and shareholder value.

We agree that Ireland cannot solve this issue on its own, but the EU put down a serious marker to all corporation in the Apple ruling, and Ireland should not be standing in Apple's corner, we should not be providing a cloak to hide behind at a time when there is no end in sight to our homeless crisis and housing crisis.

Ireland should have stood with our people, with the weakest and most vulnerable at home and abroad; instead Ireland danced like a performing monkey for the organ grinder of international capital, as

it did before when it bailed out 42% of all EU bank debt at the expense of its own citizens and future generations.

As we approach this government's first Budget in October, "new politics" Fine Gael are committed to abolishing the USC which raises €4 billion towards the social wage – 75% of which is collected from those earning more than €50,000 per year.

The media is full of stories of a "high tax economy", "making work pay" and the "squeezed middle" and of multi-Apple type corporations who cannot attract key executives to Ireland because of our tax regime – well, I suppose if the corporations pays no tax, why would the top executives want to pay taxes? The rest of the masses will be told to expect little, tighten your belts, put your shoulder to the wheel, wage increases are a danger to recovery and we must do what Europe tells us on water (but not on Apple tax).

We cannot afford to build houses but can pay hotels and landlords billions of euro to provide emergency accommodation, we cannot afford to staff hospitals or employ special needs assistants or carers, but we can afford to abolish the USC.

It's the same old spin, the same old politics and the same old crap – it's about policy choices, and those making those choices are making them in the interest of powerful business and finance capital.

Whether it's water charges, private health care, bank debt, social contributions, corporation taxes, bus workers' wages, and decent jobs on a living wage, it's the same organ grinders just different monkeys dancing to the same old tune.

The last election was just the beginning – look behind the spin and build for real change.

DECEMBER 2016

## The year past, the year ahead



The symbolic importance of the centenary of 1916 was not lost on the citizens of Ireland. During the year they looked on in disbelief at our Government's lack of social solidarity and its failure to implement the values and ideals of a Republic.

Previous governments had saddled over €64 billion of banking debt on the backs of the people – now this Government was selling the hopes and dreams of distressed mortgage holders to international vulture funds and stood idly by as thousands of families were evicted from their homes, adding to the army of those already homeless. Our city streets

are full of homeless rough sleepers, our cheap hotels and B&Bs are full of homeless families forced to merely exist, pushed from billy to jack night after night. The pockets of private landlords and hoteliers are being lined with our taxes which should be invested in decent social housing.

On countless occasions our Government has stood with the bankers, with international capital and with the carpetbaggers against its own people. In Budget 2016 the Government choose to give another €600 million in a reduced VAT rate to the hospitality sector so that the very same hotels could charge exorbitant room rates and continue to pay their employees the minimum wage.

The Government told the EU that we did not want the €13 billion of taxes awarded against Apple – in fact, it went further, it is going to spend millions of tax payers money on legal fees defending Apple. Our Taoiseach on a recent visit to the US met the CEO of Apple to reassure him that the Irish government was in his corner.

But who is in the corner of the homeless, the poor, the sick, and those struggling to survive? Our Government should be, but – alas – they are not.

Our Government supported by our lucky media continually beat out the lie that there is not enough money for schools, hospitals, childcare and for decent wages for workers. They attempt to turn private sector workers against public sector workers, those with jobs against the unemployed. Our bogus self-employed radio and TV presenters – some of whom I'd suggest pay little or no tax themselves – lecture unions, water protestors and workers while crying crocodile tears on phone-in shows for the lack of social

services, the homeless crisis etc, all the time deflecting from their own role in starving the State of vital resources to tackle the problems.

But there is a growing movement of opposition and resistance to this this axis of powerful elites. A movement has grown in every community in Ireland, a movement given expression in the Right2Water movement but not confined to water. A movement based on a network of volunteers and activists who have created an open space for discussion and education that the traditional elites in government, the media and business can't control or censor.

JULY 2017

## Time to stand up and be counted



OUR recent experiences with Dunnes Stores and Tesco has shown once again the importance of worker unity and

solidarity. There can be no doubt in the case of Tesco that the company has chosen a deliberate strategy of union avoidance in an attempt to destroy the workers' voice at work and in the medium to long term, place the company as the sole decision maker on terms and conditions of employment for all workers into the future.

This hostile and alien approach is more akin to the era of Thatcherite Britain than to Ireland. It's an approach which finds little favour among the Irish shopping public who during the recent dispute in February voted with their feet in avoiding Tesco stores as a sign of their disapproval with the company and solidarity with workers who have served them so well over the decades.

The approach of Tesco, or indeed any other major retailer following the same path, is doomed to failure, causing as it does massive reputational damage to the company, as well as alienating staff, customers and the 700,000 trade union members and their families across Ireland.

It's difficult to understand the logic behind such a flawed strategy, maybe it's corporate driven from the centre or maybe it's personal, driven by an individual or individuals, either way it will not succeed, Ireland is a village, an injury to one neighbour is an injury to all.

Of course it does not have to be like this, Mandate Trade Union and our members have over the decades shown that we are in touch with the real retail environment and we have agreed many complicated sets of negotiations which have served both workers and the company well. This is always the preferred approach of Mandate, but when one is faced from the

outset with a hostile employer, bent on destroying workers who over the decades contributed greatly to the success of Tesco, then there can only be one response – strike, which should always be the weapon of last resort but when faced with such hostile circumstances, there is no other option.

Tesco workers get it, they see the bigger picture and know they are fighting for their right to be members and to be active in their union. They understand that their future and the future of decent employment in retail depends on workers having a strong voice at work – the alternative is a race to the bottom.

Guaranteed banded hours, Sunday premiums, bonuses, shift premiums, sick pay, pension, pay increase etc., are all won by workers through their union, nothing is given by employers freely. Strong union density is the only leverage workers have to improve their lot. This union leverage can be used in a destructive fashion or a constructive fashion, but this depends on the approach of the employer. Unfortunately, Tesco through its attempt at union busting (Project Black) set out the path for conflict.

The workers' voice in Tesco – or indeed any employment – is not going away; it will not be intimidated or bullied, and it will not be bought with promises or favouritism.

Our Mandate members in retail are prepared to face the challenges in their sector, challenges such as Brexit and online retailing, and they are capable of facing these challenges as equals in an industry they helped build. Those who attempt to demonise them and marginalise them do not see workers

as equals or having entitlement to a collective voice at work rather they see workers as a means of production, a resource, a raw material to be used and exploited as they choose.

The next five to 10 years in retail will be defining, none of us know what retail will look like or what the future for employment is, but one thing is certain – if retail workers in union and their employers do no work together on solutions, then Amazon, Alibaba, Ali Express etc., will destroy the traditional retail landscape as we know it today.

The choice is theirs – an endless conflict with staff, customers and shareholders or a shared future for all.

More people are asking why does it have to be like this? Why can't we build homes? Why do we give away our natural resources? Why do we allow our seas to be plundered by Dutch factory ships?

But more importantly they are reaching the conclusion that it does not have to be like this and the reason it is, is because those in control and with the most to gain have fixed the game – they have stacked the cards against the people and in favour of capital and wealth.

The Right2Water movement stripped bare their dirty agenda of privatisation of water, of handing over our natural water resources to big business to bleed massive profits from what is a basic human right. Our governments present and past were co-conspirators. They ran our water infrastructure into the ground so that the private sector vulture funds could step in – big profits for consultants, big money for meter installation companies, big money for billing companies, and ultimately huge profits for the companies

who would run the private water companies.

This approach is a classic tactic of neo-liberal governments – they deliberately under-invest in social infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools, transport, childcare etc, then they proclaim that the State and the public sector is inefficient and unable to deliver and that then only option open is to give the service to the private sector, who will invite private investors and vulture funds to invest in social services based not on need but on the profit motive. Hence we have private hospitals, private schools, private transport etc. all driven by profits. Those who can afford to pay will be forced to – the rest of our citizens can languish on trolleys or in cheap B&Bs or sleep in doorways.

The Right2Water and Right2Change movements can be the blueprint and catalyst for change. We can win back our country and our democracy and create a real Republic. Mandate Trade Union is proud to be a founding member of the Right2Water movement. We are proud to be driving a campaign for decent contracts and a living wage and an end to zero hour contracts. We are proud to be at the forefront of the rent control and end homelessness campaigns. Yes, we will also fight the important fight for decent wages and conditions in employment, for respect and equality at work. All of these struggles are for a decent society, for a future for our children and grandchildren.

We have made powerful enemies – some have moved against us and others are waiting their opportunity but, lest there be a doubt, we are not going to be silenced, we have the truth on our side, we have fairness on our side and the Irish public is opening its eyes, and we will let the light in.

Let's make 2017 the Year of Decency at Work, Decency in Society. A decent job and a home for all.

And a Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year to all Mandate members, activists and their families.

**OCTOBER 2017**

## **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.

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



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

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

While a strike is always a last resort, your union and our members in Tesco had very little option, forced as they were by an uncompromising attack on workers'

terms and conditions of employment and a company that was not prepared to accept the democratic and legal decision of Tesco workers to reject a Labour Court Recommendation.

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

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

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

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

Following on from the Dunnes Stores strike in 2015, Mandate launched a well-resourced campaign for the introduction of legislation that would guarantee workers fixed working schedules and secure earnings. We have met with all political parties and were instrumental in supporting both Sinn Féin and the Labour Party when introducing Banded Hours Bills in the Dail and Seanad.

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

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

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

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

Our industrial agenda across all retailers continued throughout the year. Our national negotiating teams were successful in winning pay and benefits increases across nearly all retailers. While these increases are never enough, we will

develop new tactics and strategies which will deliver for workers a living wage.

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

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

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

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

Mandate Trade Union and our members will continue the struggle for Decency and Respect for Retail Workers. We will defend the right of workers to have a voice at work. We will continue to campaign for certainty of income and decent jobs. We will fight for a living wage. But, we can only achieve all of these things if we organise,

if we recruit new members and stand up as shop stewards and activists. The union is only as strong as its members and that is why your union, Mandate, is one of the

strongest and most effective unions in Ireland – it's because of our members, they get it!

Unity is Strength.

FEBRUARY 2018

## Gagging on the gig economy



SOME of you might have heard of the “gig economy” and more of you might be wondering what the gig economy is. Has it anything to do with music or outdoor events you might well ask. It sounds fun and exciting but words and phrases are often used to hide reality or portray a more benign picture.

The “gig economy” for the majority of workers simply means unfettered exploitation. The “service provider” [employer] has simply carved up what were once decent jobs and re-classified them as self-employed, and in doing so washes their hands of all responsibility to the “new gig workers” who are now deemed self-employed.

So these so called gig workers are entitled to no holidays, no pension, no sick pay, no contract, no rights, and no future. The “service provider” will often say that “gig workers” take these self-employed (bogus) jobs as a lifestyle choice, that gig workers like to work when they want, for as long as they want, on days of their choosing – it suits the gig workers they contend.

We hear the same from employers who only offer part-time or flexi contracts to their employees. This is frankly delusional for these gig service providers have total control over their workers via sophisticated technology which monitors their every move, their speed, rate of productivity and customer response.

Who are the gig workers? The most visible are the delivery bike riders, large square boxes strapped to their backs as they weave in and out of our city traffic delivering our meals or our post. They race the traffic lights, taking the short cuts, endangering themselves and others in their quest to make an income and hoping they might get a tip. Their delivery times and routes monitored and customer feedback analysed by sophisticated software so that so-called unproductive workers can be weeded out. Their own health and safety is solely their responsibility, they fall or crash they are not covered.

But gig workers are also across other sectors, they are the "pickers" in warehouses and distribution centres, the home-helps paid per client visit, they're the accommodation staff in hotels paid per bed or room cleaned. They all have one thing in common – they have to race to make an income.

The jobs they perform are broken down into units of time. They have no legal rights as employees because they are so called self-employed. They are on every construction site in the country often not realising they have been deemed self-employed by the main contractor until they get their first week's wages, which will not have any employee tax or PRSI deducted. They, like the employees on precarious contracts in retail, are at the coalface of the race to the bottom.

Far too many of our young people feel they have been abandoned to the gig economy. They believe that the older generation has pulled the decency ladder up behind them – not for them a decent job, a decent wage, a pension, a career or even a home. Many employers believe that they, as employers, have no responsibility to create decent jobs; rather their sole objective is to maximise profits and the return on capital.

They believe that it's the "State's" duty to provide a basic decency threshold via social transfers/Social Welfare Payments, e.g. Family Income Supplements etc. But, ask yourself why should the State be forced to subsidise by social transfers exploitative profitable employers? The employers who, while refusing to pay a living wage or create decent jobs, at the same time increase shareholder dividends and CEOs' salaries and bonuses?

In a decent society, of course, the State has a role in supporting a basic decency threshold for all citizens but the State should pick up the tab for major profitable multi-national companies who deliberately destroy decent jobs.

The immoral concentration of wealth is now at obscene levels across the world – the world's richest one per cent own over half of all the world wealth (2017). There are now 36 million millionaires across the globe (an increase of 2.4 million millionaires in the past year alone). These millionaires account for just 0.7% of the world's population while on the other side of the spectrum 3.5 billion of the world's poorest adults have less than €8,000 in assets. This trend in the accumulation of wealth is increasing each year.

Most of the wealth accumulated by the 1% is at the expenses of labour's share. But the greed of the 1% is the fatal flaw within the neo-liberal capitalist system, and if it remains unchecked will see a total collapse of the prevailing world economic order, which is still predominately based on consumerism, be it the consumption of products or data.

If the trend of the accumulation of wealth in fewer and fewer hands continues, the vast majority of the world's population will not have the means to consume – i.e. they will not have money or assets to spend.

The rise of the gig economy and precarious work is becoming the norm, and a living wage and a decent job are being confined to the history books. Then, one has to ask, who will be spending in our shops, pubs, restaurants or over the internet? If large swells of the population are not earning enough – not only to spend but also not earning enough to

make a social contribution via Tax/PRSI to the State for the social infrastructure of schools, roads, hospitals, etc – then the whole deck of cards will collapse.

This is already the case in many countries around the world where the 1% have retreated to the high-security, gated communities for fear of attack/kidnap as social order breaks down fuelled by poverty and a lack of hope.

This scenario is not scaremongering but a certainty to happen if the world remains on the same neo-liberal trajectory it is currently on. There are even some of the 1% millionaires who see this happening and are calling for a “fairer” system of wealth distribution, their motive is self-preservation. When the “great and the good” meet in places like the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, they discuss how to prolong the system and protect their wealth. They realise that the current model is globally unsustainable.

Workers and workers’ collective power is the only counter-balancing force to this inevitable collapse. Workers need to organise in trade unions, political parties and communities to win back their fair share of the wealth they create. It will not be easy, the odds are stacked against us. For decades the 1% in collusion with willing governments and a bought-off media have demonised trade unions and workers’ actions. But in a strange twist of fate, the future survival of the 1% might now depend on workers organising and winning a greater share of wealth so that they can continue to be active in the economy as consumers.

The current younger generation must find their voice and the strength to organise – to protest, to join unions, to demand

a decent job, a decent life and a decent society. The gig economy is not a lifestyle choice, young people do not voluntarily choose to be exploited. The ball is firmly in their court. They can strike it or let it pass. Let’s hope for the sake of humanity and the planet that they stand up to the plate and strike hard.

“Do not wait to strike till the iron is hot, but make it hot by striking” – William Butler Yeats





"A report from the General Secretary regarding a meeting of the Officers and John Douglas was read to the committee and the Secretary was instructed to pay Mr.J.Douglas £5.00 increase from the date his 6 months trial period was up. This was agreed by the Committee."

Excerpt taken from minutes of the Irish National Union of Vintners, Grocers and Allied Trades Assistants (INUVGATA) National Executive meeting on 6 August 1980



I've been responsible for Shopfloor since it morphed from the stylized but slightly derivative magazine Mandate News, into a "red top" style union newspaper publication that delivers a different slant on topics of the day to our members and now to an even wider readership beyond our members. Shopfloor relies on the good grace of our team of contributors for progressive left wing analysis of society and politics. It's a workers newspaper that responded to the right wing class war that is being perpetrated against our class. A newspaper that reports on union industrial issues, social and international issues with a refreshing honesty and a huge amount of regard for working class values and the betterment of Irish society in general.

One contributor who never fails to supply copy is our General Secretary John Douglas via his "Straight Talking" column (it was my decision to name it Straight Talking because of my direct experience of dealing with John on a daily basis). My call for copy goes out weeks in advance of the deadline, however, the final article received on every edition since the first publication has been the coveted Straight Talking column. The Chief always tells me, "relax Forbes, it's always worth waiting for the cream to rise." This interesting collection of revolutionary musings of a union General Secretary brings with it many years of high blood pressure and stress on my part but I wouldn't change a second of it. John's vision and empathy for workers (don't tell him I said this) is second to none in the Irish Trade Union movement and this collection of revolutionary musings is testimony to that fact. I hope you enjoy reading them half as much as I was tortured for chasing him for them. If you do, then it's a life worth living. Up the workers!

— Brian Forbes, National Coordinator, Mandate Trade Union

Mandate Head Office  
O'Lehane House  
9 Cavendish Row  
Dublin 1

Tel: (01) 874 6321/2/3  
Fax: (01) 8729581

[www.mandate.ie](http://www.mandate.ie)