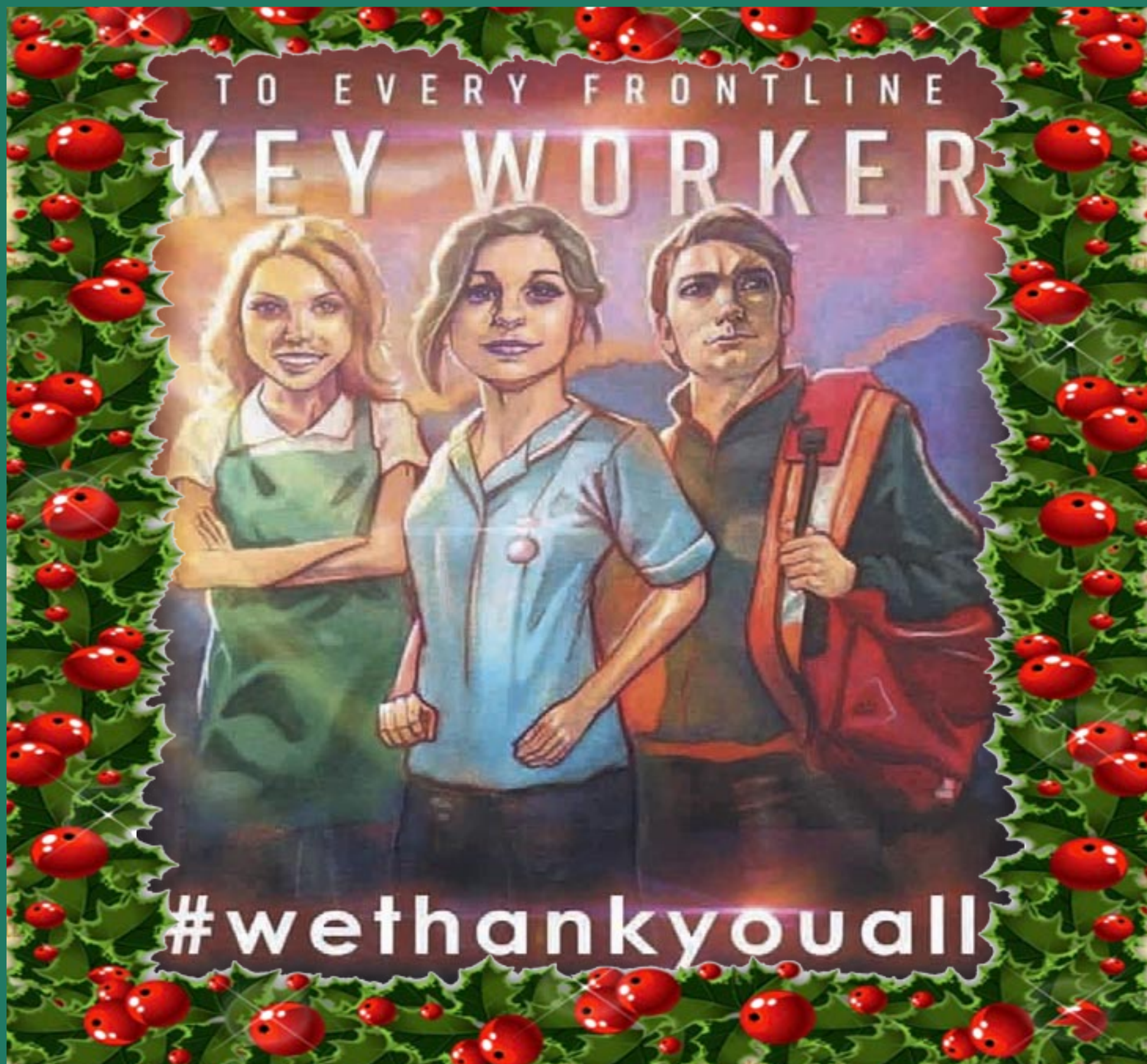


MANDATE TRADE UNION

ONLINE EDITION  
DECEMBER 2020

# SHOPFLOOR

**NEW DEAL FOR DISTRIBUTION & RETAIL WORKERS P4**



**UPFRONT GERRY LIGHT P2 ● INSIDE STORY DEBENHAMS P20**

# 2020 – a year to reflect

**THIS is the first opportunity I have had to pen this piece as the General Secretary of our proud and distinguished union and I want to say it is a pleasure and honour to do so.**

Twelve months ago the term Covid-19 was unknown along with any understanding of the deadly virus to which it referred. There can be little doubt that the rapid and intense spread of this global pandemic has virtually stopped us all in our tracks and forced us to not only look at how we reorganise our day-to-day lives but also to reassess the things which are important beyond those of material value.

**It is also an opportunity to challenge the societal and economic norms which value a job purely from a financial perspective instead of asking what contribution it makes to our society as a whole, particularly during a time of national crisis.**

Regrettably many sectors, industries and businesses have been ravaged over the past nine months with the world of retail in particular being severely impacted. This stark reality has meant thousands of retail workers have lost their jobs with others having their incomes seriously depleted.

Those who have remained at work providing what now is generally accepted as an essential public service have to face the constant threat and worry of contracting the virus.



## UPFRONT

**Gerry Light** *General Secretary, Mandate Trade Union*



Picture: Jonathan Cutrer, Public Domain

Being a union operating predominantly in the retail sector, Mandate has along with its members been very much in the eye of the storm. Clearly the biggest impact so far has been the loss of more than 1,000 good quality retail jobs following the decision of Debenhams to close its Irish operation.

What has followed over the past nine months is a determined and heroic effort by our members who have been involved in actively picketing, in some cases 24/7, the 11 ex-Debenhams stores in pursuit of a just and fair settlement to their industrial dispute.

**Clearly this has been and continues to be a long and difficult struggle for the members involved and we are committed to ensure that their efforts will not be in vain.**

Also significant numbers of our members employed in the bar trade have seen their livelihoods wiped out with growing uncertainty about the future of the sector and the many thousands workers it employs.

There is no price too great which can be placed on human health and that is why we will continue to prioritise the absolute need to ensure that our members who turn up for work on a daily basis are afforded the greatest levels of protection and respect from both employers and customers alike.

There must be zero tolerance against behaviour from any quarter that has the potential to negatively impact our members' physical or mental well-being.

**They have put themselves literally in the line of fire and the least they deserve in return is appropriate appreciation and due consideration.**

With the advancement of technology allowing for greater levels of automation and the way these developments have changed customers' shopping habits there can be little doubt that the shape of traditional bricks and mortar retail has also significantly changed over the past number of years, the arrival of Covid has served to accelerate these trends considerably.

Notwithstanding the promising news that is emerging on a daily basis about potential vaccines there can be little doubt the world of retail that will emerge post-Covid has the potential to be radically different.

This is why Mandate continues to demand from Government the establishment of a specific taskforce charged with the responsibility of identifying supports for the future of traditional bricks and mortar retailing and the thousands of jobs it supports.

Post-Covid some employers will seek, in the greedy pursuit of greater profits, to take advantage of the situation – in fact, there is evidence that this type of unscrupulous behaviour has already started.

**Going forward it will be the role of your union in consort with you the members to fight back against these unjustified attacks on your hard-won, long-established terms and conditions of employment.**

To those employers who were quick to laud the contributions of their workers during the Covid crisis, we say it is now time to go beyond words of gratitude with other forms of meaningful recognition and reward. It is hard to escape the ironic reality

that some businesses have done very nicely as a direct consequence of Covid through significant increases in turnover and profits.

Whether it is over the past nine months, or indeed as we head into 2021, the best way of facing uncertainty is not individually. By acting in this isolated manner it will always ensure that workers' interests are placed secondary to those of business and the market.

If nothing else the Covid crisis has shown from a societal perspective what can be achieved through acting collectively. The notion of the common good has quite rightly been given a renewed sense of focus and importance.

The workplace is merely a microcosm of society. What we need now is to see a transfer of these values by workers into their place of work and to help them build an understanding of how they can lead to greater levels of reward, respect, fulfilment and dignity.

**The power and benefits that can evolve from a collective approach are clearly proven all we need to do is reassert our confidence in the belief that by joining together in common purpose this approach will continue to deliver in the future.**

As the recently appointed General Secretary of Mandate I give you an absolute assurance that myself, the staff and members of our National Executive Council will continue to tirelessly strive to lead our members through the current challenges facing us.

We will ensure that the interests of our members are always to the forefront – whether it's in relation to issues directly impacting them in the workplace or indeed the broader social justice matters that impact them and their dependents.

Never before has the wish for you, your families and friends to have a happy, safe and enjoyable Christmas and New Year been more sincere and appropriate. It's been a tough year, unfortunately far too many of us knew those who paid the ultimate price.

However, as we head into 2021 let's do so in the confidence of knowing that if we continue to have each other's backs and commit to acting in unity and common purpose the future holds more promise than fear. So let's stop hoping for a better new year, instead let's resolve to do what we can within our control to make it happen.

**Have a great Christmas and New Year, you deserve it.**

BAH HUMBUG!

# Lloyds Pharmacy 'Scrooges' cancel Xmas staff bonus

LLOYDS Pharmacy bosses have been accused of acting like "cold-hearted misers" after a Scrooge-like decision was taken to cancel Christmas bonus payments.

Workers are furious they will not now pocket a yearly 'thank you' payment worth between €150 to €400 each.

And it comes after months of extraordinary efforts by Lloyds workers to keep the pharmacies open during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Workers insisted a special seasonal online event hosted by former Big Brother star Brian Dowling did absolutely nothing to restore any feelings

they had of Christmas cheer.

One worker, summing up the feelings of colleagues, said: "We feel we should be given a bonus this year more than ever."

Brian Dowling's virtual Christmas social - including festive TikTok videos, games of charades and bingo - took place on November 21st for pharmacy staff.

Not to be outdone, Mandate members at Lloyds Pharmacy launched a virtual event of their own - an online petition to restore the bonus.

The petition stated: "It's been eight months since Leo Varadkar made his Covid lockdown announcement to the

country. Lloyds staff kept the pharmacies open. Lloyds staff made sure that elderly and more vulnerable customers were looked after... Lloyds staff got Covid. Lloyds staff deserve a Christmas bonus."

## 'Equitable'

Lloyds claimed the Christmas bonus was withdrawn as part of a new "more transparent and equitable" monthly bonus structure to reward employees.

However, the claim was disputed by Mandate lead organiser Bill Abom who insisted this did not constitute part of the talks arranged to restructure a separate bonus.

Mandate National Coordinator Brian Forbes slammed Lloyds bosses and claimed the move was an "insult" to workers.

He told *Shopfloor*: "To be encouraged now by the company to engage in TikTok fun and games with Brian Dowling instead of being paid their hard-earned Christmas bonus is frankly an insult to the tireless and significant sacrifices made by these essential frontline workers."

"Lloyds Pharmacy bosses are proving themselves the cold-hearted misers and the big bad Scrooge of the Irish pharmacy sector."



Big Brother star Brian Dowling  
Picture: Public Domain

FESTIVE MESSAGE TO BOSSES, GOVERNMENT AND SHOPPERS...

# Have a safe and respectful Christmas

MANDATE has called on all employers to strictly adhere to Covid-19 protocols as the retail sector reopens in the run up to Christmas.

And the union, which represents almost 30,000 workers in the retail sector, has also called on consumers to respect retail workers following an increase in abusive behaviour.

General Secretary Gerry Light insisted the health and safety of workers must always be of paramount importance.

He said: "The current Covid regulations must be strictly adhered to if we are to reduce transmission of this deadly disease and ensure we don't go into a third lockdown - which would obviously be bad for employers, workers and the economy."

"But crucially, we need to protect the health and well-being of retail workers and their families and that includes affording them dignity and respect at work."

Light added: "We have received numerous complaints from retail workers who have been verbally abused or threatened by customers after they were requested to wear masks or to socially distance. Abuse is never part of the job, and in these difficult times, it's essential that we recognise the efforts of our frontline workers and we all protect them from abusive behaviour."

Mandate has calling on employers, consumers and the Government to ensure the health and safety of work-



Picture: Belinda Fewings on Unsplash

ers of the utmost importance.

## All employers should:

- Ensure shops are not overcrowded by managing queuing systems and controlling numbers inside and outside of stores.
- Investigate whether to extend opening times to spread the customer base, while also allowing designated times for vulnerable customers.
- Allow workers the voluntary option of working beyond their agreed hours and times and adequately rewarding them for this.

● Strictly adhere to the wearing of face coverings and manage social distancing, using qualified staff to police these policies.

● Make regular announcements on intercoms about social distancing and other health and safety measures.

● Ensure an adequate supply of hand sanitizer is available at all times.

● Adopt a zero-tolerance approach from customers towards staff and remove abusive customers from the premises while providing supports for workers.

Mandate is calling on the Government to:

● Provide clarity around the enforcement of fines for the refusal to adhere to Covid regulations.

Mandate is calling on shoppers to:

● Adhere to social distancing guidelines.

● Use hand sanitizer and wash your hands regularly.

● Be patient with retail staff and other customers and under no circumstances verbally abuse, threaten or assault shop workers.

Light said: "Christmas is always a busy and very stressful period for everyone, but particularly shop workers, and this year will be more difficult than most."

"We're asking people to be mindful of the pressures facing shop workers and remember that workers requesting that customers abide by health and safety policies do so at the behest of their employer and government regulations."

He added: "If we are genuine about our appreciation for the 'essential work' of retail staff, then we must all play our part over the coming weeks and months. Respect retail workers, and remember that respect is not just for Christmas."



Mandate General Secretary Gerry Light

# McCauley pharmacy chain reinstates Christmas bonus for staff

A MANDATE delegation held a "constructive and informative" meeting with management at McCauley Health & Beauty Pharmacy on November 18th, resulting in a number of what was described as "positive and welcome outcomes for members", including confirmation that a Christmas bonus will be paid this year.

The family chemist chain operates more than 30 stores nationally and employs over 500 staff.

A Mandate source told *Shopfloor*: "It was confirmed at the meeting that the Christmas bonus would be reinstated, and that staff who were

temporarily laid-off during the year would also receive the bonus as normal, which the company plans to pay by the first week of December."

However, company representatives claimed they couldn't afford the 2.2% pay rise but did promise to review the issue early in the New Year.

The source commented: "We made it clear to them that we were seeking to have the pay rise backdated to October when it was due. We will revisit this matter again early in 2021."

Mandate also spoke about understaffing, with McCauley management stating that they were beginning to "address the gaps" which they blamed on an increase in worker-absenteeism due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Management, however, did confirm that temporary Christmas staff would be taken on as normal in December.

Company representatives also pointed out that understaffing issues could be raised and addressed with the shop manager and if no resolution is found, the matter could then be

brought to the attention of senior management.

The Mandate delegation raised a number of health and safety concerns at the meeting with management representatives reiterating their full commitment to all Covid-19 related safety measures.

Meanwhile, it was also confirmed that progress is being made on finalising a recognition/procedural agreement between Mandate and the company. This agreement will set out how both sides engage going forward.

## PAN-UNION INITIATIVE



# 'New Deal' campaign launched for retail & distribution workers

RETAIL and distribution workers are demanding a 'new deal' that will tackle low pay and insecure work and help rebuild the sector after the Covid-19 pandemic, as part of a campaign launched by trade unions representing workers across sector.

*A New Deal for Retail & Distribution Workers* sets out the key measures needed to restore and rebuild the sector after the pandemic, by tackling the serious issues around low pay, working conditions and poor job quality that were exposed by the health emergency.

The campaign, launched on December 8th, is backed by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions' Retail Sector Group, which comprises unions representing workers in retail and distribution across the island of Ireland, including Mandate, SIPTU, Unite, USDAW and the GMB.

*A New Deal for Retail & Distribution Workers* calls for the establishment of a Retail Stakeholder Group composed of trade unions, retail employers and key government departments that would be tasked with devising a new blueprint for the retail and distribution sector to help it recover after the pandemic.

The campaign document states that workers in the sector can "no longer afford the price of the low pay and insecure work" and that a new deal must embrace Decent

Work standards as a key priority, including improved pay and conditions, trade union representation and collective bargaining, along with access to training and upskilling.

Rebuilding the sector post-pandemic and ensuring fair competition between online trading and the traditional 'bricks and mortar' high street model will require significant financial and policy assistance from the Government, according to the document.

Trade unions and workers must play 'an integral role' in developing a new blueprint and 'future-proofed model' for the retail and distribution sector. Given the essential roles played by retail and distribution workers during the pandemic, there is a strong desire for progressive change to employment standards within the sector.

Workers will not support "a return to business as usual and to the old, failed model," the campaign document points out.

The Congress Retail Sector Group has called on all political parties to support the *New Deal for Retail & Distribution Workers* campaign and proposals and is seeking an urgent engagement on these key issues with Minister of State Damien English,

who has responsibility for the retail sector.

Speaking in support of the campaign, Mandate General Secretary Gerry Light told *Shopfloor*: "The pandemic exposed how essential service workers in retail and distribution are among the lowest paid and least well protected.

"This must change and this demand for change is supported by the workers, by a range of expert bodies and commentators and by political leaders.

Indeed, it is an issue the Tánaiste Leo Varadkar has also been vocal on.

He added: "The time for promises is past. Now is the time to act and to deliver a New Deal for workers in the sector."

Michelle Quinn, of SIPTU, said: "The retail and distribution sector faces enormous challenges into the future. We now have an opportunity to break with the failed model of the past and build a sector that delivers quality jobs and growth.

"We need to address challenges like online trading, automation and the range of new skills the future workplace will require. To do this successfully we need the voice, knowledge and commitment of workers to help shape and inform a

Median weekly wage for wholesale & retail workers...



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3. Secure hours & benefits
4. A Voice at Work

Picture: Alisdair (CC BY 2.0)

new blueprint for this vital sector of our economy."

North of the border, Usdaw Area Organiser Nicola Scarborough said: "The pandemic exposed how essential service workers in retail and distribution are among the lowest paid and least well protected. They deserve and are rightly entitled to far better.

"As we move to rebuild the sector in the aftermath of the pandemic and brace for the impact of Brexit, we need to put decent work standards front and centre of that process."

And Belfast-based SIPTU organiser

Niall McNally agreed. He said: "Workers in the sector are also facing challenges in respect of online trading, automation and the wide range of new skills that will be required into the future.

"If we are to rebuild the sector in a sustainable manner, we need to prioritise the creation of good quality jobs. The time for promises and applause is past. Now is the time to deliver a new deal for workers in the sector."

● *A New Deal for Retail & Distribution Workers* can be downloaded at: <https://bit.ly/33WRPME>

# Great support for striking service station workers

MANDATE members working for a Carrick-on-Suir service station have staged two days of strike action in the run-up to Christmas over the employer's failure to engage with their union on pay and working conditions.

The workers picketed outside O'Sullivan's Applegreen and Centra Service Station at Ballylynch on Thursday, December 10th and Friday, December 18th.

They said they had received tremendous backing from passing pedestrians and motorists throughout the two days in their bid to secure trade union recognition.

A local newspaper reported that the strikers had been greeted with "honking horns of support" from many motorists driving past the Pill Road station as well as messages of good will from passers-by.

It stated: "Most vehicles that approached the service station to use the shop or get petrol or diesel drove on rather than pass the picket."

Mandate Divisional Organiser Betty Dillon, explaining the background to the dispute, said some

months ago staff members at the service station joined the union and had wanted it to negotiate pay, sick pay and rosters on their behalf.

O'Sullivan's was approached by union representatives in early October but steadfastly refused to engage despite all the union's best efforts to communicate by letter, email and phone.

Dillon pointed out members were left with no option but go on strike. Mandate had, she said, served notice of strike action ahead of the statutory seven-day notice period but this had also been ignored by management.

"This isn't anything that anyone wants to do but we have been left with no other choice," she said.

Dillon told the newspaper: "These workers have worked on the frontline all through the Covid-19 pandemic and still are. This is 2020 and just because staff join a union the sky is not going to fall in."

She added that the dispute could be resolved very quickly by the owner picking up the phone and engaging with Mandate.



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# Mandate warns of drone threat to retail jobs

MANDATE has warned jobs in the retail sector could be threatened by developing “game changer” drone technology.

National Coordinator Brian Forbes said: “Some companies, such as Amazon and UPS, have been touting the need for an increased use of unmanned drone technologies for a number of years.

“Much like the use of self-service tills at supermarkets the increased use of drones for deliveries will see jobs being endangered by this exponential growth in technology.”

He made the comments after it was revealed that Oranmore, Co Galway, has been chosen to take part in a ‘pilot’ initiative to test the viability of delivering shopping by drone.

Tesco teamed up with Irish-based drone delivery company Manna to run the Oranmore service, which started in late October and is expected to run over several months.

Led by the retailer’s Group Innovation team small basket

deliveries – involving an initial range of 700 products – are being offered to customers from its local store.

But Forbes claimed there was a number of what he called “unanswered questions” for the drone industry in Ireland to answer as Irish laws play catch-up with European legislation.

## Weak

He explained: “The Irish Aviation Authority regards these unmanned aerial vehicles as aircraft but the laws in Ireland for misuse are extremely weak with only one prosecution since the laws were introduced back in 2015.”

It is understood Oranmore residents place their order at a special website which is then packed up by a Tesco worker in-store. The delivery is overseen by a Manna drone supervisor.

Drone orders run 9.30am-5pm from Tuesday to Sunday and can be tracked in real-time, with purchases



Picture: Caleb Woods on Unsplash

delivered within 30 minutes to one hour of ordering. The drones fly at speeds of 80km/h with a capacity to lift 4kg (9lb) of shopping good packed into a cargo cassette which is then lowered to the ground as the machine hovers above its destination.

Earlier this year, Manna Aero abandoned a plan to deliver takeaway orders in favour of prescription medicines in response to the Covid-

19 pandemic, and choose the small Midlands town of Moneygall as its test location.

Forbes told *Shopfloor*: “Mandate fully appreciates the fact that automation is a potential game-changer for many retailers looking to cut costs and boost profits in our capitalist society.

“However, these retailers must recognise, appreciate and

compensate all workers directly and indirectly affected by the introduction of new technologies and meaningfully consult and negotiate with trade unions before, during and after the implementation of any proposed new technology.”

He added: “For those of you dreaming about pizza delivery by drone, just stop – it’s a pie-in-the-sky idea.”

## IN BRIEF

Members at Malahide GC reject pay freeze proposals

TALKS are continuing between union officials and management at Malahide Golf Club after members rejected proposals to freeze pay until 2022.

Negotiations – launched March 2020 but subsequently suspended due to Covid-19 and the initial lockdown – recommenced in October.

Mandate welcomes 3% pay rise for Nolan’s staff

NOLAN’S management have announced that they will put in place a 3% pay rise for staff from the beginning of 2021.

Industrial Officer John Callan told *Shopfloor*: “Having written to the company in early November seeking a meeting to discuss the upcoming expiry date of our current pay deal, the company announced on 3rd December that they would implement a 3% pay increase from 1st January 2021.

“Although the union welcomes this announcement we will continue to raise further issues with the retailer following on from the results of a recent survey conducted among our members working in Nolan’s.”

He said: “Pay was, of course, the central concern for staff at the retailer. While we welcome the awarding of a 3% pay increase, Mandate will follow up with management on the various issues highlighted in the feedback we received.”

# Mandate seeks clarification from Minister over Covid-related benefit

FRONTLINE retail workers have been left “high and dry” by the Government, Mandate National Coordinator for Training Jonathan Hogan has claimed.

He told *Shopfloor*: “The wages of retail workers should be safeguarded whether they’re deemed to be self-isolating or restricting their movements.”

Hogan made the comments following the implementation of the Covid-19 Enhanced Illness Benefit and came amid warnings that shop workers could find themselves without a wage over restrictions placed on their movements by HSE guidelines.

He highlighted these concerns in a September 22nd letter to Heather Humphreys, the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

“Retail workers working at high risk on the frontline should not be at any loss, regarding absences attributed to Covid-19,” he told the Minister.

Hogan pointed out that the Covid-19 Enhanced Illness Benefit seemed only to deal with employees “self-isolating” as a result of exposure to the virus but not to those requested to “restrict their movements” as set out in the HSE guidelines.

He explained to the Minister: “An example of where the ‘restrictive movements’ definition may impact workers negatively is in scenarios where a worker’s colleagues or their



Social Protection Minister Heather Humphreys

colleagues’ family members are symptomatic, are awaiting a Covid test and the close contact worker or parent must restrict their movements for a period of time.

“Another example is where our members may find themselves to be a close contact of a confirmed case and are advised to restrict their movements for 14 days or whatever period of time the HSE recommend at the time.”

Hogan claimed that some Mandate members were caught between “their public health and social obligations” and “the loss of their income” – and warned that this was a “grave position” for any worker to find themselves in which was “particularly amplified” when they were low paid.

He called on the Minister to review the scheme to ensure that retail

workers were not placed at a disadvantage through loss of earnings as a result of Covid-19 absences from work, whether due to instructions to “self-isolate” or to “restrict movements”.

In her October 8th reply, Minister Humphreys described the Covid-19 Enhanced Illness Benefit as a “short-term public health measure” and not a “long-term income support payment”. It was designed to “encourage people not to go to work due to financial constraint when they should be in isolation”.

She pointed out that employers were being asked to facilitate remote working “where possible” but did recognise that this was not possible in some sectors of the economy, such as retail.

Minister Humphreys continued: “In the event of an employee being told by their employer to go home or stay at home for a period of time without pay, they may be entitled to claim the Pandemic Unemployment Payment or Jobseekers Benefit/Allowance. If not eligible for those payments then they may apply for Supplementary Welfare Allowance.”

This Supplementary Welfare Allowance, she added, was in place to provide “immediate and flexible assistance” for those who did not qualify for payment under other State schemes.

## IN BRIEF

Members in North Dublin SuperValu being balloted

MANDATE members at three SuperValu stores in North Dublin – outlets in Killester, Raheny and Talbot Street – are being balloted on a deal involving a 1.5% pay rise backdated to October 1st, 2020. The agreement is for 18 months to April 1st, 2022.

It is the first time the SuperValu store in Talbot Street has been included in the pay deal and the union is recommending acceptance of this proposal.

Meanwhile, in correspondence with the union, management acknowledged their “huge gratitude” to staff “during these challenging times”.



Ex-Debenhams workers thank Fórsa for donation

THE ex-Debenhams workers on strike in Galway wanted to send a special thank you to the Fórsa Galway Branch after it made a big-hearted €500 donation to the strikers.

Shop steward Karen Shaughnessy, speaking to *Shopfloor* from the picket line on November 23rd, said: “We really, really appreciate the donation from Fórsa and wanted to acknowledge such a practical example of solidarity in action.”



ESTÉE LAUDER STRIKERS

# ‘We’re looking to be treated fairly’

ESTÉE Lauder workers at Dublin Airport have taken part in a series of strike actions in September and October in a bid to prevent their company issuing compulsory redundancies to some members of staff as well as the rehiring of others on inferior terms and conditions of employment.

Workers standing on the picket line at Dublin Airport roundabout on 21st and 25th September and 2nd, 4th and 5th October generated a great deal of support from passing motorists entering and exiting the terminals complex.

The upmarket cosmetics firm is seeking to implement the compulsory redundancies on statutory terms of two weeks pay per year of service.

Mandate has called on Estee Lauder to allow the workers to be given the choice of voluntary rather

than compulsory redundancy and to negotiate any subsequent redundancy package, including selection criteria, with the union.

The union is also seeking to negotiate the terms and conditions of those employees who remain in the business.

Estee Lauder management failed to attend a Labour Court hearing on Tuesday, 6th October, which had been arranged to try and break the impasse.

Speaking from the picket line on the first strike day, Jackie Gibbons, said: “They forced compulsory redundancy on to us and are only [giving us] a statutory redundancy package. They also made us re-interview for our positions.”

Jackie, who has worked for Estee Lauder subsidiary Clinique for eight years, added: “We’re just looking to be treated fairly considering the num-

ber of years of service we have given to the company. It’s a big company, a big operation, a multi billion dollar company. All we want is to be treated fairly.”

Echoing that comment, Mandate Divisional Organiser Robert McNamara called on Estee Lauder “to have respect for their workers”, and he insisted that that meant going through the negotiation process to secure a package “that’s fair for everyone concerned.”

He said: “The fact the company is attempting to make workers apply for their own jobs on inferior terms should be a concern for everyone. If Estee Lauder – one of the largest and most profitable enterprises on the planet – can treat their workers this appallingly, then it can happen to anyone.”

And speaking before the second day of strike action, McNamara said:

“It is regrettable that a company the size of Estee Lauder would force their workers go on strike for a second time rather than offer them the respect they deserve.

“All it would take to prevent this strike is for the company to sit down and negotiate with the workers through their trade union.”

He added: “We’ve been left with no alternative but to refer this dispute to the Labour Court and ask for an urgent hearing.”

McNamara pointed out that the strikers had been shown great support from the public and said workers wanted to thank them for that backing.

He said: “These workers know that the public is on their side and we’re all extremely grateful for it. The actions of Estee Lauder management denying workers their rights is not a good look for a cosmetic firm.”

BALLOT

## 85% vote in favour of pay deal

MANDATE members at SuperValu MOPI have comprehensively voted in favour of a pay package agreed between management at the retailer and trade unions.

It follows a lengthy series of negotiations between officials from Mandate and SIPTU and SuperValu MOPI management with the help of WRC Conciliation Services.

Divisional Organiser Keith Pollard told *Shopfloor*: “We are pleased to announce that a set of proposals was agreed by postal ballot – with 85% of votes cast in favour of the proposals.

“The pay element of the agreement sees all Mandate members in SuperValu MOPI receive a 2% pay increase backdated to February 3rd, 2020. A further 2% pay increase will be awarded on July 31st, 2021 with the agreement expiring on January 31st, 2022.

“Furthermore the company will pay an additional 2% one-off payment on all earnings for the period February 3rd to August 30th, 2020.”



## Union set to review its in-store structures

MANDATE is to launch a review of all in-store union structures at SuperValu MOPI in January 2021.

This comes after a comprehensive survey of Mandate shop stewards at the retailer was carried out in August and September 2020.

It is understood the review will be followed up an online training programme for shop stewards, deputy shop stewards, House Committee members and health & safety reps.

Divisional Organiser Keith Pollard told *Shopfloor*: “Further details of this campaign will be discussed and agreed with all shop stewards and Divisions in January 2021 in advance of being launched to the wider membership.”

And he urged members to “keep an eye on your union noticeboard or through Mandate electronic communications” for more details.

Note: if you are not receiving Mandate updates by text message, contact the union at 018746321 or by emailing [mandate@mandate.ie](mailto:mandate@mandate.ie) to update contact details.



# Retailers and Government must lead by example and show respect to retail workers



Dave Gibney

AS WE move towards an easing of Level 5 lockdown with shops opening for Christmas, all of us – including employers, the Government and customers – must show genuine respect for frontline retail workers.

While we've heard words of support from across Irish society for the sacrifices shop workers have made, very little has changed in terms of really appreciating the efforts carried out by workers in retail. If anything, matters have worsened.

These "essential" workers – who have kept us fed and clothed throughout the Covid-19 emergency – don't deserve the indecent conditions many are forced to work under. And they certainly don't deserve the level of abuse heaped on many of them in recent months for simply doing their job.

So we must figure out a way forward that gives all workers, including shop workers, some measure of dignity and respect.

## Employers

Employers must ensure that workers' health and safety is their utmost priority – and that means making sure all Covid regulations are strictly adhered to.

Requirements are in place to ensure retail outlets aren't overcrowded. Overcrowding will, of course, help spread the virus and lead inexorably to an eventual third lockdown. As Christmas approaches, employers must ensure they control customer numbers both in queues and throughout their stores.

It is likely there will be a requirement to open shops later than usual to spread the customer base and Mandate supports recommendations that vulnerable members of the public should be given designated shopping times.

However, it is also the view of the union that workers who are asked to work unsocial hours or outside of their contractual provisions should do so on a voluntary basis and be adequately rewarded for it.

Employers must strictly adhere to the wearing of face coverings. However, it is not the responsibility of shop workers to enforce such a policy which has led to increasing levels of abuse of workers. Employers should have designated security staff trained on handling such a provision.

Where possible, stores should also make regular announcements to remind customers of their obligations and of Covid-19 regulations.

An adequate supply of hand sanitizer should be widely available and stores should be equipped with proper signage, both to remind shoppers of social distancing require-



Just a little respect: be kind when doing your festive shopping, don't make Christmas miserable for our members – they have a hard job to do

ments and to underline the retailer's strict policy of zero tolerance when it comes to the abuse of staff by customers.

When requested to do so by workers, employers should always

recognise a worker's right to be represented by a trade union for individual or collective purposes, as is enshrined in the *UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *EU Charter for Fundamental Rights*.

## Abuse at work

There's lots of anecdotal evidence that abuse at work – whether verbal, physical or threatening behaviour – has increased since the onset of the pandemic. Many workers are being subjected to abuse

Retail workers serving customers have five-fold risk of catching Covid-19

Picture: Bernard Hermant on Unsplash

for asking customers to wear a mask.

Employers must adopt a zero-tolerance approach to workplace abuse, including the removal of abusive customers and the provision of supports to workers who have borne the brunt of customer rage.

This abuse of retail workers didn't start from a low base. Mandate launched the Respect Retail Workers survey in July 2018, long before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The survey – completed by more than 2,300 workers (75% of whom were female) – revealed:

Retail workers are assaulted, threatened or abused once every 6.5 days



Picture: Adrien Delforge on Unsplash



Picture: Kelly Sikkema on Unsplash

it's vitally important for everyone's health and safety to follow in-shop Covid-19 policies





Picture: Arturo Rey on Unsplash

**3 out of 4 retail workers said abuse increased during pandemic**

- 44% had experienced verbal abuse during the previous 12 months.

- 19% had experienced verbal abuse or violence when selling age-restricted goods or services (alcohol or tobacco).

- 270 people (15%) had been threatened over the previous 12 months.

- 156 people (9%) had experienced physical abuse during the course of their employment.

The reality is that matters are much worse now as a result of the pandemic, so we need real action on this issue both from employers and from the Government.

### Government

We already know that retail workers are having their terms and conditions changed with many employers using the pandemic as an opportunity to reduce costs. Lloyds Pharmacy, for example, has taken away their workers' Christmas bonus without any negotiations.

Mandate is calling on the Government to urgently bring in real representational rights for all workers. This includes the right of entry for trade union officials to carry out health and safety and workplace rights inspections as well as for collective bargaining purposes.

The recently announced €80 fines for those flouting the wearing of masks is welcome, but it is still unclear how this measure will be enforced.

Where a customer has been abusive towards a retail worker, we need legislation that affords workers stronger protections. In the UK, the House of Commons is due to debate the Assaults on Retail Workers Bill in January 2021.

This Bill, if implemented, would ensure that an assault or threat that took place against a retail worker during the course of their employment would be recognised by the courts as an aggravating factor increasing the seriousness of the offence.

In Mandate's Respect Retail Worker Survey, 93% of respondents said they would like to see changes to criminal law to strengthen protections for workers in the retail sector, including those selling age-restricted goods or services. Mandate is calling on political parties to look into this Bill and replicate it in Ireland.

The final call on the Government is for the swift implementation of the

Duffy/Cahill recommendations to prevent employers walking away from their obligations to employees in future and so prevent a recurrence of what happened to the Debenhams workers. This would include ensuring that any worker who has lost their job since the emergence of the pandemic has the right to avail of their collectively-agreed redundancy package.

### Consumers

Mandate is calling on all consumers to abide by health regulations includ-

ing the wearing of face coverings and adhering to social distancing guidelines. When hand sanitiser is provided, please use it and wash your hands regularly.

It is in all of our interests that we get the transmission of this virus under control and ensure there is no need for a third lockdown. No worker should have to go to work and worry about contracting a deadly disease that they may bring home to vulnerable family members. So your vigi-

lance is appreciated.

We understand the difficulties many customers are enduring but we are asking for their patience. Shop workers do not personally put in place store policies – whether they are to do with Covid-19, refunds, the selling of restricted goods, or anything else.

Workers are simply enforcing policies for their employer or for the Government. Their job may be at risk if they do not carry out their duties, so please be understanding and be nice. Please also be patient and courteous with other customers. Who knows what that other person is going through right now.

Workers

If you are a shop worker, join your union Mandate and ask your colleagues to join. Together we can make a difference, whether at a local level in enforcing adherence to regulations and improving terms and conditions of employment, or at a national level where we can influence working conditions and legislation.

### Workers

If you would like to get active with Mandate, please message us at

<https://mandate.ie/contact-form/> and we will ensure you are provided with all the necessary support.

### Respect Retail Workers

Christmas is a difficult time for shop workers – a time of the year when they are expected to work longer hours on relatively low wages, face larger crowds and endure time pressures.

This year will have an added burden in having to deal with a global pandemic. We are asking that everyone shows some empathy and understanding about the pressures retail workers are faced with.

The beginning of the pandemic saw increasing levels of appreciation for the essential work being done by nurses, carers and shop workers, but in truth, it didn't take long before that appreciation dissipated.

As we now open up the economy again, it is up to us all to ensure that this time the respect shown has a longevity it didn't have last time.

*We can all play our part – whether as an employer, in Government, as a customer or a worker. Respect Retail Workers and have a happy Christmas.*



AMAZON

# Black Friday protests backed

MANDATE called on its members to show solidarity and give support to Amazon workers taking part in #MakeAmazonPay protests across the world, timed to coincide with that annual November 27th sales binge known as 'Black Friday'.

And members were asked to flood social media platforms with the hashtags #OrganizeAmazon and #MakeAmazonPay on that day.

Mandate Communications Officer Dave Gibney told *Shopfloor*: "Amazon workers staged these coordinated



Picture: Fibonacci Blue (CC BY 2.0)

protests from Brazil to Germany to highlight unsafe working conditions at the online retail colossus as well as the employer's anti-union practices.

"They also wanted to emphasise the negative environmental impacts Amazon has on the world, issues around Covid-19 precautions, sick

pay, and not forgetting for you – the consumer – your user privacy!"

He explained: "As Ireland's largest union for retail workers we want our members to support local jobs where they can. You can support and show solidarity with these warehouse and logistics workers by not purchasing from Amazon."

The union wanted its members to send the text of an 'open letter' to Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos – the world's richest man, worth \$183bn – to their local TD for them to sign. [Check out <https://tinyurl.com/y5m3ykqb> to download a copy of the letter.]

Gibney continued: "Think about the workers who have to get your order picked, packed and shipped within 24 hours of you clicking the 'add to cart' button.

"Think about the environmental impact that such a quick turnaround creates. Think about the anti-union practices which make forming a union so difficult within Amazon."

Urging members to shop local on

Black Friday, he asked members not to add a single cent to Jeff Bezos' already bulging bank balance on November 27th.

"Whatever you want on Black Friday can wait," he said. "Every click you make on Amazon on that day affects thousands of workers around the globe.

"The message is simple: Support Amazon workers, support their right to form a union, support their right to sick pay, support their right to work in safe conditions, support their right to dignity in the workplace.

"Your instant gratification when you click has a direct impact on workers lives and well-being," he added.



**Dear Member,**

*We are excited to announce that MC2 – your very own online training and job-matching platform – is live now! We believe that this platform gives our members the best possible chance to succeed in these troubled times and prepare for what we hope will be a new post-pandemic era.*

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For further information please contact **Jonathan Hogan** at [jhogan@mandate.ie](mailto:jhogan@mandate.ie) or **Amanda Blake** at [ablake@mandate.ie](mailto:ablake@mandate.ie)

# Covid exposed 'big failings' on sick pay

CONGRESS General Secretary Patricia King has claimed it took a global pandemic to expose the "big failings" in how workers were protected against loss of income due to sickness.

She made her comments following the launch in November of a public consultation on plans to guarantee all workers the right to sick pay.

King said: "Unlike workers in nearly all European countries, workers in Ireland have no legal right to sick pay. Sick pay is at the discretion of the employer to include or not in a contract of employment.

"As a result, up to half of the labour force, including hundreds of thousands of low-paid essential workers, don't receive sick pay and face being financially compelled to work when unwell."

ICTU Social Policy Officer, Dr Laura Bambrick told *Shopfloor*: "Ensuring workers are well at work is a basic issue of safety and simply the right thing to do. When workers are unwell they need to rest to recover. When sick workers stay home they reduce the spread of infection and the risk of

workplace accidents; they protect others."

The consultation, launched on November 16th, comes after Tánaiste and Minister for Employment Leo Varadkar issued an invite to ICTU and employer representative bodies to discuss the design of a statutory sick pay scheme.

Varadkar has already put on record his commitment to introduce such a scheme. He told RTE: "This needs to change and I am committed to introducing a statutory sick pay scheme that works for employees and employers as quickly as possible."

Bambrick said: "Our voluntary system of sick pay isn't working. Introducing mandatory sick pay will be a lasting legacy of the pandemic and bring Ireland in to line with basic workers' rights in the rest of Europe."

The closing date for submissions to the consultation is December 18th.

Check out ICTU guide, titled *The State of Sick Pay in Ireland* at <https://bit.ly/37gQTDC>

● Dr Bambrick on sick pay – page 17

# Parliamentarians vow to Make Amazon Pay in letter to Bezos

FOLLOWING the launch of Make Amazon Pay, 401 legislators from 34 countries have written to Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos backing the campaign's demands and pledging legislative action in a letter organised by initiative co-convenors UNI Global Union and Progressive International.

The signatories include global political figures such as US Congresswomen Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, former UK Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, French leftist leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Greek progressive politician and commentator Yanis Varoufakis, as well as a slew of Irish TDs and senators, including – among others – Paul Murphy, Richard Boyd Barrett, Joan Collins, Mick Barry, Marie Sher-



lock and Thomas Pringle.

On Black Friday, 27th November a global movement was born to Make Amazon Pay. A coalition of more than 50 organisations, including Progressive International and UNI Global Union, alongside Greenpeace, Amazon Workers International and the Tax Justice Network, published a list of 25 demands as workers and activists led strikes, protests and stunts in 15 countries across five continents.

Striking delivery drivers, call centre workers, garment workers, warehouse workers, trade unions, environmentalists, tax justice advocates and social justice activists united with one common cause – to Make Amazon Pay.

In the letter to Bezos, the parliamentarians

claim that Bezos and his firm, Amazon, have “dodged and dismissed... debts to workers, societies, and the planet.”

Addressing the billionaire directly, they urge him “to act decisively to change your policies and priorities to do right by your workers, their communities, and our planet.”

And they vow: “We stand ready to act in our respective legislatures to support the movement that is growing around the world to Make Amazon Pay.” Progressive International’s Casper Gelderblom added: “Our message should be ringing in Jeff Bezos’ ears: change is coming. But if it isn’t already, we promise that this is just the beginning.”

Check out [www.makeamazonpay.com](http://www.makeamazonpay.com)

## TRAINING FUND PACKAGE

# Ex-Debenhams workers balloted over Lab Court recommendation

THE GOVERNMENT is to set up a €3 million training, up-skilling and business start-up fund to help former Debenhams workers who lost their jobs when the UK-based retailer’s Irish operation went into liquidation in April.

This forms part of a recommendation put forward by Labour Court Chairman Kevin Foley and follows months of engagement between the workers and their union Mandate, KPMG, and a number of government agencies in a bid to resolve the dispute, now entering its eighth month, over enhanced redundancy payments.

The ex-Debenhams workers are being balloted on the proposals.

It is understood the fund, which is to be administered by Solas, will run for two years or until such a time as the monies have been fully put to use.

Emphasising what he termed were the “exceptional circumstances” faced by ex-Debenhams workers, Foley said this money set aside for educational

and career support and business start-ups was a recognition on the part of Government of this fact.

He acknowledged that workers might feel disappointed by the set of proposals contained in the three-page document and admitted that what was on offer fell short of “the ambitions of the former workers” and was “not reflective” of the contribution they had made to the retailer to whom they had given “such long service”.

However, Foley said that having “engaged extensively” with all parties, he was satisfied that what was on offer represented “the maximum achievable in a very difficult situation.” He pointed out that he was also satisfied that both sides had entered the process in good faith and that the recommendation contained the “optimum set of measures” which could be put in place to resolve the

dispute. In the document, the Labour Court Chairman found that the 2016 collective agreement for enhanced redundancy payments could no longer be applied legally, and that the current legal framework limited the scope for the liquidators to make a contribution to resolving the dispute.

### Terms

He said: “I have not been able to establish that the terms of that collective agreement were intended to be applicable to redundancies occurring in 2020. In any event, it is clear that the agreement has no legal application in 2020.”

Foley noted that the main preferential creditors in the liquidation were the Department of Social Protection and the Revenue Commissioners – owed approximately €18m – but that “available resources are far outweighed by the debt owed to these

preferential creditors”.

The State had taken responsibility for statutory redundancy payments totalling more than €13m, with the retailer having made no contribution to those entitlements.

“I am now clear however that, despite extensive engagement and full consideration, the principal preferential creditors will not find it possible to mandate the liquidators to do other than meet the requirements of the relevant law.

“The result of that conclusion is that the liquidation process cannot, within the framework of relevant law, make any financial contribution to the resolution of this dispute,” he added.

The extension of the liquidation, which had entailed additional costs, had reduced further available assets and had “resulted in the depletion of practically all cash resources in the business which at the outset exceeded €4m”.



Labour Court Chair Kevin Foley



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Picture: Justin Pickard (CC BY-SA 2.0)

# Welcome move as CETA Dáil vote is postponed

MANDATE has welcomed the postponement of a Dáil vote on the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) until early 2021.

The controversial free-trade agreement between Canada and the European Union was scheduled to be ratified in the Dáil after a 55-minute debate on Tuesday, December 15th but did not go ahead after serious concerns were raised by Green TDs, part of the governing coalition, and most opposition TDs.

Reacting to the move, Mandate National Co-ordinator Brian Forbes told *Shopfloor*: "This is a welcome postponement – but an emphatic no vote when it comes before the Dáil in January is the only response any decent TD should have to this free trade arrangement.

"It really is just a sweetheart deal for big business. It's bad for workers and it's bad for the



STOP CETA: 'Sweetheart deal for big business'

Picture: Angula Berria (CC BY-SA 2.0)

country." He pointed out that ratifying CETA would give foreign multinationals the right to sue national governments in Europe for compensation for the loss of expected future profits when government actions impact on their profits.

Forbes said: "Multinationals already pay little to no taxes yet by ratifying CETA we will be giving them the legal right to sue Ireland for any decisions taken by our government which might negatively impact on their future profits."

He added: "Full and proper parliamentary scrutiny by both the Dáil and Seanad is needed before any vote can be allowed on such a dangerous trade deal."

# 'The picket line baby'



IT'S OCTOBER 16th and Claire O'Leary (pictured above left), some eight months into a pregnancy, is still doing her bit, standing with her ex-Debenhams colleagues braving the chill, late autumn weather on the picket line in Patrick Street, Cork.

A month later, on November 17th, People Before Profit TD Mick Barry (pictured right) stood in the Dáil to speak during Leaders' Questions. He said: "Taoiseach, last Wednesday afternoon (November 11th) at three minutes to 2pm, baby Grace O'Leary – six pounds, six ounces – was delivered at the Cork Maternity University Hospital. Baby Grace is known in Cork as 'the picket line baby'.

"Her mother, Claire, has been on strike for seven-and-a-half months now. Many people, myself included, feel that it is a major sign of foot dragging on the part of your government that this dispute is still not settled after nearly the duration of a full pregnancy.

He added: "These workers – overwhelmingly women – want to know if you intend to intervene to resolve the dispute in time for them and their long-suffering families to have a decent Christmas."



Claire, who worked in Patrick Street Debenhams for 10 years as a supervisor in the women's accessories department, told the *Irish Daily Mail*, after Grace's birth: "I found out I was pregnant just before we lost our jobs. The fact that my baby will be born now really shows what a

long-lasting dispute this has been.

"The situation is terrible. The girls can't be left out on the picket for much longer. And they've come so far they can't back down now.

"It's time the Government put its foot down. Talk is cheap, we need action now."

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# Union representatives withdraw 'with regret' from the Low Pay Commission

AFTER five years of taking part in the Low Pay Commission (LPC), ICTU's representatives, ICTU General Secretary Patricia King and Mandate General Secretary Gerry Light, withdrew "with regret" from the Government-established body in September.

They said they took the decision because they did not want to be party to leaving the lowest paid behind.

Following the move, Patricia King said: "We have been engaged in extensive discussions at the Low Pay Commission on proposed changes to the National Minimum Wage to be issued to the government for consideration.

"It became very clear to myself and Gerry [at the LPC meeting] that other members of the Commission were not prepared to propose an increase for 2021 beyond 1% - i.e. 10 cent.

"We could not in conscience be party to any recommendation that did not afford the lowest-paid workers in the Republic of Ireland an increase in excess of 2% similar to other sectors in our economy.

"If we have learned anything as a society in this pandemic it is that we must value work and those who carry



it out. We must make work pay."

King pointed out that many workers on minimum wage formed part of what she termed "the cadre of essential workers" that kept the economy afloat during the Covid-19 pandemic.

She continued: "It is, therefore, completely unacceptable that they and other workers who are the lowest paid in this state would not be afforded decency and fairness by receiving a modest minimum 2% increase in the National Minimum Wage.

"The lowest paid in our society suffered disproportionately during the last recession and we won't be party to a process that leaves them behind.

Therefore it is with regret, but with clarity that we can no longer be part of this Low Pay Commission. There can be no going back to the old ways where the lowest paid are left behind." King vowed: "We will continue to campaign through other for a for a just increase."

### Most vulnerable

Commenting on the LPC withdrawal, Gerry Light insisted that in the face of the Covid pandemic the lowest paid and most vulnerable workers "needed protection more than ever".

He told *Shopfloor*: "A wage increase of 1% simply does not go any way

near affording these workers the decency and respect that they deserve. The double standards at play here come more acutely into focus when one considers the billions of taxpayers' money that has been given to employers in recent months - principally to subsidise payroll costs."

Light continued: "This level of increase does not represent a credible effort at closing the gap between the statutory minimum and living wage hourly rates thus reinforcing the stark reality that the current minimum wage continues to fall way short of the at-risk-of-poverty wage threshold which is set at 60% of median earnings."

Despite leaving the LPC, Gerry Light wanted to emphasise and reflect upon the important work that had been carried out over the past five years.

He said: "Central to this has been the creation of a body of original research which allows for the first time an informed analysis and decision-making process around issues such as the prevalence and impact of low pay and specifically the extent of working poverty particularly from an Irish perspective.

"If nothing else we must use the Covid experience to force society to look at new ways of thinking about how we value and protect those who need this recognition most of all.

"Workers must also realise that statutory provisions, such as the minimum wage, are in most circumstances only minimum entitlements and unless through a determined and structured collective effort they will not achieve significant advances beyond them."

He added: "Of course, the best way of bringing that collective influence to bear is by being a member of a trade union."

**NOT ALL HEROES WEAR CAPES, SOME WORK IN RETAIL**

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# Joint call for action on violence against women

THE GENERAL Secretaries of the trade union federations covering Great Britain and the island of Ireland (ICTU, TUC, STUC and WTUC) have issued a powerful joint statement demanding an end to violence against women, in work and in society.

The four bodies together represent more than six million workers across these islands.

Congress's Patricia King joined with her counterparts Frances O'Grady (TUC), Rozanne Foyer (STUC) and Shavanah Taj (WTUC) in drafting the November 24th statement released the day before International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

They called for urgent interventions to support victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence in work and in society, insisting that domestic abuse was "always a workplace issue".

They said in the statement: "Trade unions know that work is often a place of safety for women experiencing domestic abuse. Every year sees mounting evidence of the devastating impact of violence against women but 2020 has been particularly difficult.

"During lockdowns, which extended to all parts of the UK and Ireland, many women were stuck at home with the perpetrator of violence, unable to escape to, what for many women, is the safety of their workplace."

They outlined how trade unions had called for additional emergency help to support women caught in these circumstances but un-



Picture: Feans (CC BY 2.0)

derlined the importance of employers and governments providing support "in the longer term... as our societies eventually emerge from lockdowns and restrictions".

The statement continued: "We know that the effect of domestic abuse spills over into the workplace and we also know that providing a supportive workplace can make a real difference to women who are suffering domestic abuse and violence.

"That's why we are calling on our Govern-

ments to immediately ratify ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work.

"Article 18 of the accompanying recommendation specifies measures which should be taken to mitigate the impacts of domestic violence at work including leave for the victims of domestic violence, flexible work arrangements and the inclusion of domestic violence in workplace risk assessments."

The general secretaries called on employers

to work with unions in develop workplace policies that ensured the appropriate supports were put in place.

"This should include ensuring that managers and HR specialists as well as trade union reps are trained in how to spot the signs of domestic violence as well as how to support and appropriately signpost people," they said.

"Employers should also consider measures such as adjusting work patterns, allowing flexibility in arrival or finishing times."

Insisting that no one should lose their job or pay because of domestic abuse, they called for additional employment rights to be given to victims of domestic abuse.

"Very often people need to take time off to access legal or financial support and during the working day is the only safe time to do this. A day one right to paid time off from work to access this support, as in countries like Australia or New Zealand, would make a real difference to women's lives."

The statement added: "The organisations which support women and their families who are victims of violence do a fantastic job, but very often, they are operating on a shoestring. Governments need to prioritise properly resourcing these organisations as well as committing to school programmes which support young people to learn about healthy relationships."

## Skills for Work

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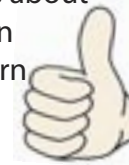



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| <p><b>GEOGRAPHIC FLEXIBILITY</b><br/>Learners do not have to leave their county or country to attend the best colleges to gain their certificate or degree. They may remain with family and colleagues increasing greater emotional well-being and less stress.</p>  | <p><b>SELF MOTIVATION</b><br/>Because a course is online does not mean it is easy. You need determination and self-motivation to keep yourself on track.</p>   |
| <p><b>IMPROVE TECHNICAL SKILLS</b><br/>New skills can include using new software suites and communicate effectively online (discussion boards and teleconferencing). Employers often demand these skills as more and more positions require employees to work remotely.</p>  |  <p><small>Picture: Brooke Cagle on Unsplash</small></p>   |
| <p><b>CAREER ADVANCEMENT</b><br/>Earning a degree can lead to a promotion that may also involve increased wages. Besides tangible career benefits, most online degrees and certificates also allow learners to continue working while they study. Learners who work can apply new knowledge and skills to their job immediately.</p> |  |
| <p><b>INTERACTION</b><br/>Meet hundreds of other learners through online learning communities</p>  | <p><b>LESS SOCIAL</b><br/>Because online courses are globally accessible the chances of meeting your classmates in person is slimmer.</p>  |

## Classroom learning **Pros & Cons**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>COLLABORATIVE LEARNING</b><br/>Collaborative learning is essential to increasing a student's self-awareness about how other students learn and enables them to learn more easily and effectively.</p>    | <p><b>LOCATION &amp; TIME</b><br/>You must be in your classroom at the scheduled time regardless of traffic, weather, personal circumstances and more.</p>   |
| <p><b>CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS</b><br/>Gives students the opportunity to engage in live discussions in which they are forced to use their critical thinking skills to formulate opinions or arguments.</p>  |  <p><b>EXPENSES</b><br/>Learners may need overnight accommodation and or need to travel long distance to attend in class incurring a cost.</p> <p><small>Illustration: Xoan Baltar (CC BY 2.0)</small></p> |
| <p><b>BOOSTS SOCIAL SKILLS</b><br/>Experience rapport through social interactions with tutors and students.</p>   |   |
| <p><b>ORGANISATIONAL SKILLS</b><br/>Being ready for pop quizzes, turning in assignments by their due date and being prepared for in-class discussions. In effect, students learn how to organise their time, prioritise their assignments.</p>  |  <p><small>Picture: Brooke Cagle on Unsplash</small></p>   |
| <p><b>KEEPS STUDENTS STIMULATED</b><br/>This interaction enables students to retain more from what they have learned during a session.</p>  |   |
| <p><b>MODIFYING TEACHING STYLE</b><br/>Tutors can modify their teaching style based on types of learners in their classroom, they can get a clear idea whether students are following what has been taught or they require further explanation. At the same time, students can get their doubts clarified immediately before moving ahead in a topic.</p> |   |
| <p><b>SUPPORT</b><br/>Good courses offer student care, mentor support and tutor assistance.</p>   | <p><b>INDIVIDUAL</b><br/>Shy or less confident learners may have difficulty interacting or asking questions.</p>  |

Divisional Organiser **John Carty** on Debenhams, Arcadia and the 'liquidation' of gazebos in Galway...



LEGISLATION

# Govt must do three point turn to protect workers

AS many *Shopfloor* readers will be aware, the official picket lines outside Debenhams stores across the country are no ordinary picket lines. Unlike other industrial disputes in retail, no customers have passed the picket lines and no Mandate member has scabbed on their friends and work colleagues and gone into work. The employer (now liquidator) is not trying to con, cajole or coerce the strikers to return to work.

The only similarity with these picket lines and other protracted strikes is the Irish weather. Recognising this, Eoghan Fox (a shop steward at M&S in Galway), as a Mandate delegate to the Galway Council of Trade Unions (GCTU) proposed at a recent GCTU Zoom meeting, that the trades council pay for a gazebo for the strikers in Galway. For those not in the know, the GCTU is a trade union equivalent of a local Chamber of Commerce.

Restrictions

Eoghan regularly joins the ex-Debenhams workers' picket line in Galway. Before any legal heads want to cite Bertie Ahern's Industrial Relations Act 1990 and its restrictions on who can picket, Eoghan is picketing in his capacity as vice-chairperson of his Mandate Trade Union's Local Council (a branch).

The Galway Council of Trade Unions unanimously passed Eoghan's proposal and the pop-up gazebo was duly erected and put to good use. It was very much welcomed by the picketers as it offered a measure of protection against the Irish weather in the dark, wet mornings and bitter-cold evenings and nights on the picket line – just as (excuse the pun) Eoghan had forecasted.

However, recently due to Galway city traffic flow (or lack of), a bus driver was forced to perform a three-point turn close to where the gazebo was sited. While reversing the vehicle at the back gate of the Debenhams building, the bus driver's manoeuvring caused unintentional but irreparable damage to the shiny new gazebo. The driver, who was totally unaware of what had happened, then drove off.

The Mandate picketers contacted the bus company and reported the unfortunate incident. The bus company without hesitation, accepted the picketers' plight and sent a cheque to buy a new replacement gazebo. A second gazebo was bought from Argos and – just like the first gazebo – the retailer was chosen as it recognises Mandate for collective bargaining.

As anyone who has ever used a pop-up gazebo for protection from the Irish weather will recall that sometimes, it is the gazebo itself that needs protection from the Irish weather! So, while not in use, the picketers would dismantle the gazebo and store it, in what was assumed was a relatively safe hiding spot. Unfortunately, the hiding spot was not as safe as initially anticipated, and the replacement gazebo was stolen.

Not only were the gazebos used by members of Mandate, they were also

used by the Trade Council delegates and members of other unions who attended the picket line so far, in their own time in solidarity with the ex-Debenhams workers.

And Mandate wishes to record its acknowledgement and appreciation to those Trade Council delegates and/or other members from different trade unions. These fraternal comrades are too numerous to mention each by name, so some names will have to suffice.

The first name that will be mentioned is that of the President of the Galway Council of Trade Unions, Marian Spelman, who has attended while wearing the Trade Council's chain of office. The second is James Rabbitte who took part in the picket in his capacity as Vice-Chairperson of the Mandate Trade Union's Local Council in Athlone. James would have liked to have attended more but was restricted due to Covid-19 restrictions.



Mandate delegate to GCTU Eoghan Fox, left, came up with gazebo idea. PBP support at Galway picket



Mandate shop steward Karen Shaughnessy, centre, 'an example to workers in struggle everywhere'

'Under cover' solidarity: framed by the gazebo, Ian Ó Dálaigh (Éirígi), above, offers support on the picket line in Galway, while guitar in hand Cian Mortimer, top, found some shelter from the storm...

Thirdly is Kerry Fleck from the Belfast Council of Trade Unions. Mandate members from other Galway-based retailers frequently supported the picket line in solidarity and especially Dermot Neary (Penneys) and Regina Ffrench (Dunnes).

To date, representatives from Irish political parties (but not all, you have three guesses...) have visited the Mandate official picket line in solidarity with the protesting workers, including two Galway West TDs, Catherine Connolly (Independent) and Mairéad Farrell (Sinn Féin).

Commended

The following parties (in declining order of frequency to date) have also stood in solidarity: Éirígi, the Social Democrats, the Labour Party, Republican Sinn Féin, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and non-aligned anarchists. However, two parties need to be commended for their continuous and ongoing presence every day are (in order of numbers participating) the Socialist Party and People Before Profit.

Karen Shaughnessy, the Mandate (ex-Debenhams) Shop Steward in Galway, needs to be recognised as an example to workers in struggle everywhere. Karen has used (what some HR managers refer to as) her people skills, scheduling capabilities, logistic analysis, persuasive abilities, and motivational effectiveness to maintain this Galway picket line. Or to put it another way, she is a damn good shop steward. That needs to be re-

peated: she is a damn good shop steward. Karen has stepped up to the challenge, but nevertheless acknowledges that this strike is a learning curve for her. She will tell you she never knew there were so many left-wing parties in Ireland. The only one left-wing party that Karen says she hasn't spotted is the Communist Party of Ireland.

With respect to Karen, *Shopfloor* can confirm that the Communist Party was in attendance every week in its endeavours to lead workers in struggle.

Any reader with an interest in Arcadia, will probably be wondering at this stage, what this article, given its headline has got to do with Arcadia. The relevance is that the Mandate members in Arcadia are now possibly facing into the very same struggle as their fellow union members from Debenhams.

These union members are not calling on the Government to provide them with gazebos for protection from the Irish weather. They are calling on the Irish Government for legislation to protect them from Irish and international capitalism.

Perhaps the Government wish to drive off like the above-mentioned bus driver? But unlike the bus driver, the Government is aware of the consequences of its reversing. For the third time – first Clerys, then Debenhams and now, possibly, Arcadia – workers have been thrown under the bus.



# SICKENING: the state of sick pay in Ireland



IT TOOK a pandemic to bring to public and political attention the big failings in how we protect workers against loss of income – the lack of a legal entitlement to sick pay from an employer being one glaring example.

Almost all European countries legally require employers to cover workers' pay for at least the first two weeks of absence from work due to sickness with many requiring a much longer period of cover.

In Germany, for example, employers must pay a sick worker's full wage for up to six weeks. In the UK they must pay a flat-rate amount of £96 (equal to 20% the national average wage) for up to six months, and in the Netherlands they must pay 70% of the wage for up to two years.

Supports are available for small employers and employers with a genuine inability to pay.

In Ireland, with few exceptions, workers have no legal right to be paid by their employer if absent from work because of sickness. Sick pay is viewed as a perk of the job that employers can decide to include or not in a contract of employment.

As a result, workers, mainly in non-unionised jobs in the private sector, are forced to continue working when sick or to turn to social welfare.

Illness Benefit is difficult to access and inadequate. It is paid at €203 per week before tax to full-time PAYE workers. No payment is made for the first six days, which are known as



Picture: Marek Studzinski at Unsplash

## Mandatory sick pay by the employer in high-income European countries...

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Netherlands</b> – 2 years<br>@ 70% of a worker's wage    | <b>Belgium</b> – 30 days<br>@ 100% of a worker's wage |
| <b>UK</b> – 28 weeks @ 20% of the national average wage     | <b>Norway</b> – 16 days<br>@ 100% of a worker's wage  |
| <b>France</b> – 60-90 days<br>@ 90% for first 30 days       | <b>Sweden</b> – 2 weeks<br>@ 80% of a worker's wage   |
| <b>Austria</b> – 10-16 weeks<br>@ 100% for first 6-12 weeks | <b>Finland</b> – 9 days<br>@ 100% of a worker's wage  |
| <b>Germany</b> – 6 weeks<br>@ 100% of a worker's wage       | <b>Ireland</b> – Zero                                 |

'waiting days'. To qualify, workers must have paid a minimum two years of PSRI contributions. The application must include a 'certificate of incapacity to work' completed by a family doctor. A typical GP visit fee is between €30-€60 countrywide. Self-employed workers and those aged over 66 years are not eligible.

Ireland's lack of sick pay legislation didn't escape the attention of the Trioka during the bailout. They encouraged reform that would require employers to pay for the first two to four weeks of sickness, bringing an end to the unusual practice of the state picking up the full cost.

Department of Social Protection

figures show that each week of employer-funded sick pay would save the Social Insurance Fund €35 million – money that could be better spent funding workers' old age pension instead of pushing up the pension age.

Government did act on the Trioka's advice to reduce the cost on the state. However, they did this by doubling the unpaid waiting days for Illness Benefit from three to six days, resulting in workers, not employers, carrying the cost of the reform.

When the first case of Covid-19 was confirmed in Ireland it was clear to trade unions that large numbers of workers would not be able to afford to follow public health advice if infected or required to self-isolate.

Following representations by ICTU General Secretary Patricia King to the Taoiseach, the Government quickly introduced an enhanced Illness Benefit at €350 per week to help slow the spread of the virus.

### Weak

The outbreak of Covid-19 clusters in meat plants and an ICTU campaign for legislation to make sick pay mandatory caught the attention of media. Public support was overwhelming – a poll of 1,200 people found just under nine in 10 (87%) people believe workers in Ireland should have a legal right to sick pay from their employer.

In September, Government committed to legislating for sick pay by the end of 2021. ICTU has now entered discussions with Government and employer representative bodies on the details of the new scheme.

In October, the Budget reversed the austerity increase in unpaid waiting days for Illness Benefit from six to three, another ICTU demand in our campaign.

Ensuring workers are well at work is a basic issue of safety and simply the right thing to do. When workers are unwell they need to rest to recover. When sick workers stay home they reduce the spread of infection and the risk of workplace accidents – they protect others.

Our voluntary system of sick pay hasn't worked. Introducing mandatory sick pay will be a fitting legacy of the pandemic and bring Ireland in to line with basic workers' rights in the rest of Europe.

Dr Laura Bambrick is the Social Policy Officer at the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

## NEWS

# Members at Boots seek pay increase without concessions

MANDATE officials and Boots management representatives took part in protracted negotiations on pay throughout 2020, held against the backdrop of the continuing Covid-19 pandemic.

Members will be balloted on the outcome of those talks in the run-up to Christmas.

It is understood the final phase of the proposals effectively ends the pay

harmonisation model agreed between both sides some years ago.

Mandate members will vote on an accumulated 3% pay rise, paid in two instalments over the course of two years retrospectively starting from April 2020.

Added to that, Mandate has managed to negotiate a subsidised maternity leave/adoptive leave pay agreement, described by the union as

"unprecedented within the retail industry".

National Coordinator Jonathan Hogan told *Shopfloor*: "Mandate is proud to be progressing the interests of its members through these troubled times. It is a priority for this union is to seek to advance the terms and conditions of our members. Members will be balloted on the proposals in December."

## BROWN THOMAS ARNOTTS

# T&Cs commitments given

MANDATE has sought and received assurances from management that the terms and conditions of employment of Arnotts workers will not be impacted by the decision to combine Arnotts and Brown Thomas into one legal entity.

On December 7th, employees of Arnotts Limited were transferred to the new entity, Brown Thomas Arnotts Limited.

National Coordinator Jonathan Hogan explained: "We sought assurances that our members' terms and conditions would remain the same

following from the transfer. The company confirmed in writing to Mandate that the current T&Cs would be safeguarded in the move."

He continued: "Further assurances were sought over those terms and conditions copperfastened by collective agreements – all of which was confirmed. All collective agreements, both expressed and implied, which apply at the time of the transfer of the Arnotts business will be maintained thereafter."

SHOCK FINDINGS...

# Every **second** a nurse's salary is lost to a tax haven...



A TOTAL of more than \$427 billion in tax is lost each year to international corporate tax abuse and private tax evasion, costing altogether the equivalent of nearly 34 million nurses' annual salaries – or one nurse's annual salary every second.

As pandemic-fatigued countries around the world struggle to cope with second and third waves of coronavirus, a ground-breaking report has revealed for the first time how much public funding each nation loses to global tax abuse.

The inaugural edition of the *State of Tax Justice* – an annual report by the Tax Justice Network on the state of global tax abuse and governments' efforts to tackle it, was published in November together with global union federation Public Services International and the Global Alliance for Tax Justice.

It is the first study to measure thoroughly how each country loses out to both corporate tax abuse and private tax evasion, which its authors claim marks a giant leap forward in tax transparency.

The publication of the report coincided with a series of national and regional events across the world where economists, unions and campaigners urged governments to enact long-delayed tax reform measures to clamp down on global tax abuse and reverse the inequalities and hardships exacerbated by tax losses.

**Secrecy**

While previous studies on the scale of global corporate tax abuse have had to contest with the fog of financial secrecy surrounding multinational corporations' tax affairs, the *State of Tax Justice* analyses data that was self-reported by multinational corporations to tax authorities and recently published by the OECD, allowing the report authors to directly measure tax losses arising from observable corporate tax abuse.

The data, referred to as country by country reporting data, is a transparency measure first proposed by the Tax Justice Network in 2003. After nearly two decades of campaigning, the data was made available to the public by the OECD in July 2020 – although only after multinational corporations' data was aggregated and anonymised.

Of the \$427 billion in tax lost each year globally to tax havens, the *State of Tax Justice 2020* reports that \$245 billion is directly lost to corporate tax abuse by multinational corporations and \$182 billion to private tax evasion.

Multinational corporations paid billions less in tax than they should have by shifting \$1.38 trillion worth of profit out of the countries where they were generated and into tax havens, where corporate tax rates are extremely low or non-existent.

Private tax evaders paid less tax

than they should have by storing a total of more than \$10 trillion in financial assets offshore.

**Poorer nations hardest hit...**

While higher income countries lose more tax to global tax abuse, the *State of Tax Justice 2020* shows that tax losses bear much greater consequences in lower income countries.

Higher income countries altogether lose more than \$382 billion each year whereas lower income countries lose \$45 billion. However, lower income countries' tax losses

are equivalent to nearly 52% of their combined public health budgets, whereas higher income countries' tax losses are equivalent to 8% of their combined public health budgets.

Similarly, lower income countries lose the equivalent of 5.8% of the total tax revenue they typically collect a year to global tax abuse whereas higher income countries on average lose 2.5%.

The same pattern of global inequality is also strongly visible when comparing regions in the global



**WHAT THIS MEANS...**

● Tax abuse in Vietnam causes as much economic loss as Typhoon Molave...

**Typhoon Molave, described by Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Trinh Dinh Dung as "one of the two most powerful storms Vietnam has had in the past 20 years," destroyed more than 700 houses and left 80 people dead and missing in October 2020.**

**The Vietnamese government estimates Typhoon Molave to have caused \$430 million in economic damage. Vietnam loses nearly as much tax, over \$420 million (97% of \$430 billion), every year to global tax abuse.**

● South Africa's tax losses could lift over three million people out of poverty...

**Nearly half of South Africa's adult population lives in poverty,**



with more women (52%) in poverty, than men (46%). The latest upper-bound poverty line published by the South African government in 2019 is ZAR 1,227 per month (almost \$85 per month). If the \$3.39 billion in tax that South Africa loses every year to tax abuse was instead given as direct cash transfers of \$85 per month to

people living in poverty, over three million people could be lifted out of poverty.

● Greece's tax losses equal to over a quarter of scheduled debt repayments...

**Greece's annual loss of nearly \$1.36 billion in tax (€1.15 billion) to tax abuse is equivalent to more**

than a quarter (27%) of Greece's scheduled debt repayments for 2020, which total €4.19 billion.

Among the multiple debtors Greece owes, the country is specifically scheduled to repay €443.7m to Eurozone countries in 2020. Greece's annual tax losses are more than double this amount.

north and south. North America and Europe lose more than \$95 billion in tax and over \$184 billion respectively, while Latin America and Africa lose more than \$43 billion and over \$27 billion respectively.

However, North America and Europe's tax losses are equivalent to 5.7% and 12.6% of the regions' public health budgets respectively, while Latin America and Africa's tax losses are equivalent to 20.4% and 52.5% of the regions' public health budgets respectively.

#### Rich nations to blame...

Assessing which countries are most responsible for global tax abuse, the *State of Tax Justice 2020* provides the strongest evidence to date that the greatest enablers of global tax abuse are the rich countries at the heart of the global economy and their dependencies – not the countries that appear on the EU's highly politicised tax haven blacklist or the small palm-fringed islands of popular belief.

Higher income countries are responsible for 98% of countries' tax losses, costing countries around the world more than \$419 billion in lost tax every year while lower income countries are responsible for just 2%, costing countries over \$8 billion in lost tax each year.

The five jurisdictions most responsible for countries' tax losses are the Cayman Islands (responsible for 16.5% of global tax losses, equal to more than \$70 billion), the UK (10%; more than \$42 billion), the Netherlands (8.5%; more than \$36 billion), Luxembourg (6.5%; more than \$27 billion) and the US (5.53%; more than \$23 billion).

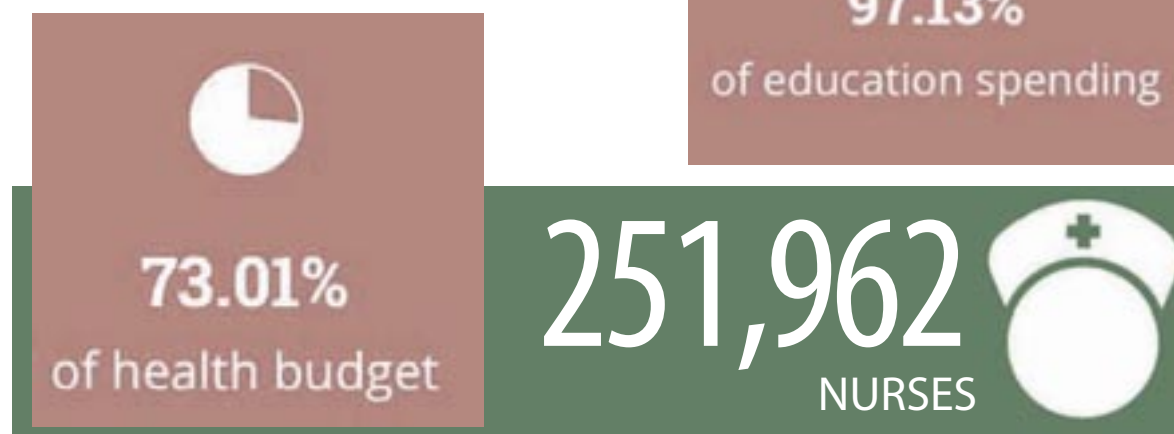
#### The G20 nations...

The G20 member countries that met recently at the Leaders' Summit 2020 in Riyadh are collectively responsible for 26.7% of global tax losses, costing countries more than \$114 billion in lost tax every year. The G20 countries themselves also lose over \$290 billion each year.

In 2013, the G20 mandated the OECD to require collection of the country-by-country reporting data analysed by the *State of Tax Justice 2020* – a measure the OECD had long resisted until then.

In 2020, the OECD's consultation on country-by-country reporting highlighted two major demands from investors, civil society and leading ex-

**IRELAND loses \$14,462,658,146 in tax every year to global tax abuse – equivalent to 22% of tax revenue (Total tax revenue: \$65bn); that is a loss of \$3,046 per person (Irish population: 5 million). This breaks down to \$199m lost to global tax abuse committed by multinational corporations and \$14bn lost to global tax evasion committed by private individuals. ALL OF THIS IS EQUIVALENT TO...**

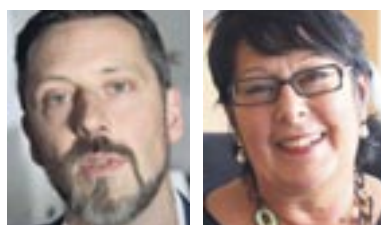


perts: that the technical standard be replaced with the far more robust Global Reporting Initiative standard, and – crucially – that the data be made public.

The Tax Justice Network called on the G20 heads of state meeting in Saudi Arabia to require the publishing of individual multinationals' country-by-country reporting, so that corporate tax abusers and the jurisdictions that facilitate them can be identified and held to account.

Tax Justice Network CEO Alex Cobham said: "A global tax system that loses over \$427 billion a year is not a broken system, it's a system programmed to fail."

"Under pressure from corporate giants and tax haven powers such as the Netherlands and the UK's network, our governments have programmed the global tax system to prioritise the desires of the wealthiest corporations and individuals over



Alex Cobham

Rosa Pavanelli

the needs of everybody else.

"The pandemic has exposed the grave cost of turning tax policy into a tool for indulging tax abusers instead of for protecting people's wellbeing."

"Now more than ever we must re-programme our global tax system to prioritise people's health and livelihoods over the desires of those bent on not paying tax."

"We're calling on governments to introduce an excess profit tax on large multinational corporations that have been short-changing countries

for years, targeting those whose profits have soared during the pandemic while local businesses have been forced into lockdown."

"For the digital tech giants who claim to have our best interests at heart while having abused their way out of billions in tax, this can be their redemption tax. A wealth tax alongside this would ensure that those with the broadest shoulders contribute as they should at this critical time."

Public Services International General Secretary Rosa Pavanelli said: "The reason frontline health workers face missing PPE and brutal understaffing is because our governments spent decades pursuing austerity and privatisation while enabling corporate tax abuse."

"For many workers, seeing these same politicians now 'clapping' for them is an insult. Growing public anger must be channelled into real

action: making corporations and the mega rich finally pay their fair share to build back better public services.

"When tax departments are downsized and wages cut, corporations and billionaires find it even easier to swindle money away from our public services and into their offshore bank accounts."

"This is, of course, no accident; many politicians have wilfully sent the guards home. The only way to fund the long-term recovery is by making sure our tax authorities have the power and support they need to stop corporations and the mega rich from not paying their fair share."

"The wealth exists to keep our societies functioning, our vulnerable alive and our businesses afloat: we just need to stop it flowing offshore."

"Let's be clear. The reason corporations and the mega rich abuse billions in taxes isn't because they're innovative. They do it because they know politicians will let them get away with it. Now that we've seen the brutal results, our leaders must stop the billions flowing out of public services and into offshore accounts, or risk fuelling cynicism and distrust in government."

Global Alliance for Tax Justice Executive Coordinator Dr Dereje Alemayehu said: "The *State of Tax Justice 2020* captures global inequality in soberingly stark numbers. Lower income countries lose more than half what they spend on public health every year to tax havens – that's enough to cover the annual salaries of nearly 18 million nurses every year."

"The OECD's failure to deliver meaningful reforms to global tax rules in recent years, despite the repeated declaration of good will, makes it clear that the task was impossible for a club of rich countries."

"With today's data showing that OECD countries are collectively responsible for nearly half of all global tax losses, the task was also clearly an inappropriate one for a club heavily mixed up in global tax havenry."

"We must establish a UN tax convention to usher in global tax reforms. Only by moving the process for setting global tax standards to the UN can we make sure that international tax governance is transparent and democratic and our global tax system genuinely fair and equitable, respecting the taxing rights of developing countries."



## Introducing the 'axis of tax avoidance'...

*THE Corporate Tax Haven Index 2019* had previously estimated that the UK, together with its network of Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies; Luxembourg; Switzerland; and the Netherlands are together responsible for half of the world's risk of corporate tax abuse, coining the label "axis of tax avoidance" for the group.

The Tax Justice Network revealed in April 2020 that the axis of tax avoidance costs the EU more than \$27 billion in lost tax every year solely from US multinational corporations operating in the EU.

*The State of Tax Justice* has confirmed that the axis of tax avoidance is collectively responsible for more

than 47.6% of global tax loss incurred from corporate tax abuse.

When including tax losses to private tax evasion, the axis of tax avoidance is responsible for 55% of all tax losses suffered by countries around the world, costing countries nearly \$237 billion in lost tax every year.

### WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

## Actions govts must take...

The Tax Justice Network, Public Services International and the Global Alliance for Tax Justice, along with supporting NGOs, campaigners and experts around the world, have called on governments to take three actions to tackle global tax abuse:

- Introduce an excess profit tax on multinational corporations making excess profits during the pandemic, such as global digital companies, in order to cut through profit shifting abuses. Multinational corporations' excess profit would be identified at the global level, not the national level, to prevent corporations from underreporting their profits by shifting them into tax havens, and taxed using a unitary tax method.19
- Introduction of a wealth tax to fund the Covid-19 response and address the long term inequalities the pandemic has exacerbated, with punitive rates for opaquely owned offshore assets and a commitment between governments to eliminate this opacity. The pandemic has already seen an explosion in the asset values of the wealthy, even as unemployment has soared to record levels in many countries.
- Establish a UN tax convention to ensure a global and genuinely representative forum to set consistent, multilateral standards for corporate taxation, for the necessary tax cooperation between governments, and to deliver comprehensive, multilateral tax transparency.

Shop steward **Michelle Gavin** joined four colleagues in occupying the Debenhams

# The inside story

on the dispute that shames Debenhams...

**By Dave Gibney**  
Mandate Communications Officer

WHEN Michelle Gavin started working for Roches Stores in Waterford back in 1993 she believed she'd be able to leave the company at a time of her choosing. That was all thrown into turmoil on April 9th when she received a phone call from a friend of hers in Cork telling her to check her emails immediately.

Debenhams, which had taken over Roches Stores in 2006, had sent a generic email to Michelle and her 68 colleagues in the Waterford store stating that its Irish stores "are not expected to reopen".

She was out of a job, along with – including concession staff – some 90 other workers in the Waterford store.

"The managers at least got the courtesy of a phone call," Michelle recalls as we discuss that life-changing announcement.

It's "horrible" to get this news after 27 years of service she explains and details how this has turned her life upside down.

"This situation I'm in now is 24/7. Being the shop steward, I've taken on the role of trying to organise things. It never shuts off in my head.

"I still have one daughter in college. There are fees I still have to pay. I was lucky enough my mortgage is paid so I'm in a lot better position than some of the other girls."

It's clear Michelle has taken on more than her fair share of responsibility in trying to achieve a settlement for all Debenhams workers, and it isn't an easy burden to carry.

"I organise my whole life around the pickets. And when you're not on the picket line, you're doing Zoom calls or contacting TDs.

"Not everybody took part in the pickets and that puts a bigger burden on those that are doing it because we have to do a lot more shifts," she adds.

"Mentally it effects you as well," she continues. "I was there 27 years, and I thought I'd be deciding when I'd leave. I remember saying to one of the girls in the cash office where I work, 'I think I'll stay until I'm 60'. Little did I know I wouldn't have that choice."

I ask Michelle if she's looked for alternative employment.

"The thought of even looking for

another job is very daunting for me. It's changed a lot since my day, even though I know I'd be very capable.

"Until this is over, I don't think I can move on. I know the others are the same, but seven- and-a-half months on, you just don't want to walk away."

While the blame for what's happened is on Debenhams, Michelle feels the Government shares some responsibility.

"The way I look at it is, they allowed Debenhams the facility to walk away. I knew about Clerys, but I'll be honest with you, and much to my shame maybe, I wasn't aware of the Duffy/Cahill report. But I've learnt an awful lot from this."

### Fateful

Michelle is referring to the 2016 government report, published more than four years before she received that fateful email from Debenhams. If the recommendations in Duffy/Cahill had been implemented it could have

prevented the Debenhams workers from being in the situation they currently find themselves in. "If that had been implemented, we would have been protected to some degree. I didn't think I'd be in this situation. I think it's important for every worker to get their head around it, because it could happen to them at some stage."

Michelle took part in the occupation of the Debenhams building in Waterford.

"I didn't think I'd ever see myself doing anything like that," she admits as she giggles at the very thought of breaking the law.

I ask if she's proud of her actions. "Very proud," Michelle replies. "I didn't think I'd do anything like that."

She continues: "The Monday we went in, we felt we needed to get a new focus on it and put it in the public eye, so to speak.

"I'm married to a retired Garda sergeant. I know he was anxious about it but when I came out he had a lovely bunch of flowers and a beautiful big card to say 'I'm very proud of you', and that meant so much to me.

"He's been so supportive of all of this and he's been great and I'd have been lost without him. A lot of the posters we've made outside of the union stuff, he's made them."

When asked about what support had been given to the Debenhams workers by local politicians, Michelle finds little positive to say.

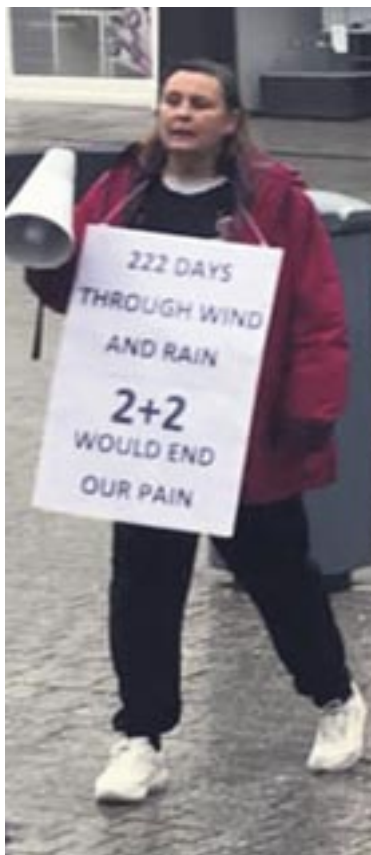
"With regard to the TDs in Waterford it's been very disappointing. David Cullinane has been good because he's with Sinn Fein but – and I have to be honest – Mary Butler (Fianna Fail) and Marc Ó Cathasaigh (Green Party) have not.

"Matt Shanahan, who is an independent, has said he's supporting us but hasn't come down and our local Mayor hasn't come near us."

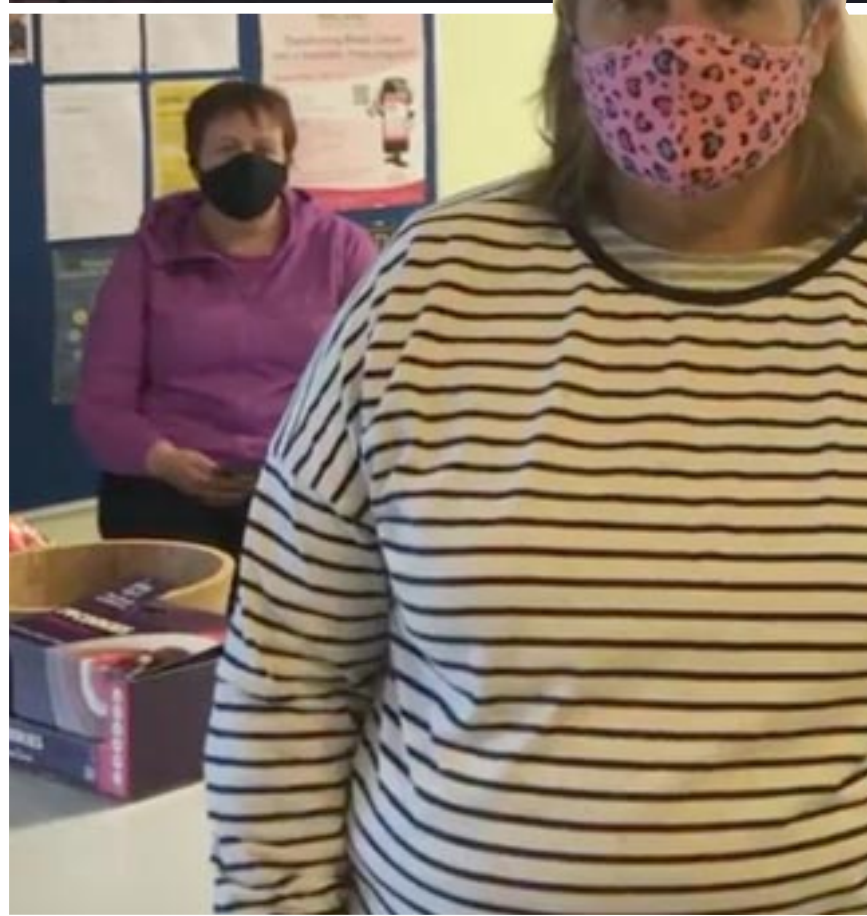
Michelle also spoke of her long involvement in the trade union movement.

"I'm the type of person that hates somebody not treating somebody else right," she explains. "And I suppose, I've always had a bit of a mouth on me, so I'd always speak up.

"My mother was a shop steward as well and she was one of a family of nine and they all would've felt the



'End our pain': Michelle with megaphone in hand



# store in Waterford for five days, but she has spent 100s of days on the picket line...



Noeleen McCarthy, Michelle Gavin, Stephen Troy and Margaret Sinnott inside the Debenhams store in Waterford (Michelle Byrne not pictured)



same. We're good workers – but you have to stand up for yourself.”

While the strike has, of course, dominated the lives of the Debenhams workers, personal issues – family bereavements and the like – also have to be dealt with.

“Up to this year all of them were still alive,” explains Michelle of her mother’s family, “and the youngest is 71 and the oldest is 88. The first one of her family died when I was in the occupation. And that was hard because I was there and I was saying, ‘Do I come out? Do I stay in? What do I do?’”

“I was in terrible turmoil over it. I remember she [Michelle’s mum] rang me to tell me what had happened, and then she said to me, ‘Now, don’t come out, because Jim was a fighter so you’re to stay there.’”

“And then two weeks later, the day the lorry decided to come to Waterford to deliver pallets, the second member of my family died. So we lost two in the space of two weeks.”

“That’s all on your mind as well. We’re trying to do ordinary day-to-day living. You have all those things going on in your life as well.”

## Fighting

“We’re trying to cope with the Covid, and then we have this thing that’s always there and is not going away. You do want it to end, we want to move on. But you’re not gonna stop fighting, because after seven-and-a-half months you’re not just going to stop.”

Michelle underlines how the workers have appreciated all the support they’ve received, particularly some of the donations from trade unions.

“That donation we got we decided to split it out between us all because we’ve incurred expenses – paying for lunches and coffees, even for gloves, hats, rain gear and all that stuff to try to keep ourselves dry.”

“We divided it out between what was left there and one of the girls when I handed her the money said to me, ‘Oh thanks be to God for that, the poor child needs her glasses repaired, and I can use that to pay for that.’”

“She also said she still hasn’t received her redundancy money. She said, ‘I hope I get that money in the next few weeks, because

I was on the mortgage holiday and that’s going to hit back in and I really kind of need my redundancy to help me get over it.’”

Michelle thinks the impact of what has happened hasn’t been widely understood. “What many people don’t understand is that jobs are not as plentiful now as they were because of the pandemic. But we still have all our expenses because when you’re in a permanent job you take on things, so you might have borrowed for your car, so that extra two weeks would give everybody that opportunity to put that side of their life in order for a few years. Like you could pay off that car loan.”

Michelle’s admiration for her colleagues – who’ve been on the picket lines across the country for the last eight months – is clear.

“We have all the same trials and tribulations still going on in our lives. They didn’t go away just because we’re on strike. One girl attends the hospital every second week, she has medical issues, but she comes into do her strike duty, there’s no issue with that.”

The sense of social justice Michelle articulates isn’t just related to Debenhams workers and their plight. She has a broader view of the world:

“I wasn’t big into politics (before the strike), but it kind of opens your eyes now to this ‘inner circle’ as they call it, it’s very apparent. Being involved in this opens your eyes to other things that maybe I wouldn’t have taken an interest in but it makes you aware of everything that’s going on...”

“Like we should have a brilliant health system, the teachers and the schools should be all sorted. Another thing I always felt, there should be no person in this country, in a progressive country like us, that should be waiting on a cataract operation in 2020.”

“So easy to fix, not horrendously expensive, and imagine leaving an old person go nearly blind for something that’s so simple. Things like that you become very aware of.”

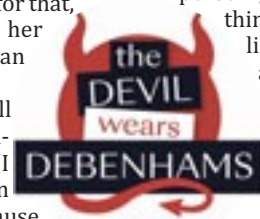
I asked Michelle if there are any positive stories from the picket line.

“We had a protest yesterday and this lovely gentleman came along. He said, ‘Would you mind if I go on your protest with you?’ I said, ‘No, not at all, we’d be delighted’. He said, ‘I made a little sign, and I made you some nice sandwiches that we can have afterwards’.”

“He had made this lovely, homemade bread and made them gluten-free ‘just in case’! Beautiful, beautiful sandwiches and we handed them out afterwards.”

That kind of positivity from Michelle Gavin and her focus on the kindness of others, at a time when she has every right to be angry and bitter at what’s happened, is a testament to the leadership skills she’s exerted in running her own picket line for almost eight months.

These workers deserved better from their company, and they deserve better from the Government. They should be very proud of their actions.



Gestures matter: solidarity and sandwiches...

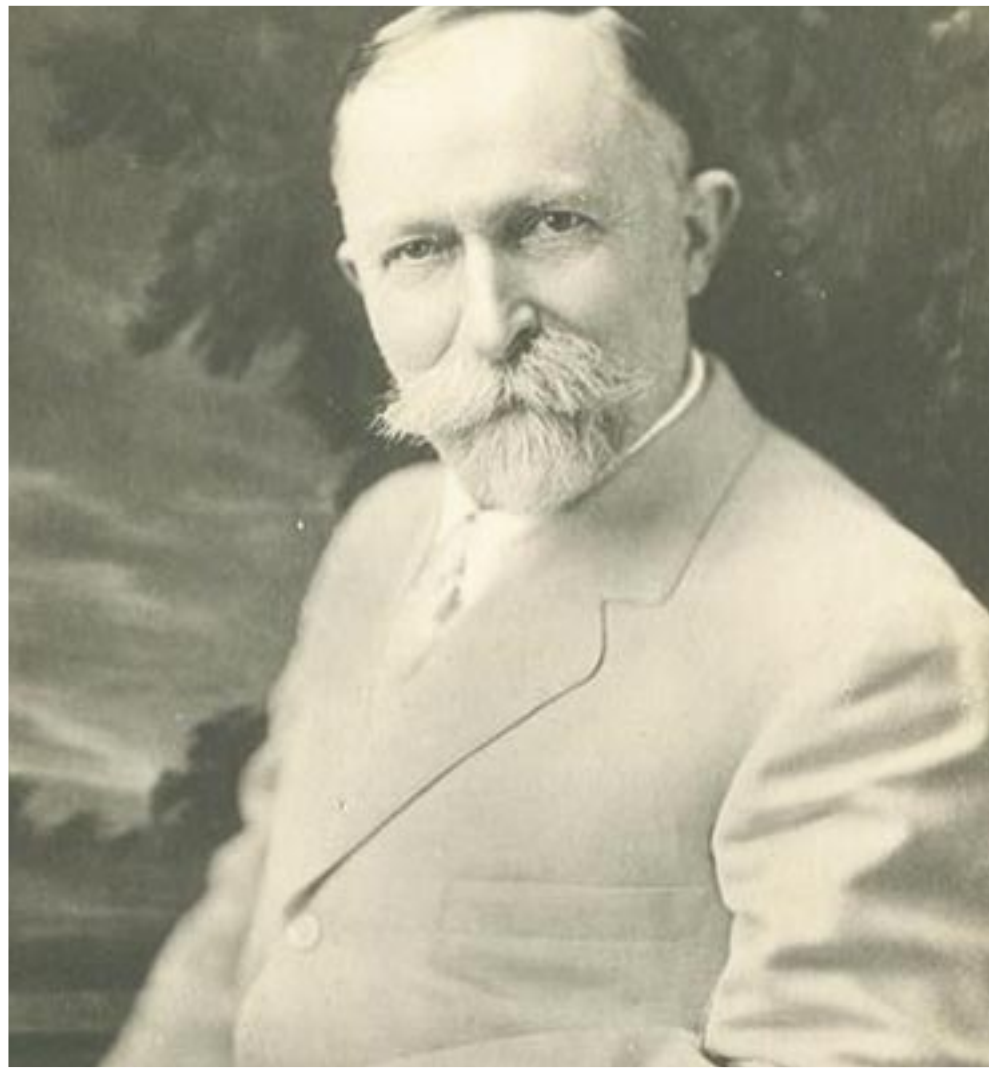
# When it comes to tax, they're making jerks of us all



Brian Forbes



Pictures: all images on Unsplash; Public Domain



Corny not horny: John Harvey Kellogg (right) thought a bowl of cornflakes was a surefire cure for masturbation but its crispy goodness clearly does little to address the scourge of tax avoidance

JOHN Harvey Kellogg invented cornflakes in 1878. He created them as a plain food for patients in the sanatorium he worked in. He felt that plain food would stop people masturbating and so he marketed his cornflakes as a “healthy, ready-to-eat anti-masturbatory morning meal”.

Maybe you might just reflect the next time you're digging into a big bowl of cornflakes and feeling like the bowl isn't big enough. Knowing fine well that you'll need more of those tasty, milk-sodden, crunchy flakes of corn to satisfy your insatiable hunger for more.

Well, that feeling of insatiable hunger is precisely the way popular cornflake makers Kellogg's seemingly feels about holding on to their money. Ever increasing profits and money they make from sales in the UK and Europe which is then cleverly redirected, made from their more than 1.1 billion of sales, through an Irish-based business.

Kellogg's operating from a unit based near Dublin Airport registered 2019 sales of more than €446 million in the UK last year. They registered almost €650 million from the rest of Europe as well as €23 million from the Middle East and Africa. All monies declared by Kellogg's in one of the biggest tax havens in the world – Ireland.

Wow, you're probably thinking, that's going to be great for the Irish economy. Then think again. Dublin-registered Kellogg Europe Trading (KET) racked up such significant “losses” that they received a €17 million tax credit from the Irish government.

The heavy losses were incurred due to the interest KET pays on loans provided to them by other Kellogg's companies, including the mother-ship operation in Luxemburg. To summarise:

Kellogg's lent Kellogg's money and the interest paid on those loans means Ireland happily subsidises Kellogg's (KET) based here in Ireland to the tune of €17 million.

In total, there are nine Kellogg's domiciled in Ireland. The Irish sales of Kellogg's are funnelled through a separate company registered as Kellogg Company of Ireland. You're probably thinking, surely this company with Irish sales amounting to a pre-tax profit of €1.3 million will be liable for a hefty tax bill in the best little country to do business in anywhere in the world? Then think again.

## Tax pittance

Kellogg's was able to have its tax bill for Irish sales reduced to approximately €5,000 because the company claimed a “group relief” credit from the Irish government which allows it to pay a pittance in tax in comparison to an ordinary PAYE earner like you and I.

Taxation from our work is a contribution to the running of our country that I'm more than happy to pay. Unfortunately, our Government with its myriad of tax loopholes and tax avoidance systems deems it unnecessary for major multinational companies making millions, and in some cases billions, in profits to pay their fair share of taxes.

As workers in the tax system we are obliged to pay our social contract with the Government. It's patently obvious that profitable companies are not subjected or required

to fulfill their fair share of that same social contract.

Clever use of the tax loopholes provided by our Government for big business means our health system is falling apart at the seams, our schools are underfunded and understaffed, our citizens cannot access adequate public housing to put a roof over their heads and our country is riddled with financial debt and austerity for generations to come.

There is (pun intended) ‘cereal abuse’, legally allowed, of our tax system by capitalists and their government enablers. We the people suffer the consequences of that neoliberal ‘business first’ political ideology.

Those ‘job creating dragons’, so coveted by our Government, increasingly

operate in the murky financial shadows of the Irish tax system which allows them to avoid tax not just in Ireland but across the world.

Ireland facilitates global tax avoidance by many hugely profitable companies. Our Irish tax policies create massive detrimental impacts on the tax take in many other countries. This means that not only do we not get our fair share of tax from these profit-hungry companies but we enable them to funnel their profits away from any social contract they should have in the actual locations they are operating sales in.

## Tax avoidance

Ireland and its people are world renowned as a welcoming and warm place for visitors to our shores. Ireland and its tax system is world renowned as a welcoming and warm home for legally laundered money and global tax avoidance. We should be thoroughly ashamed of our country's prominent role in perpetuating the ongoing ‘cereal abuse’ of other countries.

Avoiding tax and facilitating the avoidance of tax, legally or otherwise, isn't clever. It destroys lives and heightens inequalities across the world.

John Harvey Kellogg was a fervent believer in abstinence and thought sex and masturbation were unhealthy and abnormal. Cereal madness! Anyone for a tasty bowl of “Loopholes” – the cereal all money hoarders love?



## Spend your money where workers count

When you're shopping look for the "Fair Shop" mark.  
Support workers in Ireland by choosing shops that treat their employees fairly.

FRIENDSHIP AMONG PEOPLES

# Solidarity gesture warms our hearts

IN AUGUST 2019 Mandate hosted a fraternal visit to Dublin by a group of senior trade unionists from the Henan Federation of Trade Unions (HNFTU) in China. Mark Zhang, Secretary General of the Ireland-China Friendship Association, helped coordinate the visit of our Chinese comrades to Ireland and proposed a return visit by a Mandate delegation to China. But the subsequent global pandemic led to the cancelling of all international travel plans.

However, Mark continued to maintain his contact with Mandate. National Coordinator Brian Forbes told *Shopfloor*: "Mark let us know that our Chinese trade union comrades were concerned about the health of Irish trade unionists. And in a wonderful demonstration of international solidarity 2,000 face masks recently arrived in Ireland sent by our friends in HNFTU. Mandate General Secretary Gerry Light met Mark at Mandate HQ in Dublin to receive the handover of the masks and to sincerely thank Mark and our Chinese comrades in HNFTU for their exceptionally kind gesture of fraternal solidarity for ever."



FLASHBACK: 2019 *Shopfloor* story (left) about HNFTU delegation's visit. General Secretary Gerry Light (right) accepts the consignment of masks from Mark Zhang, who helped coordinate last year's visit of Chinese trade unionists to Dublin

## VIEWPOINT



Noah Donohoe mural in west Belfast

# There must be justice for Noah

## Mandate official in call to reopen probe into Noah's death

FOURTEEN-year-old Noah Donohoe left his home in south Belfast on June 21st 2020 to cycle to the Cave Hill on the outskirts of the city to meet friends for a study session.

He never returned home. Six days later his naked body was recovered from a 1km-long storm drain in north Belfast. Since then the grief of Noah's devastated mum Fiona been compounded by the what seems to be PSNI's unwillingness or inability to carry out a proper criminal investigation into the case.

Anomalies and ambiguities have surrounded the case since the day Noah's body was discovered. On the day Noah's body was "found" – Saturday, June 27th – and before an official identification had been made, and before a post-mortem had taken place a PSNI spokesperson stated that a body believed to be that of Noah had been found but that foul play was not suspected.

Since then, Noah's mum Fiona and aunt



Niamh have been left with the heartbreaking task of trying to determine Noah's last movements and how he came to end up naked in a storm drain even though he was terrified of the dark. It has been claimed that the PSNI:

- Did not seize CCTV from properties in the vicinity;
- Did not conduct door-to-door enquiries;

- Did not bring in specialist dog teams during the search;
- Did not fingerprint the entrance to the storm drain;
- Although the cause of death was drowning, water samples were not taken.

The manner of Noah's death and subsequent intransigence of the investigating team has led to 90,000 plus people signing up to 'Noah's Army' to support the family in their demand for a proper investigation.

I had a motion calling for the Police Ombudsman to investigate the PSNI handling of the case unanimously passed at a meeting of Derry City and Strabane District Council.

Balanced and impartial policing in the Six Counties has always been an issue, to say the least. Any progress that has been made since the Good Friday Agreement in this area has most definitely been damaged by this case.

*Raymond Barr is an Independent Councillor on Derry City & Strabane Council*

MANDATE'S National Coordinator Brian Forbes has added his voice to calls for a thorough re-investigation by the PSNI into the circumstances surrounding the death of south Belfast teenager Noah Donohoe during the summer.

He told *Shopfloor*: "Noah's mum Fiona is originally from Strabane – but right across the North communities have been coming together to back the family's quest to find out what happened and to get to the truth. The truth surrounding this tragedy must come out."

"There are murals dedicated to Noah appearing on the Falls Road in Belfast, in Newry, in Strabane and at the famous Free Derry Wall. A massive slogan #remembermynoah has also appeared on the slopes of the Black Mountain overlooking Belfast.

"The search for truth and justice is intensifying for Noah and the campaign will continue until Fiona and Noah's loving family get the answers they so desperately need," he added.

#justicefornoah #noahsarmy

# The right to retire at 65



Louise O'Reilly

Covid-19 has impacted lives in ways none of us could ever have envisaged but it has not dampened the appetite for a fairer society where people can live their lives with dignity.

If anything, it has reaffirmed it. People's anger at the prospect of the State Pension age rising again was one of the main talking points on the doorsteps in the run-up to February's general election.

That anger has not dissipated because it is demeaning that 65-year-olds are sent to stand in the dole queue to claim a jobseekers payment for a whole year until the pension kicks in at 66.

When you reach the age of 65, you will have worked hard, paid your bills, provided for your families and paid your taxes to the state. After all of that heavy-lifting, you have reached the point at which you should have the option of retiring with a state pension should you so choose.

Not only are people approaching the traditional age of retirement angry at the prospect of having to continue working or having to join a dole queue, younger family members and friends are angry on their behalf too. That is because Covid-19 has reminded us of the goodwill and decency of the Irish public, and people have had a time to reflect once more on the fact that people at the age of 65 have



Picture: James Hose Jr on Unsplash

earned the right to be treated with respect.

Many of you will have started work when you were 14 or 15. Many more of you spend your working lives run off your feet in hospitals, in retail or in hospitality and many more of you in physically draining jobs in factories or building sites. You are absolutely entitled to a well-earned break when you reach 65. That should not be in question.

And that is not to say all workers want to take

that opportunity to retire, others want to remain at work if they are able and willing to do so. Those people should absolutely be allowed to stay working, and the mandatory retirement age should be abolished to give workers the choice as to whether they want to continue working or whether they want to retire.

What is clear is that it should be the unquestioned right of any 65 year old to retire on a state pension if they so wish. That is the

bottom line. Unfortunately, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil don't see it that way. Neither party believes that when you reach the age of 65 that you should be entitled to a state pension and the right to retire with dignity.

They don't believe that people who have worked often for more than four decades deserve it. If you needed yet another reminder of just how utterly out of touch they are with the challenges facing ordinary people, well, there it is. In contrast, Sinn Féin has spent the last number of years fighting, along with the trade union movement, for your right to a state pension at 65.

In 2014, Fine Gael and the Labour Party raised the pension age to 66. Sinn Féin opposed it. Similarly, Sinn Féin tabled legislation to block the increases to 67 in 2021 and to 68 in 2028.

Since then, more than 35,000 65-year-olds have been forced on to a jobseeker's payment at retirement. This is very, very wrong.

## Fairness

We continued the fight for fairness when we recently brought a motion to the floor of the Dáil calling for the state pension age of 65 to be restored. We did this because we understand that we are not talking about some abstract age-bracket on a page. We are talking about real people – our loved ones and yours.

We are talking about our parents, our grandparents, our family. We are talking about our friends and our neighbours. We are talking about people who provided the resources to build our hospitals, our schools, our roads. They are entitled to respect and dignity.

This work has started to yield results. The Government has started to climb down on this issue, but we have much work to do.

Sinn Féin and the people who supported us at the election have forced them to back away from their plans to increase the pension age to 67 from January.

This is a good first step but it is not yet where we want to be. We will continue to work with the trade union movement and other like-minded parties to keep the pressure on.

We cannot – and will not – let this issue drop.  
Louise O'Reilly is Sinn Féin TD for Dublin Fingal

**NOT ALL HEROES WEAR CAPES**  
**SOME WORK IN RETAIL**

Thank you to the retail workers who are providing an essential public service during this time of crisis. Without their help we would not have the needed supplies for ourselves and our families.

#RespectRetailWorkers

**MANDATE**  
TRADE UNION



# Clap on the back, slap in the face



**RED BULL**  
The column that gives you wings  
**Brian Forbes**  
National Coordinator  
Mandate Trade Union

IN A quiet reflective moment, when you sit and wonder why your wages are so low and why you feel so disrespected and undervalued by your employer at work, it might help to recall the quote from Enda Kenny back when he became Taoiseach. He said: "I will make Ireland the best little country in the world to do business in."

That one seemingly-innocuous sentence uttered by Kenny explains better than any in-depth political critique or analysis could ever manage as to the precise reason you feel the weight of work and worry on your shoulders day and daily.

Ireland is a country where the vast majority of its working population lives to work instead of working to live. The horrendous exploitation of people and their labour has – and is – a common feature of the austerity-led policy-making decisions of our governments past and present.

The dual burden of personal debt and increasing financial responsibilities to house, feed and clothe oneself and one's family has only perpetuated the cycle of employers' exploitation of labour.

In many business circumstances, the minimum wage is now seen as the ceiling and not the floor by companies seeking to exploit their workforce for ever-increasing profits.

Politicians are among the first in line to clap one handed for essential workers while stabbing them in the back with the other hand. Student nurses who literally helped save many lives during this pandemic, while working without pay, received their own 'Night of the Long Knives' when the government parties combined to reject a Dáil motion calling for student nurses to receive a fair wage for their magnificent public service during this global health scare.

The motion lost 77-72 with all members of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the Green Party rejecting the call for decency.

Our Government refused to pay anything at all to those brave frontline student nurses who are performing well over and above what could reasonably be expected of them in an incredibly scary and dangerous environment while supposedly doing a work place-



Enda Kenny



ment. A few short days after sticking two fingers up to student nurses, the political elite in the Cabinet reversed cuts to retired ministers, top civil servants and former *taoisigh*. Four thousand of the highest paid retired civil servants – including the architects of the bank bailout and financial crash that has crippled our country for generations – will share a €12 million pot of cash between them.

On a 'let's rub their noses in it' roll, they also approved plans to give a 2% pay rise to our already-overpaid judiciary and significantly increase allowances paid to their own party whips, who act as convenors for their parties and who would have helped coordinate the aforementioned Government's rejection of wages for student nurses.

The blatant hypocrisy seen in the audacity of these politicians who preach integrity to us all while sitting in judgment in that den of utter contempt for working class people – namely Dáil Éireann – is sickening beyond belief.

Bargaining not begging, in combination with decent work without exploitation should be the union movement's battle cry and call to action for collectivising workers in both the public and private sectors.

It is long past time for those wielding the political power in this country to adequately compensate workers for their labour in the public sector while ensuring the eradication of exploitation and move towards a living wage with decent contracts for workers in the private sector.

“ Politicians are among the first in line to clap one handed for essential workers while stabbing them in the back with the other hand ”

On foot of the Government's rejection to pay student nurses a decent wage, one of those frontline workers was quoted in the media as saying: "We've been clapped, but that's not going to get people out of poverty. How can you preserve patient safety when you're struggling to survive yourself?"

Essential public service shop workers on the frontline of Covid-19 have kept us all fed, clothed and watered since start of the pandemic.

The *New Deal for Retail and Distribution Workers* campaign was recently launched by ICTU with support from Mandate and other retail and distribution unions in both jurisdictions on our island. For far too long, the voice, knowledge and dedication of workers towards serving the general public has been sidelined by business interests and government.

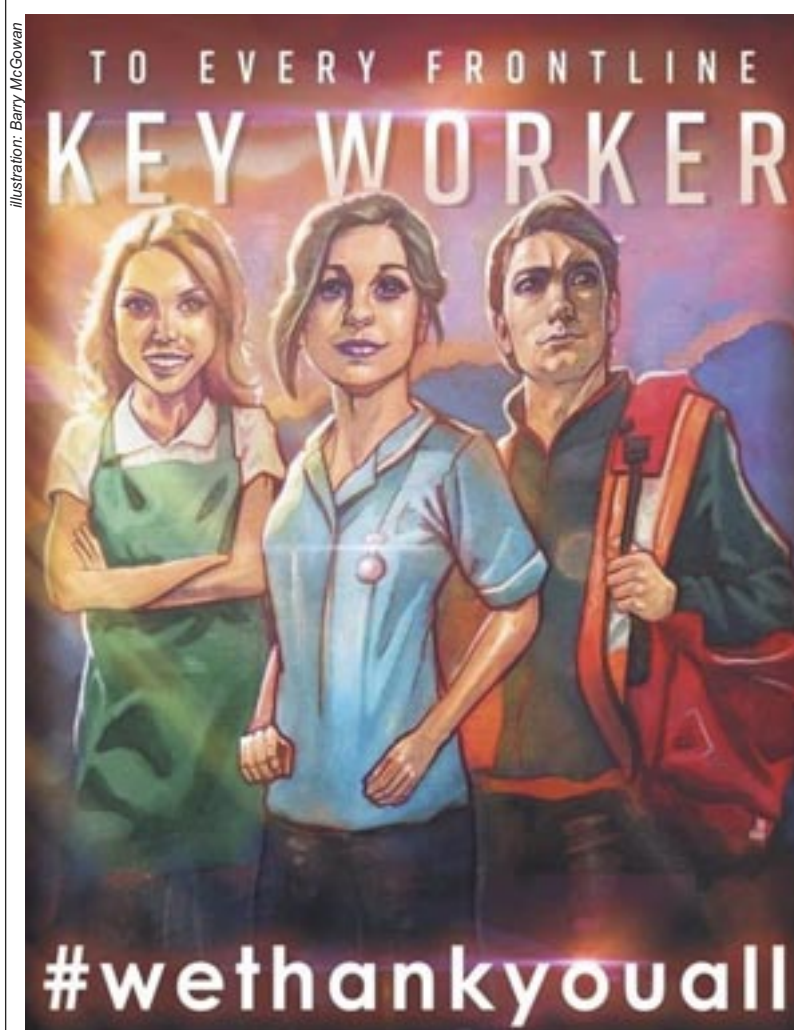
These frontline workers deserve a better deal for the sale of their labour. It's time for progressive employment standards across the Irish retail sector with no one left behind. Workers and their unions must be allowed to help shape and inform a new blueprint for a better standard of living for all retail and distribution

workers and their families.

Finally, the recent lifting of Level 5 restrictions in the run-up to the Christmas holiday season will bring with it stress and perpetuate an increase in health and safety concerns for frontline shop workers.

As previously stated, many of these frontline workers currently feel

undervalued and disrespected by their employer. If you intend to shop over the festive period – spare a thought, a kind word and a smile for all those shop workers who helped maintain a semblance of normality for society in abnormal times. Stay safe, stay union and always Respect Retail Workers.



Illustrator: Barry McGowan

# What we've been through has changed my outlook completely

By Dave Gibney

Mandate Communications Officer

"On the day that they closed the store on 23rd March, my sales manager approached me and gave me my certificate for 30 years service."

Little did Gillian McSweeney from the Debenhams Store on Patrick Street in Cork know that she'd worked her last day for the company.

Two weeks later she received a generic email from the retailer stating that the company she enjoyed working for was going into liquidation.

Gillian said: "I enjoyed work there, loved going in and meeting different people, dealing with the public and loved the family unit that we had. And there was a lot of long time service. It was a very loyal staff."

"A few people moved on but most of my friends and my lifelong friends have come out of the business, the retail business and that store."

She explains how before she was employed by Debenhams, she worked for Roches Stores.

"I just passed on with the fixtures and fittings when Roches sold us on to Debenhams at the time."

It really did seem like they were all part of one big family at Roches and then at Debenhams.

## Loyal

"If you were to come to the picket line," Gillian said, "you'd see they are all long-serving members of staff. They're people - [there for] 30 years, one girl on our picket line had 43 years service. She was the sales manager and has been there all her life. We were all loyal, we were turning up every day and we loved going to work."

Debenhams employed 300 workers at its Patrick Street outlet, with more working for the various concessions at the store. She talks of the bond built not only with Debenhams employees, but with workers in Oasis, Warehouse and the other brands that worked under the same roof.

"A lot of the concession staff had been working there a long, long time too," Gillian said. "They'd have been on the floor with us. Your relationship grows with them. You see people every week. You go through marriages, you go through babies. You build a bond."

I ask Gillian how she heard she'd lost her job. "I was doing the breakfast, and the next thing my phone started buzzing. I saw a text from the group in the department saying 'pick up your emails'."

"I thought it was an email from Laura Porter, our HR consultant. At the time we were going on Covid payment and we were trying to get all that organised, I thought something else was happening. I picked up the email on my phone and I said to my husband, 'They're gone. They're



Gillian McSweeney (right) joined Patrick Street colleagues including shop steward Valerie Conlon (left) to protest outside the National Convention Centre where the Dáil was in session in June



gone.' And he's, like, 'Who's gone?' I said, 'Debenhams have gone into liquidation'. He said, 'Everything?' I said, 'Everything'. 'They are closing the doors. They're packing up the Irish operations'."

You can still sense the shock Gillian experienced from receiving that email. She continued: "We'd been informed the week before about England going into administration and we had been told that the Irish arm of the business was fine. We'd been through an administration previously two or three years beforehand and I was kind of getting used to this because I'd gone through the drama in Roches Stores before that."

"And my husband said, 'They can't

be gone.' And I said, 'They are gone. My job is gone. Thirty years.' And I said, 'I have an email to show for it. And a generic email'."

Gillian added: "I didn't initially get very upset or start crying, I think I might've been in shock. And then

one of the girls rang and she was fierce upset and I was telling her it'd be fine. Then I was saying, 'It can't be OK because our jobs are gone in the middle of a pandemic'. We're working in retail, and you're listening on the news and everything was going upside down and inside out and then to be put in the position that we'd have no jobs to go back to after the lockdown is over."



Talking of the anonymity of the announcement, Gillian said: "There was no face to it. No being called into a room. Then we were left ringing each other and nobody had information. Even if there was a postal letter, it might have been a little bit more personal, addressed to me. There was nothing."

Gillian said she had heard that this was the way Big Business treat people, that you're "only a number", but tried to tell herself that there had to be "some sort of loyalty there".

"We did put our faith in them. And we had been told we were fine. And that was a real kick in the gut, to be told one week we were fine, and then [when] we looked into it and realised they dumped the Irish business to save the English business."

Gillian then describes the moment it all hit her: "It probably took three weeks for the shock to fade. I was at home on a Monday evening and I just started roaring, crying, and my husband asked, 'What's wrong? What's after happening now?'"

"I went, 'I can't believe that my job is gone.' And then I said 'What am I gonna do?'"

Gillian's husband tried to comfort her. "We will be fine," he told her. "The kids are fine."

She explained: "We were watching the news every night and we were

looking at people dying and it was horrendous. But I suppose in my own mind I'm thinking I won't know where to go. I'm actually worried about when retail starts for Christmas. I loved Christmas, and I loved retail at Christmas."

Looking back, Gillian insists the retailer was doing "very well" before the lockdown.

"We were being informed of figures constantly, we had been up. From the point of view of Patrick Street, we knew they had inherited a lot of overheads - the store, the leases, the rent - [but] we were told we were still performing well."

She added: "I was standing on a till bank three days a week. I knew they were taking money. Stock was being replenished. They were bringing in new concessions."

When asked about her experiences on the picket line, Gillian praises her colleagues' dedication and organisational skills. "They're very dedicated," she said. "People are very Covid aware and we're socially distancing all the time. We have our own sanitiser on the lane. We have a pump system. Everyone has their own picket board. You keep it for yourself. We spray the boards every morning and we're good to go for the day. We're very organised."

In particular, Gillian is full of praise



Vita Cortex strike veteran Greg Marshall (centre) does his stint on the Debenhams Cork picket line

for their "amazing" shop steward Valerie Conlon.

"I must say, we couldn't have organised it without Valerie, She's been amazing. And Madeline behind her too. They got organised, they got mobilised," she added.

Asked if the dispute had made her more politically aware, she agrees.

"Maybe I was plodding along, and I probably was. Plodding along in life. I thought Fianna Fail was doing what they were supposed to do for me. I had inherited it from my parents. That was probably the way I voted.

"Even though I was up outside the conference centre, when he [Micheal Martin] was being sworn in that day, and I tell you I was not shouting for him, even though I'd voted for him.

"It has changed my outlook on things completely. I will now be looking out for the Independent. The person who will do the work for you on the grassroots."

Speaking of the local support the strikers are getting, Gillian details some of the donations from supporters. "One particular gentleman, and I have to say it's probably gentlemen of a certain age, at the end of the week, they come into us, they have a little tenner folded up, they've given you the tenner and said, 'That's for a few coffees.' They've come from the 'strike generation', and they're interested."

She giggles as she explains the next bit: "We had the Vita Cortex gentlemen who came to us. They had some very interesting suggestions of what we should do. We were, like, 'We're predominantly women and can't put ourselves into that kind of situation - we have to go home and make the dinner!'"

She told the Vita Cortex strikers that their wives were probably at home making the dinner "while they were locked in in Vita Cortex".

Pondering whether there's a gendered element to the dispute, Gillian continued: "I often wondered if it was a male picket and it had gone on that long, would they have been left there? Would it have been sorted?"

Gillian claims she has become more politically aware since the strike started and admits her "whole view on everything has changed".

She added: "Out of a bad thing came a good thing as well. It made me more aware of things. And for my kids coming up behind me."

Gillian refers to the Duffy/Cahill Bill, which, if implemented, could protect other workers from expe-

Gillian: 'Even if we get nothing out of this, I'll get my self-respect back...'



riencing what has befallen the Debenhams employees.

"If we get nothing financially out of this, if we get the legislation passed, it's going to stand to my children. It's something that will always be there."

Asked if there are any funny stories from the picket line, Gillian claims the occupation of the Cork store almost never happened.

"Well, the *craic* that morning," recalling the surge of adrenaline when taking the action. "It was so funny. I got up at 4am. We all met at the lane and there was a big drama. We had our ladder. We were all set. They went down and picked the ladder up but it was too short," laughs Gillian. "The ladder couldn't reach the top of the roof!"

### Ladder

She continues: "There was a man from Marks & Spencer, and a man from SuperValu and they were just standing there with their jaws on the floor. And - would you believe - someone looked down and on the ground there was a ladder there that had been there all the time. We didn't know where the ladder had come from. It was like a gift from God!"

"They picked the ladder up. They put it on the building and climbed up on the roof and in the window and off they went. I was like, 'Who put the ladder there?' It was just a ladder that was lying covered in moss and grass and everything. We laughed so much about that ladder. It was meant to be..."

We concluded the interview on a more somber note. I asked what, if anything, the Debenhams debacle had taught Gillian. "I won't lie down anymore. I won't take the norm. I would question things a lot more. It's made life more interesting probably. I miss my job and my friends, and I'm very afraid of what will happen when the picket ends.

"You question things more I suppose. Even if I get nothing financially out of this, I will get my own self-respect back. We stood up, we didn't lie down. We didn't take it from a huge, faceless company, and there's two faceless companies in this now - there is Debenhams first, and then there's KPMG, and we always felt, 'Which is the biggest enemy?'"

Gillian is right in terms of 'self-respect'. When it comes to that, the Debenhams workers have already won that battle.

# NEW ONLINE COURSE FOR MANDATE WORKPLACE REPS

## Covid-19 return to work protocols

Mandate's new online **Covid-19 back to work induction course** is designed to guide you through some aspects of the protocol document, as well as supporting the implementation and compliance of best practice within the industry collectively as a union

To complete the course, you can register on our online academy by following the relevant steps below...

For *new learner* members to Mandate's online learning platform...

- STEP 1** Go to the following self-enrolment link <https://bit.ly/2X34Fpj> Add your name, surname and email address, press enrol
- STEP 2** Check your mailbox (including the spam basket) and then register your account
- STEP 3** Create a new password (password will need include 8 characters including upper, lower case, number and special character such as @, !, #, \*, /, ) complete the registration
- STEP 4** You will be directed to your dashboard, please click on the course and then the start button

To log back into the platform please go to the following link and enter the log-in details created: <https://mandatetradeunion.hiuphub.com/login> If you have any issue or problem during this process, please use the **support** button in your right upper corner or "**I NEED HELP**" button when logged into the platform

For *existing* members to Mandate's online learning platform...

- STEP 1** Existing trainees can use the following link: <https://mandate.hiuphub.com/login>
- STEP 2** If you cannot log in, please use **forgotten password** option on your log-in page or simply follow [support@olivemedia.co](mailto:support@olivemedia.co) to reset your details

Please keep your log-in details/password safe as you will require same for future online training

Should you have any issue accessing the links please contact Jonathan Hogan [jhogan@mandate.ie](mailto:jhogan@mandate.ie) or Amanda Blake [ablake@mandate.ie](mailto:ablake@mandate.ie) at the Mandate Training Centre

# ITUC global survey findings flag up need to repair social contract

SHOCK results from this year's International Trade Union Confederation Global Poll show that working people and their families were already living on the edge BEFORE the Covid-19 pandemic closed down most economic activity across the world.

Findings were released in September but the field research by market research analysts YouGov was carried out in February and early March, before Covid-19 took hold. The poll covers 16 countries representing the opinion of 56% of the world's adult population.

It shows that working people are struggling with a global wages slump – three-quarters of people (75%) say their income has stagnated or fallen behind.

Reacting to the findings, ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow said: "The economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic have been layered on top of a pre-existing crisis of low-wage and insecure jobs. Every second person has no financial buffer, no ability to save for the tough times ahead and relies on every pay cheque to survive."

"Without savings or a safety net, millions of people entered the pandemic with a choice between working or starving."

## Demand for change

Carried out before the spread of Covid-19, the 2020 ITUC Global Poll gives a stark insight into a precarious world filled with anxiety about work and a lack of trust in government, but underlines how there is also a clear demand from most people for change.

According to the ITUC, the results represent a warning to governments that they must work together with trade unions and civil society organisations to ensure that recovery plans build trust and resilience.

More than two-thirds of respondents expressed their fears about climate change (69%), rising inequality (69%), the misuse of personal data online (69%) and losing their jobs (67%).

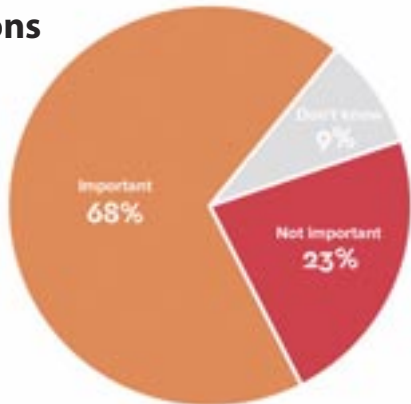
And this comes a time when over half of those questioned (52%) rated their own country's economic situation as bad.

The results reveal that workers are feeling powerless, with two out of three (66%) stating that people like them do not have enough influence on the global economy.

And almost as many (63%) believe working people have too little influence. In contrast, most believe that the richest 1% (65%) and corporate interests (57%) have too much influence.

And almost three-quarters (71%) felt their country's economic system favoured the wealthy – a view held by most people in every country surveyed. According to ITUC, this data

## Support for trade unions



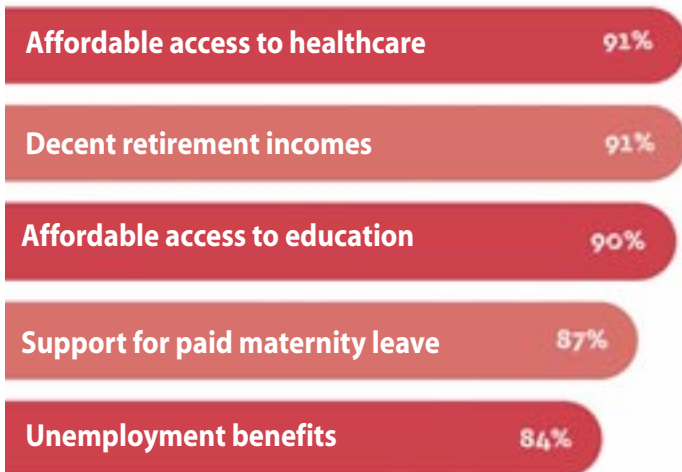
## Breaking up big tech firms into smaller companies



## Increasing tax on tech firms



## Support for social protection



## Support for labour laws and the right to strike



Even before Covid struck, workers globally were facing job insecurity and falling living standards  
Picture: Young Shanahan (CC BY 2.0)

point flags up the widespread breakdown of the social contract.

ITUC claims it also reveals deep levels of uncertainty about family income and job security:

- Almost half (42%) of people think it is unlikely the next generation will find a decent job.

- More than one-third (39%) have directly experienced unemployment or reduced working hours in the last two years, or someone in their household has experienced this.

- Three quarters (76%) state that the minimum wage is not enough to live on.

- A third (33%) have experienced less control over their choice of decent work.

- More than one in four (28%) have less control over the hours they work.

Ms Burrow said: "The despair people

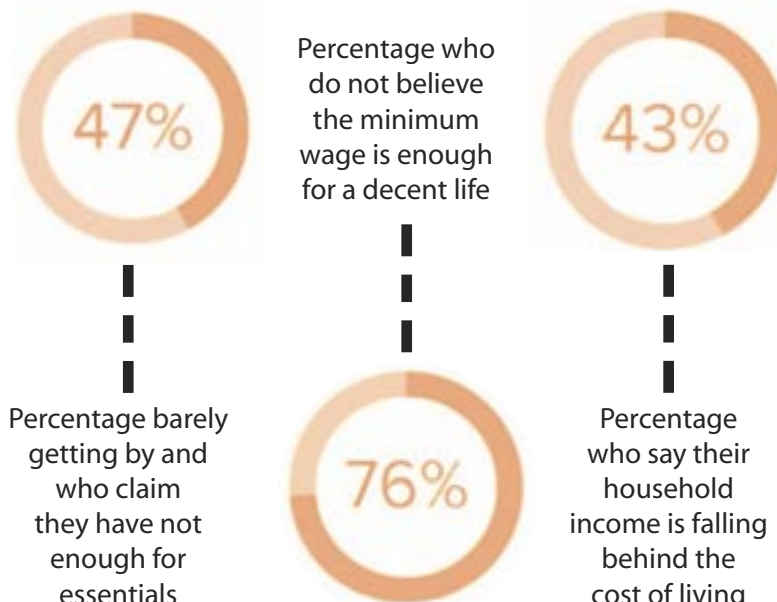
feel is spilling over and resulting in a massive loss of trust in democracy as an institution. One out of every three people is angry or despairing when asked about how they felt about their government listening to them and the needs of their family.

"Re-building that trust will require a commitment of governments to the people that results in a future that is built on a very different set of priorities.

"The demand for change with the call for jobs, climate action and justice across many fronts is no longer a slogan. Leaders should have the confidence to commit to a new social contract knowing that they have the support of voters."

The poll showed strong support for governments to take action:

- 70% of people want to see more action on a pay rise for workers.





ITUC's Sharan Burrow: 'People and governments must not be covered by corporate power'

Picture: ITUC

● 73% say governments should do more to make sure companies pay their fair share of taxes.

● 74% say governments should create jobs by investing in care for older people, disabled people and pre-school-aged children.

### Regain trust

According to ITUC, the reform of these and other issues would help the public regain and rebuild their trust in government with half (52%) stating that action taken on a list of seven policy areas – covering wages and working conditions, climate action, the care economy as well as peace and security – would lead them to trust their government more.

It's clear that climate change and the impact of new technology weighs heavily on the minds of the global population. Nearly two-thirds (63%)

of people think their government should do more to promote a Just Transition to a zero-carbon future.

The survey results also flag up the concern felt by many about regulating large, international tech companies and protecting their often-vulnerable workers.

Ms Burrow continued: "The power and dominance of big tech companies has only grown during the Covid-19 pandemic. There is a clear mandate for action when two-thirds of people want their governments to act and increase the taxes paid by these companies, with many (66%) saying they would support governments increasing regulation of these companies.

"People and governments must not be covered by corporate power. The consequences for rights and democracy are too severe to be ignored," she added.

## How to increase trust in government

- Reduce the gap between the wages of highest earners and the lowest paid
- Hold companies to account for how they treat workers and the environment
- Commit to an international treaty to ban nuclear weapons
- Plan for a Just Transition to a zero-carbon future
- Increase taxes to pay for the care of children, the elderly and the sick
- Increase the minimum wage and commit to decent work



## REPORT

# The global threat to workers' rights

THE 2020 ITUC Global Rights Index has revealed that violations of workers' rights across the world have reached a seven-year high.

The report, published earlier this year, measures trends both in government and business against a 97-indicator checklist derived from ILO conventions and jurisprudence.

ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow, writing in the foreword to this year's report, pointed to increasing attempts to place restrictions on collective bargaining and the right to strike as well as stopping workers from joining trade unions of their choice.

"This has been made worse in 2020 by an increase in the number of countries which impede the registration of unions – denying workers both representation and rights," she claimed.

Added to that, Ms Burrow pointed to an increase in the number of countries gagging or constraining freedom of speech, exposing the "fragility of democracies" especially in the age of Covid-19.

She continued: "A new trend identified in 2020 shows a number of scandals over government surveillance of trade union leaders, in an attempt to instil fear and put pressure on independent unions and their members.

"These threats to workers, our

economies and democracy were endemic in workplaces and countries before the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted lives and livelihoods.

"In many countries, the existing repression of unions and the refusal of governments to respect rights and engage in social dialogue has exposed workers to illness and death and left countries unable to fight the pandemic effectively."

Ms Burrow insisted that the 2020 ITUC Global Rights Index should be used as a "benchmark" against which "we will hold governments and employers to account".

### Conflict

Drilling into the data, the *Index* revealed that the Middle East and North Africa constituted the worst region in the world for working people – a situation made worse by the continuing insecurity and conflict in Palestine, Syria, Yemen and Libya.

● Eighty-five per cent of countries have violated the right to strike. Strikes and demonstrations were banned in Belarus, Guinea, Senegal and Togo and met with extreme brutality in Bolivia, Chile and Ecuador. In Iran and Iraq, mass arrests were made at protests.

● Eighty per cent of countries have violated the right to collectively bargain. Egypt and Honduras both moved to circumvent collective bar-

gaining rights by putting up obstacles to union registration and dismissing worker representatives.

● The number of countries which impeded the registration of unions increased from 86 in 2019 to 89 countries in 2020. Sudan suspended all trade unions and associations, and in Bangladesh, of the 1,104 union registration applications examined between 2010 and 2019, 46% were rejected by the Department of Labour.

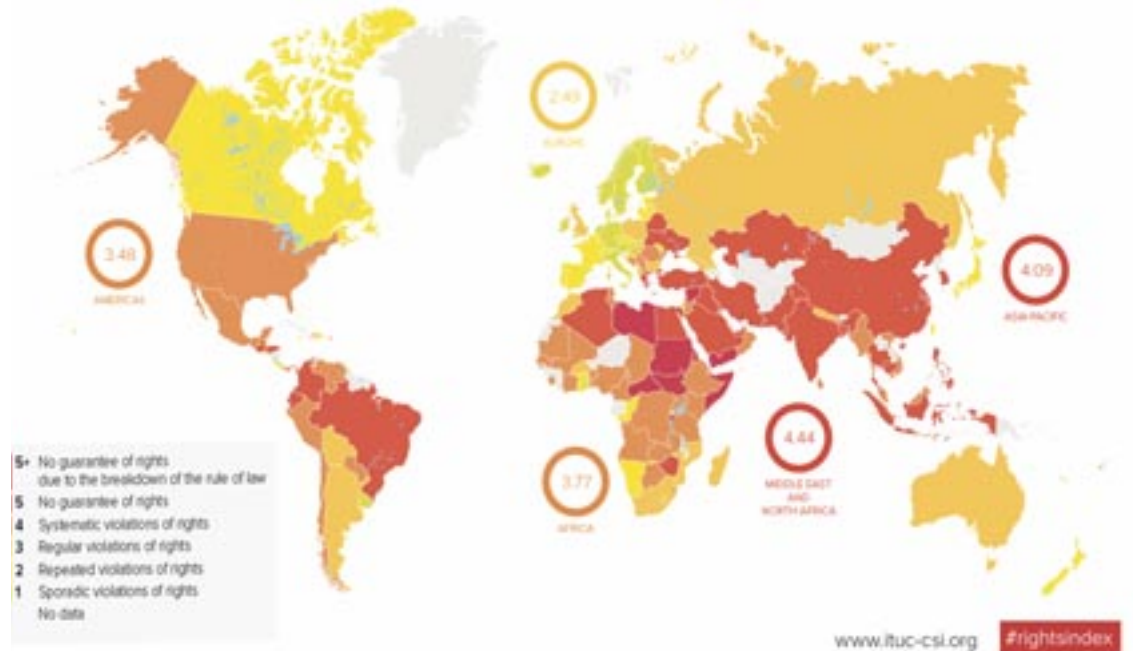
● The 10 worst countries for workers in 2020 were: Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Egypt, Honduras, India, Kazakhstan, the Philippines, Turkey and Zimbabwe.

Ms Burrow claimed the economic impact of the pandemic had placed a "spotlight" on those employment relationships which were "deficient of rights".

However, she suggested that any recovery from the impact of Covid could provide what she termed "a new model" for the global economy, with a "new commitment to workers' rights and renewed investment in compliance and the rule of law."

And she pointed out that it would take a "new social contract" to rebuild resilient economies, but warned "unless we build trust in democracy, beginning with workplace democracy, we put at risk the very foundation of our societies."

The 2020 ITUC Global Rights Index depicts the world's worst countries for workers by rating 144 countries on a scale from 1-5+ based on the degree of respect for workers' rights with 1 being the best rating and the 5+ the worst rating...



# Biffo



## The Eye That Never Sleeps

### Smart boy wanted, not too smart!

DURING a recent conversation with a casual political acquaintance, Biffo was presented with a tricky – albeit forthright – question: “You must think I’m completely useless as you’re constantly negatively critiquing my work on social media and in

that bloody union newspaper you write for.”

I hesitated slightly before responding: “Dear me, no, you’re not completely useless, you can always serve as a bad example and – in fairness – you do that really well.” As I walked away

from my now ex-acquaintance, I could hear that auld Billy Joe Shaver (RIP) tune ringing in my ear – “Devil made me do it the first time, second time I done it on my own.”

Politicians consider yourselves forewarned.

# 2020

## a killer year for music...

What a loss: John Prine fell victim to Covid-19



Pictures: digiposton (CC BY 2.0); Ron Baker (CC BY-SA 2.0)

### Words matter

IF WE all replaced using the words “the economy” with “rich people’s yacht money” then Biffo thinks life under the jackboot of capitalism would be so much easier to understand:

- “How can we effectively respond to the Covid-19 pandemic without sacrificing rich people’s yacht money?”
- “Paying a living wage to retail workers would be nice – but what about rich people’s yacht money?”
- An all-Ireland health service free for everyone at the point of need would destroy rich people’s yacht money.”

2020 has taken so many of Biffo’s musical songwriting heroes from this mortal coil.

Legends such as John Prine, Justin Townes Earle (JTE), Jerry Jeff Walker and Billy Joe Shaver, to name but a few, have left this world a little darker with their passing during the shitiest year on record (pun intended).

However, it was the sad passing of both John Prine and Justin Townes Earle which hit me a little harder than most. Prine, who chronicled the human condition in song, died from Covid-19 but had a reasonably full life and lived it well. The Singing Mailman will be sorely missed.

JTE died suddenly in August this year at the young age of 38 from an accidental “acute combined drug toxicity”. They found traces of fentanyl indicating that the usage of fentanyl-laced cocaine had resulted in an accidental overdose. Justin’s musician father, the legendary Steve Earle, also suffered a massively chronic drug addiction but somehow managed to claw his way out from the depths of heroin addiction.

He slept under bridges and hawked his guitar for just a taste of that needle and spoon. Steve was lucky to survive, his talented son not so.

Justin’s beautiful musical legacy will live on through his wonderful lyrics, the wonderfully pretty melodies within his songs and his one-of-a-kind guitar pickin’ style.

Reminiscing about seeing JTE play live on several occasions, it was the words of his song *Mama’s Eyes*, from his second album, which picks apart his fraught and tension-ridden relationship with his father by exploring their shared battles with substance abuse which hit me hardest: “I was a young man when/ I first found the pleasure in the feel of a sin/ I went down the same road as my old man/ I was younger then.”

JTE had his deeply tragic charisma snuffed out by his demons – actual, inherited and metaphysical. If someone you know needs help, then reach out and listen. It might be what they need to help save their life. Stay safe, buckaroos!



One-of-a-kind pickin’ style: Justin Townes Earle, died of an accidental overdose

### From Dr Biffo’s casebook...

VOTING these heartless sociopaths into power is a form of collective masochism that deserves to be recognised as a condition in need of treatment.

My hard-earned doctorate in ‘bullshit detection’ of the political kind allows me to make such a diagnosis about this country’s insatiable need to have political pain inflicted upon itself, election cycle after election cycle.

And I can report most voters in Ireland suffer from this debilitating disease. Every General Election day,

without fail, the nation engages in a collective exercise in self-flagellation that would shame a Bishop.

This horrible disease has many class war symptoms that subsequently lead to: collective memory loss, poll booth brain freeze and – ultimately – death.

The bodies are stacking up of those who didn’t vote themselves but caught the disease from the votes of people who did. We may be going through a pandemic but there is only one known cure – revolutionary change.

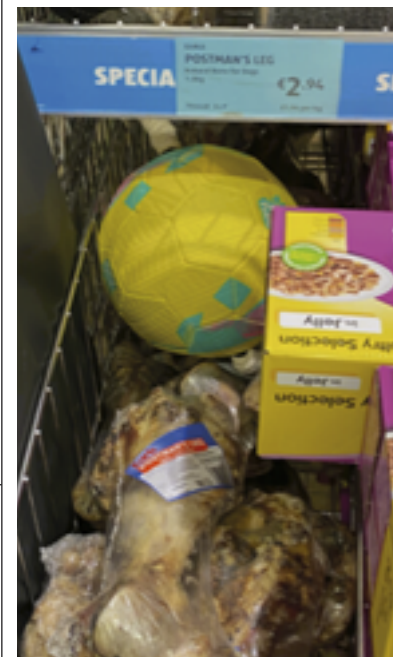
## Counting sheeple!

CONSPIRACY theories abound during our troubled times. Every scientific theory now has an ‘alternative truth’ (or, as it is also known, conspiracy theory) to keep it company. However, nothing compares to the recent shock news of Danny Healy-Rae’s conversion to evidential science.

Healy-Rae that announced in the Dáil during a climate change debate four years ago that “God above” was in charge of the weather, “as we here can’t do anything about it”. The very same bold Danny, who is on record for blaming “fairy forts” for causing dangerous dips on our roads, had evidently moved into full Stephen Hawking mode. Science has never

been a driving factor in the 66-year-old Kerryman’s analysis of the world we live in – that is until they closed rural wet pubs in his constituency. He nearly had busted a lung shouting across the Dáil at the Taoiseach: “Where is your evidence? Where is your scientific proof that pubs in rural Ireland would be the cause of transmission of the virus?”

Boffins, nerds and scientists in universities from Cambridge to Cambodia rejoiced at Danny’s “Et tu, Brute?” Dáil moment of heathen treachery. And it is whispered in parts of Kerry that holy statues wept tears of sadness at Healy-Rae’s recent embrace of evidence-based science.



You’re pullin’ my leg...

**BELIEVE IT or not, a meat product – dubbed ‘Postman’s Leg’ – is actually on sale to the public. Perhaps there’s a market out there for a ‘Government Minister’s Heart’? I suspect a ‘Government Minister’s Heart’ would have a flavour a lot like liver but leave a strong aftertaste of class war!**

### And this is why Master Yoda drives a Volkswagen Jedi...

JODEE Berry, a former waitress, thought she was in for a deal of a lifetime when she was promised a brand new Toyota if she won a beer sales contest at the restaurant she worked in.

Jodee knocked it out of the park with the sales and ended up winning the contest by selling the most beer in a month.

However, when she was blindfolded and led into the parking lot outside of the restaurant, Berry was in for a surprise. Instead of a car she got

a small package with a toy Yoda inside. Aye, that’s correct, the little green lad from *Star Wars*. Poor Jodee was understandably furious and not only ended up quitting the restaurant but she also sued them.

If Jodee bought herself a Prius and put her Yoda figurine on the dashboard then she’d have a toy Yoda in her Toyota. Did you know that Yoda’s actual surname is Layheehoo? *Yoda Layheehoo!*

Here’s a picture of a short-changed Jodee sitting with her toy Yoda at her lawyer’s office...



# Visual elegy for lives lost through male violence

By Rita Fagan  
The Family Resource Centre CDP

MALE violence is an issue for us in Ireland – an issue we must face up to, an issue we must deal with within our communities.

Male violence takes many forms – physical, emotional, financial and sexual. Children are often its first witnesses and sometimes they are used as tools against their mothers.

Many women experiencing domestic violence live in fear of pain and death. They are isolated, often lacking in self-esteem and blaming themselves for what is happening to them. They live in the communities we all live in. Women are stabbed, women are strangled, women are shot.

What is the role of communities when its women and children are experiencing abuse? Do they have a responsibility to address this or do we go along with the same old response? “It’s private – it’s best not to get involved.” It starts with screams, but must never end in silence.

The Family Resource Centre Community Development Project, St.



Michael’s Estate, Inchicore, (Tel 01-4533938) provides a grassroots community response to violence against women through their Inchicore Domestic Violence Outreach Centre.

This we do through, one-to-one support, court accompaniment, education, the use of art, protest and policy work. At the heart of our

integrated model is our free confidential outreach service.

Our service grew out of the need for women needing a safe place to disclose, be believed and supported when experiencing violence and abuse.

Our belief is that women should not have to lose their homes when

they are not the ones committing the crime.

For this year’s 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence, a special video piece, titled *And They Tell Me...*, was shot for us by film maker Joe Lee.

It follows previous renowned exhibitions developed on this theme including *Once is Too Much* (1997) and *And They Tell Me* (2012).

Joe Lee’s beautiful piece is set around 236 lighted candles, each one representing a woman who has lost her life at the hands of male violence in Ireland since femicide records began in December 1996.

This visually stunning piece is set in Goldenbridge Cemetery’s Temple and is accompanied by the haunting *Après un Rêve*, performed by cellist Vyvienne Long and Miriam Cahill on violin.

Our aim is to get this moving memorial piece to reach as many people as possible and we would appreciate you sharing this to your networks and websites.

The initiative was funded by the Irish National Teachers Organisation.



Check out ‘And They Tell Me’ at...  
<https://youtu.be/2hDpncjElhc>

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

### PALESTINE

# Probe call after IDF shoots teen

ISRAELI forces fatally shot a teenage bystander in the West Bank village of al-Mughayyir on Friday, December 5th during a protest against Israeli land theft in the area.

It was reported 15-year-old Ali Ayman Saleh Nasser was not taking part in the demo when shot. He is the sixth Palestinian child to be killed by Israeli forces this year in the occupied West Bank. According to human rights group Defense for Children International Palestine (DCIP), all Nasser was doing was watching the protest.

The teen was taken by ambulance to the Palestine Medical Complex in the occupied West Bank city of Ramallah. He was pronounced dead shortly afterward.

As in many other cases when occupation forces killed a Palestinian child, the Israeli military denied using

live fire and insisted soldiers used rubber-coated steel bullets and US-made Ruger rifles.

But activists contest Israel’s claim that Ruger rifles do not fire live ammo – and insist they fire live bullets, albeit smaller 22-caliber rounds, which are nonetheless lethal.

DCIP confirmed that Nasser was killed by live fire. The group also confirmed that Israeli soldiers used sponge-tipped rounds and tear gas grenades against protesters.

While Israel claims that rubber-coated bullets, sponge-tipped rounds and tear gas are non-lethal, their use has resulted in the deaths and severe injury of many Palestinians, including children.

Following the shooting, UN Middle East peace envoy Nickolay Mladenov called on Israel to “swiftly and independently investigate this shocking

and unacceptable incident.”

But human rights activists on the ground have queried the independence of such a probe if carried out by Israeli authorities.

A local source said: “These officials know full well that Israel’s self-investigations are a sham, shielding soldiers from accountability. So a call for Israel to investigate itself amounts to a call for Israel to continue to enjoy impunity.”

In 2016, B’Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories – dubbed Israel’s investigation system a “fig leaf”.

And a recent report by Israeli human rights group Yesh Din revealed how the deliberately long and bureaucratic process is used to run out the clock, making a genuine investigation all but impossible.

The source continued: “The results



Victim of Israeli fire: Ali Ayman Saleh Nasser speak for themselves: only one Israeli soldier has been indicted over the use of live fire against unarmed protesters during the Great March of Return demonstrations held along Gaza’s eastern boundary from March 2018. Israeli forces killed more than 215 unarmed Palestinians during those protests.

“The soldier in question killed a 14-year-old child. His ‘punishment’ was community service and a demotion.”

## Bot and sold

UK retailer Co-op is set to dramatically ramp up its use of self-driving delivery robots to thousands more customers across the water.

The groceries chain became the first retailer in the UK to offer delivery by autonomous robots in 2018.

During the two-and-a-half years the pilot has been running in Milton Keynes, nearly half a million deliveries have been made.

Now Co-op bosses want to roll the initiative out to a second town, Northampton, as well as expand its fleet of robots to 300 by the end of next year.

Shoppers access the service through robot manufacturer Starship Technology’s app. They drop a pin which indicates where they want the delivery to be sent, track it in real time, before receiving an alert which allows them to open the robot’s compartment when it has arrived.

Chicken ‘teamed up to kill fox’ at Brittany farming school

– AFP report, March 2019



Picture: Monika Kubal on Unsplash

Be a chicken...

JOIN A UNION

<https://mandate.ie/join-mandate/>

# Health & Safety Training for Safety Reps

**Anyone completing this course will be able to:**

- Describe the role and function of the Safety Representative
- List the legal requirements involved
- Assess, investigate and help prevent accidents in the work place
- List the main requirements of a Safety Statement
- Provide induction training on Health and Safety in their workplace

**Who should attend?**

Mandate Elected Health & Safety Representative

**Duration:**

Course runs for six weeks, one evening per week

**Course Content:**

- Legislation relating to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005
- Role and function of the Safety Representative
- Identify health and safety hazards in offices
- Ergonomics and manual handling
- Internal transport
- Ergonomics and Visual Display Units
- Office environment
- Lighting
- Air Quality
- Fire Safety
- Hazard identification and risk assessment
- Accident investigation
- Health and Safety management
- Occupational health and hygiene
- Information sources
- Safety Statements
- Final Discussion and review

**Certification:**

The National Safety Centre awards a Certificate of Attendance. This course meets the HSA guidelines. Certificates are valid for three years.

If you are the Elected Health & Safety Rep and have not yet completed Health & Safety Training, or if it has been more than three years since you received Health & Safety training, contact Amanda Blake – [ablake@mandate.ie](mailto:ablake@mandate.ie) – in Mandate Training Centre for further details.

## INTERNATIONAL

# The truth about Trump's tariffs tactic to woo Rust Belt voters

By Greg Godels

Pittsburgh-based commentator

TO its credit, the United Steelworkers (USW) has lifted the living standards and working conditions of millions of workers. Birthed from the militant 1930s Steel Workers Organizing Committee and midwifed by hundreds of Communist and socialist organisers, the USW became a strong advocate of industrial unionism and one of the more progressive forces in US political life.

But with the Cold War and the purging or repression of its most militant members, the USW abandoned the class-confrontation approach of its early years for a partnership with capital.

In place of exercising the strength and power of a united membership, the union leadership chose a partnership approach, negotiating contracts based upon the notion that the worker and the boss had a common interest.

In the context of the early Cold War, capital accepted some concessions to labour to guarantee US labour's loyalty to US foreign policy objectives.

In return for US labour leaders policing domestic radicalism in the workplace and for international collaboration in fighting Communism, the bosses tacitly agreed to accept wage and benefit growth commensurate with rising productivity.

With the onset of the economic crisis in the 1970s and with the ruling class turning toward market fundamentalism, capital reneged on its part of the partnership, attacking labour with a vengeance. The implicit partnership was dissolved by one side.

Unfortunately, the other side – organised labour (in this case, the USW) – clung to the partnership. Despite restructuring, downsizing, plant closures, and concession demands, the USW stood by the philosophy of co-operation, what their critics called “class collaboration.”

Since we can remember, one expression of this affinity with corporate bosses has taken the form of seeking protection from foreign competitors. From inviting workers to



Protest at the Indiana State Capitol over the loss of 1,400 jobs to Mexico in 2016 Picture: Public Domain

sledgehammer Toyotas to advocating for steel tariffs, the USW leadership has maintained that what is good for steel corporations doing business in the USA is good for USW steelworkers.

In recent years, the protectionist demand was at odds with the political mainstream, including the union's putative ally, the Democratic Party.

Since the rise of the ideas of Thatcher, Carter, Reagan and Clinton unfettered free markets have been an ideological fixation of all the bourgeois parties and their policy makers,

“Unfortunately for the USW and their bet on protectionism, the Trump tariffs failed to meet expectations”

placing tariffs and other protectionist policies beyond the pale.

But in 2016, the USW leadership found their saviour – Donald Trump rudely arrived to occupy the White House.

Moreover, he kept his promise in 2018 to impose restrictive tariffs on all the imported steel coming into the United States. Unfortunately for the USW and their bet on protectionism, the Trump tariffs failed to meet their expectations.

As *The Wall Street Journal* reports: “With the expanded production, about 6,000 jobs were added to the US steel industry's workforce after tariffs started in 2018, according to the Census Bureau. By the end of 2019, though, *those gains evaporated as steel demand and prices sank.*” [my emphasis] Authors Bob Tita and William Mauldin (*Tariffs Didn't Fuel Revival for American Steel*,





A remnant of the once massive, legendary US Steel Homestead Steel Works, the Carrie Blast Furnaces (above) are a vestige of Pittsburgh's 20th-century domination of the steel industry. Pennsylvania steel workers (below left) at the turn of the last century



Pictures: samalcurio (CC BY 2.0); George Corbin (CC BY 2.0)

WSJ, October 28th 2020) add that: "Higher prices [initially] also made steel more expensive for manufacturers that buy it, leading to the loss of about 75,000 US manufacturing jobs, according to a study released late last year by the Federal Reserve Board of Governors."

In addition, foreign steel makers secured punitive export tariffs in retaliation, further hurting domestic US manufacturing.

The lack of growth in demand for steel in the USA has forced domestic producers to seek exports of steel to markets outside the United States in search of profits, the same strategy practiced by the "foreign" competition.

A major component of Trump's 2016 victorious campaign message that helped him secure votes in the Rust Belt states was his promise of major investment to rebuild infras-

tructure and create jobs.

It never got off the ground because it was based on the false notion that capitalists will invest in the public good. Things like fixing public schools, hospitals, water systems, pollution control, and building mass transit systems simply don't offer returns to investors even though they will provide for the public good, boost

**“ Rather than casting their fate with their corporate rivals for the wealth created by the workers, unions should fight those rivals for a greater share... ”**

steel production, and create tens of thousands of steelworker jobs.

Instead, Trump, true to his real, big-business agenda, pushed a major tax cut that actually reduced the revenue available for any public investment. Rather than drain the swamp, Trump drained the public coffers and offered the syrup of "public private partnerships" that were supposed to entice capitalists to invest. They never did.

Not to be outdone, *The Pittsburgh Post Gazette* reports that the Republican-controlled legislature of Pennsylvania has now taken this phony concept to its practical conclusion which will result in the proposed tolling of many bridges in Pennsylvania as a way of making the "partnership" work to increase state revenues.

Rather than tax the wealth of billionaires and corporations to obtain necessary revenues to rebuild in the

public interest, we instead have tax cuts for the rich and privatisation of necessary networks and services.

Understandably, the US-based steel industry sought to garner greater market share through the tariff programme. However, the USW leadership failed to acknowledge one of the more basic laws of capitalism: with tariff-induced prices soaring and foreign competition locked out, domestic capitalist enterprises were incentivised to engage in an orgy of expansion and production.

As a result of this classic overproduction-induced crisis, prices collapsed and the industry withdrew, with layoffs and closed facilities. Prices for hot-rolled coiled sheet steel increased by nearly half to \$920 a ton after the tariffs were imposed, but are now below their pre-tariff level.

The advocates of tariffs as a remedy for layoffs and stagnant or declining wages and benefits forget that capitalism runs on profits and not sharing the wealth. The Communist, socialist, and other militant trade unionists who founded the union understood this truth. They sought a union that would fight the corporations for a greater portion of those profits for the workers.

Today's leadership of the USW mistakenly believes that workers will benefit if "our" corporations are favoured over "theirs." They fantasize a world where foreigners are rapacious cheaters and US producers are inspired by the greater good.

"Theirs" are driven by ruthless competition, while "ours" are committed to fairness and partnership. Lurking beneath the rhetoric is a not-too-subtle national chauvinism.

Surely, the experience with the Trump tariffs reveals that the protec-

tionist approach not only slanders foreigners, but fails to protect domestic production, jobs, and compensation.

Domestic producers, like their foreign counterparts, are ruled by the laws of motion of the capitalist system. Bust follows boom, whether it applies to a protected national market or a global unfettered market.

The union's reliance on this co-operative approach with the steel corporations defangs it for the necessary independent political action programme that could unite the membership and the general public in a fight for jobs and investment in decaying infrastructure. All research shows that this is a real path forward to create steel demand and union jobs.

It's plain to see and many studies document that America's infrastructure is in horrible shape. Tariffs have not increased domestic demand for steel. The only way to increase domestic steel production is through a massive reinvestment programme that not only rebuilds the decaying American infrastructure in the public interest but creates steelworker jobs.

Rather than casting their fate with their privately owned corporate rivals for the wealth created by the workers, unions should fight those rivals for a greater share.

If they want to guarantee jobs, security, and compensation, they should struggle to eliminate the private corporations altogether. A real fighting union would be for public ownership of the steel industry.

*This article was first published on ZZ's Blog, check out <https://bit.ly/3pXuXpl> Zoltan Zigedy is the non de plum of Pittsburgh-based writer, Greg Godels*

# The US labour-busting consultants that keep workplaces union-free

By Prof John Logan

San Francisco State University

AMERICAN companies have been very successful at preventing their workers from organising into unions in recent decades, one of the reasons unionisation in the private sector is at a record low.

What you may not realise is that a handful of little-known law and consulting firms do much of the dirty work that keeps companies and other organisations union-free.

IKEA, for example, turned to Ogletree Deakins, one of the largest law firms that specialise in so-called union avoidance activities, to help it crush unionisation efforts in Stoughton, Massachusetts, in 2016.

Google hired IRI Consultants, a firm known for its anti-union activities, for advice on how to deal with growing worker unrest. And just this summer, two liberal-leaning organisations – the Scholars Strategy Network and ACLU Kansas – recruited the services of Ogletree when their employees tried to form unions.

I've been studying these firms for two decades and have chronicled the key roles they have played in undermining an American worker's federally protected right to organise. Their tactics, abetted by weak labour laws, have turned what should be a worker-driven process into essentially a choice being made by companies.

A lack of effective federal reporting requirements means there isn't a lot of data on this union-busting industry. We do know that a lot of companies are using it.

The Labor Relations Institute offered clients a money-back guarantee that it could successfully prevent employees from forming a union in a brochure from the 2000s.

According to a Cornell labour expert, about 75% of all US employers have engaged the services of a consultant or law firm to stymie efforts by workers to organise – and are spending an estimated US\$340 million a year to do so.

Three of the biggest law firms that do this work are Littler Mendelson, Ogletree and Jackson Lewis, which have grown from regional operations into global union avoidance behemoths.

Consultants such as IRI and the Labor Relations Institute have also developed a reputation for union avoidance expertise in recent decades. IRI even used to offer a "money-back guarantee" if its efforts weren't successful.

Here's a closer look at the main services they offer clients, which occupy the gray areas of labour law.

One major reason companies hire these firms is to conduct union vulnerability audits, intended to analyze a workforce to see which departments, locations or demographic groups are most likely to organise.



US pharmacy chain Rite Aid hired anti-union consultants to try to prevent workers from successfully organising

Picture: Amy Niehouse (CC BY-SA 2.0)

The tactic has been around since at least the mid-20th century. Management professor Sanford Jacoby documented how Sears Roebuck used vulnerability audits to beat back unionisation as early as the 1940s, while labour historian Nelson Lichtenstein showed how Walmart has used similar tactics to remain union-free since the 1960s.

Today's audits, however, are more sophisticated and data-driven. Anti-union monitoring software can help management squash organising before it starts, while heat maps that collect data from a wide variety of sources reveal granular detail about where the biggest risks are.

Amazon recently used heat maps to show which of its Whole Foods grocery stores and distribution warehouses were most at risk of unionisation. Nissan used billboards to convey its anti-union message during a unionisation drive in 1989.

## 'Virus'

The anti-union firms advise companies to treat unions like a "virus" and to "inoculate" employees with messaging about the purported consequences of organising early and often.

And to that end, another important service these firms provide is supplying companies with anti-union mate-

rials, which can be anything from managerial training and websites targeting employees to "vote no" buttons and anti-union billboards – strategically located on the way to work.

For example, Nissan, Volkswagen and other carmakers have used billboards as part of their campaigns to prevent unionising at plants in the US. And last year, Delta Airlines put up posters advising employees that buying a video game console would be a better way to spend money than on union dues.

Rite Aid, as part of an effort to stop workers at a warehouse in Lancaster, California, from organising beginning in 2006, hired Oliver J. Bell & Associates to provide its managers with training resources, according to a report by labour rights organisation Jobs with Justice.

A third technique is what union avoidance consultants call direct explainer activity, such as conducting mandatory anti-union staff meetings.

Workers who experience them describe these "captive" meetings as a form of legalised intimidation, which is one reason many other democratic countries, such as Germany and Japan, restrict them.

Law firms generally avoid engaging in activities that involve direct con-

tact with employees because, technically, it must be disclosed under the US's Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1959.

This has created an opening for other types of consultants to specialise in this kind of persuasion. Weak enforcement means that reporting is patchy, even among consultants who talk to employees.

As the pandemic and concerns of benefits and safety has prompted more workers to try to organise, firms have continued to conduct these meetings. HCA Healthcare reportedly hired consultants to run meetings at a hospital in Asheville, North Carolina, as part of its recent campaign to prevent 1,600 nurses from forming a union.

Using these and other tactics, consultants claim overwhelming success rates in preventing unionisation, often 95% or higher. While it's impossible to empirically verify these claims, most labour relations researchers believe they are highly effective.

John Logan is Professor and Director of Labour and Employment Studies, San Francisco State University

THE CONVERSATION

This article first appeared in The Conversation - check out <https://theconversation.com/uk>

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# A programme for the 21st Century

Tommy  
McKearney



OVER recent years a discernible pattern has been emerging in many of those countries that the BBC likes to describe as “parliamentary democracies”.

Long-established precedents are being flouted by elected power-brokers in the leading capitalist states.

While those who govern on behalf of capitalism have never been reluctant to subvert common law or to ruthlessly employ force illegally, there was for decades a degree of regulation. More like honour among thieves than anything ethical, it served as a modus vivendi that maintained a working consensus within capitalist ruling classes, both nationally and internationally.

Over the past decade, though, this convention has been breaking down. The most spectacular example was evident in the United States during the presidency of Donald Trump. The list of his norm-breaking is lengthy: reneging on a multilateral treaty with Iran, withdrawing from the Paris climate accord, blatant malpractice leading to impeachment, and the astonishing refusal to accept election results.

Not to be outdone, the British have also broken with established protocols. The Internal Market Bill gives ministers the ability to bypass international law, while Boris Johnson contemptuously overturned long-standing precedent by ignoring a damning report accusing his home secretary of bullying a civil servant.

Among other notable nonconformists there is the Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orbán, negating legal norms, and the Brazilian president, Jair Bolsonaro, speaking warmly of the old military dictatorship.

While maybe not on the same scale, the phenomenon has not passed Ireland by. Take the judicial system for a start. There was a time some decades ago when republicans didn't recognise the authority of judges sitting in Dublin; yet never could anyone have imagined that 40 years later a Supreme Court judge would tell the Chief Justice that he didn't recognise his authority either.

Few other incidents better illustrate the essential nature of the 26-county state. With government in endless disarray, this pillar of the establishment rudely displays the ruling class's sense of entitlement and indeed contempt for the general public.

Not that the Woulfe is alone in holding this view. Exposed as having improperly shared confidential and restricted Government documents with one of his pals, the state's Taoiseach-in-waiting, Leo Varadkar, spun the Dáil a yarn, and walked away scot-free.

In spite of committing an offence



Protocol tossing right-wingers: US President Donald Trump, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, UK PM Boris Johnson and Hungarian premier Viktor Orbán

Pictures: Gage Skidmore (CC BY-SA 2.0); Marcos Brandao/Senado Federal (CC BY 2.0); Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken (CC BY-SA 2.0); EPP (CC BY 2.0)

that would have had a junior civil servant summarily dismissed, the leader of Fine Gael disingenuously claimed he was acting in the national interest. As a result, he retained the full confidence of his coalition partners, Fianna Fáil and the Green Tories. Nor does it stop at that in this, the “best wee country in the world to do business in.”

## Wham-bam

There is the jaw-dropping hubris of the “wham-bam, charge them what we can” company entrusted with building the long-awaited children's hospital in Dublin. This project is supposedly under review by the Minister for Public Expenditure, Michael Mc-

Grath. In spite of McGrath's undoubtedly scrupulous supervision, the project remains a vehicle for the redistribution of taxpayers' wealth upwards to the super-rich.

These are only some of the more egregious and outrageous recent examples of the arrogance and the incestuous nature of Ireland's ruling class. Not only are we witness to the machinations of a deeply flawed system but we are also watching as the so-called guardians of constitutional probity break their own rules.

In reality, a system that has been shaped to serve the interests of the Irish bourgeoisie is struggling to retain its hegemony and indeed legitimacy after a difficult decade of

austerity, exacerbated recently by fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Of course anything the Southern establishment can do the DUP in Stormont can do even worse. With the Covid pandemic surging out of control and Northern hospitals struggling to cope, Arlene Foster and her group of MLAs took contempt for democracy and decency to a new level.

Faced with a call for a circuit-breaking lockdown from every other party in the Assembly, the misnamed Democratic Unionists employed the ‘petition of concern’ to block the demand.

Notwithstanding that Foster and her cronies were forced into a humil-

iating U-turn a few days later, the fact that the right-wing of unionism would – and could – prevent the enactment of a crucial measure designed to protect the basic health and well-being of the local population raises further questions about the very viability of the six-county state.

Allowing for local peculiarities, there is ample evidence of a global pattern forming, a pattern indicating a distinct phase in existing capitalism and something pointing to a developing crisis.

Fearful of the influence of the emerging economic powerhouse, China, yet unwilling to forgo super-profits by domestic investment in infrastructural and social wage projects, the political wing of capitalism is growing dangerously reckless.

Working-class communities everywhere have suffered as a result of the decade-long period of austerity following the economic crash of 2008. Understandably, many people in these communities are becoming frustrated. In the midst of this angst, and taking advantage of the absence of a strong socialist alternative movement, right-wing demagoguery has flourished. As in the past, it does so with the connivance of big capital.

## Transgressions

All of which raises the question of how Ireland's Left and progressives should respond to what is likely to become an ever more serious problem. Clearly there is some advantage in publicising the transgressions of the ruling class, if only as a means of informing the wider public.

There is a limit, however, to what can be achieved by trying to challenge the bourgeoisie in their own chosen theatres of operation. A more potent strategy is required, and one that lays the theoretical foundation for a strong left-wing alternative.

There is need for a programme that promises to bring about fundamental systemic change – a programme that defines sovereign democracy as one where decisions are made by the people, in the people's interest; a programme unambiguous about bringing an end to Partition; a programme that places the means of production, distribution and exchange in the hands of the people; a programme that understands neutrality to mean ending US military involvement in Shannon Airport and No to NATO in Ireland, north and south.

Last year in Liberty Hall, the Peadar O'Donnell Socialist Republican Forum presented the basis for such a programme to a large gathering from around the country. The document, entitled *A Democratic Programme for a New Century*, was well received and broadly endorsed.

The Forum does not insist that its proposals are the definitive, last word on this matter. Seeing it instead as a valuable discussion document, the Forum plans to begin a series of open discussions on this theme early next year.

Make a note in your diary, and watch this space for details of time and venue.



Picture: infomatique (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Working-class communities everywhere suffered after a decade-long period of austerity following the 2008 crash

# Cultural shift in how we work



**DEVELOPMENTS** in technology and its widespread availability have made it possible for many jobs to be performed outside of the employer's premises. However, it took a pandemic to fully awaken us to the potential for homeworking.

Before Covid-19 struck, just under one in 20 (4.9%) workers worked mainly from home. In policy circles, homeworking was viewed as one in a suite of flexible working arrangements for attracting and retaining mothers, carers and people with a disability in the workforce.

With the arrival of Covid-19, working from home went mainstream. Over a matter of days, tens of thousands of businesses moved their staff to remote working to help slow the spread of the virus.

Around 40% of paid hours worked in the economy during lockdown were performed from homes across the country as the number of homeworkers skyrocketed to more than one in four (27.6%) of those in employment.

For some workers the experience



Picture: David Martyn Hunt (CC BY 2.0)

of working from home has been fraught. Unsuitable accommodation, poor broadband, longer hours, feeling isolated are among the top issues raised with union reps.

But, for the vast majority it has been a positive experience and they want to continue working from home after the Covid-19 restrictions end.

Unsurprising, remote working has

become a hot topic for radio and TV programmes and newspaper think-pieces, with many predicting the death of the office.

This conclusion is not supported by opinion poll findings and what we are hearing from trade union members – the overwhelming preference is for a mix of office-based and homeworking post pandemic.



Picture: Dept of Health (CC BY 2.0)  
Dr Tony Holohan: 'message not getting through'

time, part-time hours, job-share, etc – are wholly at the discretion of the employer.

Without a statutory requirement to give requests reasonable consideration, Irish employers have shown themselves to be too quick to out of hand refuse to negotiate a work from home company policy with trade union reps, prior to Covid.

Equally today, datasets on people's movements show large numbers of workers are back in the workplace, in spite of public health advice to work from home unless absolutely necessary to attend in person.

The message on working from home is "not getting through" Dr Tony Holohan, the chief medical officer, commented recently. This message needs to be targeted at employers, who hold all the power when it comes to workers' place of work.

A new EU Directive on Work-Life Balance requires Government to give carers and parents of young children the right to request remote working by 2022, in line with European workers' rights. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions has called on Government to go beyond the minimum requirements of the directive and extend this right to all workers.

The past eight months have been a mass experiment in homeworking. Granted, the experiment conditions have been far from textbook. No one would have designed it to be implemented overnight, without time to set-up, and for it to run in parallel with a public health emergency.

Even so, workers and policymakers are now very much alive to its potential. The Government will soon publish its National Strategy on Remote Working. Introducing rights to remote working and stronger protections for homeworkers will be key to getting buy-in from reluctant employers and for a smooth transition in this cultural shift in how we work.

Dr Laura Bambrick is Social Policy Officer at the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

So, while unions view the reports of the death of the office to be greatly exaggerated, we do recognise the potential for remote working to be one of the great disruptors to the workplace, similar to the arrival of the assembly line on to the factory floor and the personal computer into the office.

To be clear, trade unions are not looking to hold back the tide of progress. There is a huge appetite for remote working among our members. When implemented in the right way, working from home or remotely from another location, such as a digital hub or co-working space, can really improve workers' work-life balance, make them happier and more productive.

Our focus is on ensuring workers' hard-won rights are preserved when working from home and that protections keep pace with changes in ways of working.

However, while workers are willing to embrace this future of work, and as the Irish Congress of Trade Unions have been to the fore in highlighting, under Irish law they have no rights to work from home.

In the UK, Northern Ireland and across the EU, workers who have completed their probation period have a right to request homeworking and their employer is legally required to give their request serious consideration.

There is no obligation on the employer to agree to the request. Not all jobs can be completed remotely and the need for flexibility must be balanced with the needs of the business.

South of the border in the Republic, working from home and other flexible working arrangements – flexi-

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“...while unions view the reports of the death of the office to be greatly exaggerated, we do recognise the potential for remote working to be one of the great disruptors to the workplace, similar to the arrival of the assembly line and personal computer into the office”



Keeping shelves stocked: US grocery worker on the frontline

Picture: UFCW

# Mandate lauds UFCW hazard pay win

MANDATE has congratulated US grocers union, the United Food and Commercial Workers union (UFCW) for securing a major win on hazard pay that will benefit nearly 50,000 essential workers at the ShopRite supermarket chain.

The deal, announced on November 25th – the eve of Thanksgiving Day – marks the start of a busy holiday season in the States and recognises the risks grocery workers continue to face during the coronavirus pandemic.

It applies to ShopRite workers at stores in New Jersey, New York and Connecticut and also includes retroactive hazard pay for hours

worked between July 26th and August 22nd. Describing it as a “powerful victory”, UFCW International President Marc Perrone vowed the union’s work would continue to secure hazard pay for all its members in the grocery sector.

### Clear message

He said: “UFCW grocery workers are sending a clear message to supermarket chains across the United States that this pandemic is far from over, and every CEO must do the right thing by providing the hazard pay that these brave essential workers have earned and deserve as the threat from Covid-19 continues.”

As of November 25th, UFCW confirmed there had been at least 109 Covid-related deaths among grocery workers in the US. And a further 48,000 grocery workers have been infected or exposed to the virus since the pandemic began.

Mandate National Coordinator Brian Forbes told *Shopfloor*: “We send our hearty congratulations, solidarity and best wishes to the UFCW for securing such a marvellous outcome.

“The shocking figure detailing Covid-related deaths suffered by grocery staff in the US is a salutary reminder to us all of the price being paid by workers on the frontline everywhere.”

# Mental health must be central to policy-making

MENTAL health supports must be taken into consideration for every aspect of policy-making. For me, when we talk about mental health and access to timely and affordable support, we are talking about everyone.

Mental health should be like climate action – there should be a cross-party, all-government committee and it should be taken into consideration with every aspect of policy-making.

A motion I co-signed called on Government to ensure that mental health is a central part of its response to the Covid-19 pandemic, along with a number of other measures to ensure that mental health supports are accessible to all.

Right now, if you have €60 or €70 per week spare, you can access private counselling sessions. If you can't pay privately you are on waiting lists. With Covid, you may only have had online access to therapy. What if you don't have a computer, smartphone or safe space to talk to your counsellor?

I asked about access to mental



Thomas Pringle

health supports for people in emergency accommodation or direct provision and pointed to the high suicide rate for members of the Traveller community.

If vulnerable, marginalised or targeted groups say, ‘nothing about us, without us’, we should listen, we should allow them space to tell us what they need and then we should do everything we can to take action.

That will make a difference to people’s mental health – that and the resources for timely and affordable access to supports. Mental health matters for all of us.

Thomas Pringle is Independent TD for Donegal

“If vulnerable, marginalised or targeted groups say, ‘nothing about us, without us’, we should listen... we should do everything we can to act...”

Have you a **Mandate-related story or picture** you'd like to share with us? Email [news@mandate.ie](mailto:news@mandate.ie)

## Why we're always **app** your service!

Mandate has launched our **UNIONLINK** courses on <https://unionlink.org> where you can register online for bitesize course programmes, such as Industrial Relations, Recruitment and Organising, Stress Management courses etc.

In addition to the free training and development courses, we are pleased to launch our new online training platform (Academy on the App Store and Google Play Store), in partnership with Olive Media.

This app will allow members the option to purchase online professional and development

courses such as Interview Skills, Basic First Aid and GDPR, at discounted rates of up to 60%.

The Mandate Training Academy will also host links to Mandate’s **LOOKUP App** and our Mandate Induction video, all presented now on our new online Training Academy.

In time our course offering will grow, allowing you – the member – improved access to a wider range professional course modules.

The cost of purchasing Mandate online courses also qualify for grant support through our Education Grant Scheme every November.



### How to register...

- Click on the registration link here – **REGISTRATION LINK**
- Fill out details leaving the 'Member ID' and 'Team' field blank.
- This should be done from PC/laptop using a Google Chrome web browser (where possible)
- If you already have an existing AcademyHQ account please contact our support team at [support@olivemedia.com](mailto:support@olivemedia.com)
- Following registration above, members can download the 'Academy HQ' app from the Google Play store or App Store if you wish to login from your smartphone. Alternatively use the following link to login on your PC: <https://mandatemembers.academyhq.com/en/auth/login>



### How to purchase training...

- Click on Purchase Course on the bottom left hand of your page
- Here you will see a list of courses and their prices
- Choose your course and click 'Add to Cart'
- Proceed to check-out
- Make payment
- Return to the dashboard tab and you will see your course



# Update on the Occupied Territories Bill

FOLLOWING the disappointment of the exclusion of the Occupied Territories Bill (OTB) in the Programme for Government, the Trade Union Friends of Palestine (TUFPP) has been busy developing new strategies and preparing a series of activities for the coming months.

On 9th December Dáil Éireann voted to restore the Occupied Territories Bill to the Dáil Order Paper. While this is a technical development at this point, it is nonetheless hugely significant as it places the OTB firmly back on the political agenda. There are seven stages in the legislative process down – three to go! The bill was restored by a motion put forward by Donegal independent TD Thomas Pringle.

The Programme for Government sets out commitments on Palestine, in particular pertaining to a move towards a declaration of formal annexation by Israel. It stated that “the Government would regard any such moves [annexation] as a breach of international law and would consider an appropriate response to them at both national and international level”.

Trade unions are well aware that despite the commitment to the contrary by Israel in announcing its UAE



Picture: Peter Mulligan (CC BY 2.0)

and Bahrain ‘deals’, annexation by Israel not only remains on the table but has already taken place in practice.

The existing breaches of international law committed through Israel’s settlement enterprise amount to de facto annexation.

The Ireland-Palestine Alliance, SADAKA, has done a briefing on this which has been circulated to all Oireachtas and MEP members. Check it out at <https://bit.ly/3oWUCNZ>

Together with the other organisations in the campaign group, our immediate political aim is to secure a cross-party commitment of ‘de facto’ annexation thereby paving the way for the Government to take “appropriate measures at both national and international level”.

It should be noted that Minister Coveney said in the Dáil recently: “The proposals around annexation were about permanently extending

Israeli sovereignty to elements of the West Bank.

“Having said that, the expansion of settlements that we have seen in recent years is almost like creeping annexation.”

In doing so, discussions with Oireachtas members have started on a Dáil motion, which we aim to have as a cross-party motion.

Further updates on lobbying actions will be circulated to unions once

they are announced. The dominance of Brexit and Covid-related policy matters has led us to extend our timeframe on this.

Meanwhile, despite the campaign making the opinions of respected legal experts available to them, the Government parties continue to state that their reason for failing to include the OTB in the Programme for Government is the bill’s alleged incompatibility with EU law.

This position is based on the opinion of the former Attorney General Seamus Woulfe and they insist they are bound by it.

However, Prof Takis Tridimas from King’s College, London, is of the opinion that the bill is compatible with EU law. Prof Tridimas is a leading scholar in the field of EU law and one of the most frequently quoted academic authors by advocates general of the European Court of Justice and on matters of EU law by English courts.

The campaign is to organise a briefing by Senator Frances Black with Prof Tridimas. The seminar will be hosted by Senator Black using an ‘in conversation with’ format. SadaKa’s legal officer Gerry Liston will pose questions to Prof Tridimas to draw out the legal argument on both his and the Attorney General’s opinion.

The seminar is aimed at members of the Oireachtas and Irish MEPs. No date has been set for the seminar.



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# What do you do when Christmas is not the most wonderful time of the year?

By Sarah Stack

Communications & Policy Manager, Samaritans Ireland

CHRISTMAS on TV and in the movies is usually shown as the happiest time of the year. A time where families gather together happily, everyone is upbeat and there is an abundance of food, drink and presents.

However, for many people, Christmas can be a very difficult time where feelings of loneliness and depression are heightened against a backdrop of relentless cheer.

There are many reasons why people find Christmas difficult. Issues such as loneliness and isolation, family and relationship problems, financial pressures, depression and illness can become more pronounced as the rest of the world enjoy their Christmas dinner and after-dinner naps. Many of those issues will be compounded with Covid restrictions, especially for the elderly and those who are unable to visit family and friends. One in three calls to Samaritans come from people who say they feel alone or isolated from others.

For those who have lost a loved one or ended a relationship, Christmas can also be a painful reminder – an empty space at the table, one less person to put presents under the tree for, constant memories of someone who is no longer there. It's easy to feel out of sync with the rest of the world if you're not enjoying the holidays and the option to do normal things, like seeing family, socialising with friends, or even going to Christmas Mass, have been taken away.

That isolation can feel greater than ever this year. That's why we believe that it is important to provide a space for people to talk about how they are feeling honestly and what they are going through. The Christmas period is always a busy time for Samaritans. Last year, we received almost 40,000 calls during the month of December. We received more than 1,150 of those calls on Christmas Day alone.

People can talk to Samaritans any time of the day or night, in their own way, about whatever is getting to them. Some people think that you have to be suicidal to talk to Samaritans but that is not the case. In fact, about 80% of the people who call us are not suicidal, but they do have something they need to talk about.

This Christmas, just like every other day of the year, Samaritans volunteers in our 13 branches across the country, will be there for anyone who needs to talk about how they are feeling.

We are there for anyone struggling to cope, whoever they are, however they feel, whatever life has done to them. It doesn't matter what kind of problem our callers have, however big or small it may seem compared to the problems

## Tips for taking care of your mental health

● **Pay attention to what you're feeling** – Our self-help web app (<https://selfhelp.samaritans.org>) can help you track your mood and includes practical tips and techniques to help you look after your emotional health.

● **Connect with people you love** – Although we may be physically isolated from one another, it's more important than ever for us to feel socially connected, so try and reach out to people to talk, and try to be there to listen to others.

● **Talk about your feelings** – Talking about how you're feeling can help put things into perspective and may help you feel more positive about the future. If you don't feel like there's anyone you can talk to, you are never alone. Samaritans volunteers are here for you.

Contact options, go to: <https://bit.ly/2LkfuQP>



other people have. What matters to us is how their life is making them feel. Sharing how you are really feeling without fear of judgment can help you feel less isolated.

When people are in crisis, talking can help them to feel calmer and get through that moment. Through human contact with someone who really listens, people can begin to feel hope. Talking can help people to see their situation in

a different light and find their way forward. If you are finding Christmas tough, why not talk to us and see if we can support you?

Samaritans is available round the clock every single day of the year. You can call freephone 116 123 or email [jo@samaritans.ie](mailto:jo@samaritans.ie).

For more information about Samaritans, or for self-care tips this Christmas, visit [www.samaritans.ie](http://www.samaritans.ie)

● **Keep to a routine** – Planning your day can help you feel grounded if you're feeling uncertain about the future. Try to prioritise eating well, getting plenty of sleep and exercising – wrapping up warm for a short walk outside at lunchtime can be a great place to start.

● **Make time for something you enjoy** – You could try learning a new skill, doing something creative or revisit your favourite books and movies. If you're active online, making time for other activities can help you to take a break from the news cycle or social media.

● **Try a relaxation exercise** – Sometimes something simple like controlled breathing can help us feel calmer. Follow along with the video (see link below) or try the muscle relaxation exercise on our practical things you can do to help yourself cope page. Go to: <https://bit.ly/37L4zan>

## Signs to look out for

- Lacking energy or feeling tired
- Feeling exhausted all the time
- Experiencing 'brain fog', find it hard to think clearly
- Finding it hard to concentrate
- Feeling restless and agitated
- Feeling tearful, wanting to cry all the time
- Not wanting to talk to or be with people
- Not wanting to do things you usually enjoy
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope with feelings
- Finding it hard to cope with everyday things and tasks
- Experiencing 'burn out'

If you don't see what you're feeling on this list, please still get in touch. You might also find our suggestions and tips for ways to help yourself cope useful.

Go to: <https://bit.ly/37L4zan>

And if you do think these symptoms sound like you, or someone you know, please still get in touch on 116 123, at [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org), or in another way that suits you.

If you're worried about someone else, we can help too.

“ Talking can help people to see their situation in a different light and find their way forward. If you're finding Christmas tough, why not talk to us and see if we can support you? ”

SAMARITANS

We're here to listen

Call free day or night on

116 123

Email [jo@samaritans.ie](mailto:jo@samaritans.ie)

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