

CONFERENCE 2020-2022 SPECIAL

Breaffy House Resort,
Castlebar 4/5 April 2022

MANDATE TRADE UNION



MAY 2022

SHOPFLOOR

16 PAGES OF CONFERENCE REPORTS & PICTURES...



**CONFERENCE
SETS COURSE
FOR NEW ERA**

FOCUSED AND READY

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS



Our identity is key

"We are worth fighting for," President Denise Curran said during her address to conference.

She told delegates Mandate must "at all costs" preserve its identity as a union "that strikes for social justice whether at home or internationally".

Curran insisted: "There is no price worth paying for forfeiting our rights as workers to picket, or forfeiting our rights to struggle for social justice and – most importantly – forfeiting the right to be singularly identified as a union of bar and retail workers."

Mandate was known, she pointed out, for "punching above its weight". "This should always remain the case if we are to remain relevant to our existing and potential members."

She claimed struggles such as the anti-Apartheid Dunnes strike and the more recent Right2Water campaign "represented who we are [as a union]," adding, "We must ensure that it remains that way. We are worth fighting for."

Character

The "character and identity" of the union was "never more apparent" than in the actions taken by the former Debenhams workers.

Curran told conference this dispute highlighted the "absolute failing" of the political and industrial relations system.

"If there is to be any consolation for these brave workers, we must ensure that we force through the appropriate legislation that would protect workers from this type of employer behaviour."

She warned that Mandate was at a "crossroads" and action was needed not just to halt the decline in the union but to actually grow its membership.

"This can only be achieved," she suggested, "if we affirm our union identity with a view to actively campaigning to make sure it remains fertile, strong and relevant to not only us as members but importantly to those that need our union."

And she called on each delegate to take on the task of recruiting 15 to 20 new members before the next BDC and underlined the importance of remaining an organising union.

"We are committed to this model of a union – there is no going back," she said.

"If the employers choose to listen, well and good. If they don't, then let's go back to what we can do best."

CONFERENCE MOTIONS

Maximising & sharing union resources

Martin Mahony (NEC), moving **Motion 1**, called for greater levels of cooperation between unions to ensure the "constant slide" in union membership is addressed. He insisted unions had to set "confident objectives" in reversing these trends and in "growing [trade union] density".

Adopting the motion would place Mandate at the "very centre" of such a campaign of renewal, he suggested, and flagged up Mandate's internal strategic review launched last year.

Mahony stressed the need to make the best use of resources and claimed it was the responsibility of every Mandate activist "to effectively organise and recruit new members into the union".

Warning delegates that failure



was not an option, he added: "If the objectives [of this motion] fail, there will be many bleak years ahead of you in the trade union movement and those workers who so badly need the protection they deserve." Motion carried.

Campaigns

Cathy McLaughlin, moving **Motion 2** (NEC), underlined the

CONTINUED PAGE 3





GENERAL SECRETARY ADDRESS



This is why everything is in our power

In his conference address, General Secretary Gerry Light praised the response of retail workers to the Covid pandemic. He said that “from day one” they had “courageously” turned up for work during a time of great uncertainty and had shown a standard of “not only service but public duty” despite low wages and poor working conditions.

Light said it was “fitting” to reaffirm Mandate’s call for the reintroduction of mandatory wearing of face masks in public settings, adding that members “deserved nothing less” after all they had endured over the past two years.

He flagged up in particular the “heavy price” paid by retail and bar workers who had lost their jobs or faced significant cuts in income during that time.

Former Debenhams workers had, he pointed out, stood on the picket lines for

406 days “for what they believed was rightfully theirs” and to ensure that no other worker would “endure the same mistreatment”.

He told conference that the “greatest service” that could be paid to these workers was to ensure that their struggle was not in vain.

Legacy

Vowing to do “everything in our power” to secure a “meaningful and tangible” legacy in their name, Light said Mandate had joined with ICTU to call for legislative changes to ensure better treatment for workers in businesses that go into liquidation.

Calling on the Government to speed up this process of change, Light told delegates that in the “wake” of Clerys, Debenhams and Arcadia, “let there be no more reports left gathering dust on a shelf, no more hollow words of

sympathy and support from our legislators, the time for action is now.”

Light said a “line in the sand” had to be drawn to make sure society no longer undervalues retail workers, and warned that “one-off payments or public holidays won’t cut it.”

What retail workers needed instead was a “meaningful and permanent” improvement to their terms and conditions of employment.

And the best way of achieving this was when employers were prepared to collectively bargain with trade unions and their members.

Pointing out that workers could not depend on the good will of employers “acting decently”, rather it was up to the Government to “step up to the plate” and to bring in laws that give workers and unions the statutory power to collectively bargain “with all employers

– not just the willing few”.

He told conference: “A constitutional right to be a member of a trade union is meaningless unless workers are afforded the opportunity to fully vindicate that right.”

Influence

Though he acknowledged how difficult the last few years had been in retail, Light assured delegates that the union was very much “alive and well”.

“The extent to which we can shape and influence working conditions within the retail sector in the future is only limited by our willingness and commitment to make things happen.”

Now was the time for retail workers “to assert themselves like never before.”

Light told conference: “Together all of us must join in common purpose to strengthen and grow our proud union and create a force to be reckoned with.”

CONFERENCE MOTIONS

FROM PAGE 2

importance of renewing Mandate’s commitment “to fight injustices both at home and abroad”.

That focus should be, she told conference, “an ongoing effort” to fight for change across a range of “vitaly important” issues, including statutory collective bargaining rights as well as

changes to employment and company law to ensure injustices suffered by Arcadia and ex-Debenhams members “are never endured by other workers in future”.

Referring to research being carried on Mandate’s behalf by Conor McCabe, she said: “In order to effectively campaign and win these demands, [we] must be able to properly advocate on behalf of those we

represent and this is why this research is of critical importance.” Motion carried.

Motion updates

Jane Crowe, moving Motion 3 (City Centre LC), called on the incoming NEC to produce an update for all local councils on what actions were taken over motions carried at the last BDC.

Pointing out that local councils

CONTINUED PAGE 4





CONFERENCE MOTIONS

FROM PAGE 3

“put a lot of work” into bringing motions forward, she said: “... two years later we arrive at the next conference [still] not knowing what has happened [to the previous motions].”

Crowe continued: “We’re asking that the NEC every nine to 18 months put forward to all councils what has happened to those motions, so that people are informed about what actually happens.”

Communications

While acknowledging current Mandate’s “strong” communications set-up, **Kevin McColl**, moving **Motion 4** (Letterkenny LC), said he wanted to see the union make more use of social media.

Social media had, he said, a huge potential to act as a “counterweight” to print and broadcast media “where working people’s perspective is usually lacking”.

McColl told delegates: “We can give a human face to the problems and aspirations of working people. Social media can never replace grassroots activism – and it never should – but we must always be our union’s strongest and loudest advocates.”

“We can use our clicks to amplify our union’s voice online and build a stronger union.” Motion carried.

Internal communications

Padraic Gallagher, moving **Motion 5** (Westport LC), emphasised the need for “direct face-to-face engagement” within the union “at all levels” as a means of boosting “real activism” and called for a survey to determine the “most cost efficient and effective [communications] tool or process” to achieve this. Motion carried.

Mandate Youth observer seat on the NEC

Motion 25 (Wicklow LC) called on incoming NEC to lobby the Government and the Department of Education to ensure the “history and role” of trade unions is covered in school curriculums. Formally proposed by **Lorna Dempsey**. Motion carried.

Trade union training release

Samantha Farrell (Monaghan LC) in moving **Motion 26** called on the incoming NEC to lobby ICTU to seek “appropriate paid release” for “union specific training”. “Over the last few years,” she told delegates, “I’ve attended numerous Mandate



training courses and it’s been noted that not all companies will give paid release for training.” Motion carried.

Mandate and student body liaison

Bill Meehan (Leitrim LC), moving **Motion 27**, asked the incoming NEC to develop an action plan that “engages, educates and works with students” to promote the role of trade unions in society. Motion carried.

Activists’ training

Helen O’Keeffe (Tralee LC), moving **Motion 28**, called for mandatory negotiation skills training for all members appointed to National Negotiating Teams. She said: “Management tactics are always evolving and we must move with this evolution as well. You’ve heard the old phrase ‘Kicking the can down the road’.

“The multinationals know where they want the can to stop! They will have put things in motion long before they sit down at the negotiating table, so we have to be aware and recognise what’s going on.”

She continued: “We want to have the best qualified teams

CONTINUED PAGE 5



AGS ADDRESS



Pursue nothing but the best for members



In his speech to conference, Assistant General Secretary Jonathan Hogan reminded Tánaiste Leo Varadkar about comments he made in 2021 recognising retail staff as “frontline essential workers”.

And he challenged the Government to honour the “spirit” of those comments by introducing a “new minimum starter rate” for “all low paid essential retail workers”.

Insisting that Mandate members deserved better, Hogan told delegates: “Not one person in retail serving on the frontline – recognised by the Tánaiste as an essential worker – should be paid the minimum wage.”

He said Mandate must be the “foundation stone” of pursuing “nothing but the best” for workers and called for the demand for legislative change on collective bargaining “to be driven by workers and led by workers”.

Hogan noted this was not just Mandate’s fight alone and underlined the need for the whole Irish trade union movement to mobilise around this issue.

“The effective implementation of any future robust collective bargaining legislation must be seen as paramount to the future proofing of the Irish trade union movement,” he said.

Hogan said he was proud of the activists who had taken part in training despite the many practical difficulties presented by the Covid-19 pandemic.

He told conference: “Mandate was one of the first

unions to offer training on conferencing and learning platforms, which wasn’t ideal. We made mistakes, but nevertheless despite the drawbacks, we tried in so far as possible to maintain activists’ learning supports during the height of the pandemic.”

Hogan emphasised that “learning must happen all the time” and that the union must be able to “adapt and change” to meet the needs of members – flagging up in particular the increasing demand for short courses.

He said that commissioned research must also support and inform future training and learning content for activists and play a role in shaping campaign strategies.

Advocacy

“My own vision,” Hogan told delegates, “is for Mandate to become an advocacy for change for our members across the sectors we represent.”

Mandate, however, must also be the “vanguard for change” in economic policy, he said.

“Positive changes to the working environment must be complemented by fair economic policies that support low paid workers,” he continued, adding: “The rise in working poverty, the indecency of not having equal access to education and opportunity, the deficiency of climate action and not having access to a proper working health system are some of the issues that Mandate members must confront.”

CONFERENCE MOTIONS

FROM PAGE 4

armed with the best tools to do the job. We call for the putting together of an up-to-date package of negotiating techniques and that any member who wants to be on a negotiating team has to have done this course. Good intentions don’t always bring good results.” Motion carried.

Women’s rights

Padraic Gallagher (Westport
 May 2022 | SHOPFLOOR

LC), moving **Motion 20**, recognising that Mandate’s membership is predominantly female, called on the incoming NEC to ensure the union’s industrial relations strategy “embraced and worked towards” securing “gender-proofed” agreements that took into account a range of women-specific issues. Motion carried.

Mandate Youth observer status on NEC

Motion 6 (Leitrim LC) called for a representative with “observer



status” to be elected by Mandate Youth to serve on the NEC.

Insolvencies and changes to employment & company law

Motion 7 (NEC), moved by **Graham Fox**, flagged up the “legislative shortfalls” in company and employment law dealing with insolvencies and highlighted the “trauma and suffering” experienced by workers as a result. The movers of the motion called on the incoming NEC to ensure securing changes to the current

legislation is given a priority.

Fox pointed out that long before the arrival of Covid, there were “plenty of examples” – La Senza, Vita Cortex, and Clerys – of workers being badly treated in insolvencies.

On the Government-commissioned Cahill-Duffy report, published in the wake of public outrage over Clerys workers, he said: “Not for the first time in prioritising the

CONTINUED PAGE 6

CONFERENCE MOTIONS

FROM PAGE 5

needs of workers successive governments have placed this report on a very high shelf which attracted no more than considerable levels of dust.” Motion carried.

Union democracy

Motion 8 (Artane/Finglas/Santry LC) underlined the importance of communicating the important role played by local councils to the general membership of the union.

Decent Work Charter

Noting the “prevalence” of low pay and precarious work within the retail sector, NEC’s **Motion 9** endorsed Mandate’s *Charter for Decent Work* in setting out “basic decency thresholds” on workers’ rights and called for the charter to be made the “bedrock” of the union’s industrial policy.

Moving the motion, **Joan Gaffney** said she had originally written it two years ago [for the 2020 conference] but that it was now “more relevant than ever” to members and other workers “who aspire to be treated with fairness and dignity.”

She claimed the principal objective of the conference was to “reset the narrative surrounding the value of retail workers” and slammed the “corrosive influence” on employment rights of decades of non-union employment.

The *Charter for Decent Work* objectives had allowed a light to be shone on what is possible – with retail workers “not acting as desperate individuals but through effective collectivism”.

She added: “We must never apologise for setting the standards high and the experience of the last two years must give us the confidence to fight for a just reward we truly deserve.”

Christmas/St Stephen’s Day and Easter Sunday

Deirdre Caldwell, moved **Motion 10** (Limerick LC) which called on the incoming NEC to campaign to have Christmas Day, St Stephen’s Day and Easter Sunday designated as non-trading days in retail. She told delegates: “Retail workers have such busy lives with flexible working hours between Monday and Sunday with very limited family time. We have proven our worth throughout the Covid pandemic.”

Graham Fox (NEC), in support, pointed out that family life had been “eroded from us” with Sunday now seen as a “core day”. He said: “Your Easter Sundays, your Christmas days, your St Stephen’s days – they



want them to be core days. It’s time to stand up and say we want this time for us and for our families. We deserve it, we went through everything [in the pandemic], they didn’t.

“Remember going through the checkpoints asking us where we were going? Everybody else was at home. We deserve this!” Motion carried.

Tip theft

Jane Crowe, moving **Motion 13** (City Centre LC), called on the incoming NEC to survey Mandate members in the bar trade to quantify the prevalence of tip theft within the trade.

She described tip theft as a “long standing injustice” which had “deprived and cheated” the lowest paid workers of their

hard-earned tips. Praising Unite’s “amazing” campaign on the issue, she called for a similar drive to be organised by Mandate if the survey reveals its widespread practice. Motion carried.

Abolishing and replacing 1990 Industrial Relations Act
Jane Crowe (City Centre LC),

moving **Comprehensive Motion 1**, called for the abolition and replacement of the 1990 [Industrial Relations] Act.

Describing the Act’s restrictive legislation as “outrageous,” she said: “It prevents solidarity with trade union activists from other companies to come out and

CONTINUED PAGE 7



Become the voice of the shop floor

National Co-ordinator Lorraine O'Brien told conference Mandate was going through "the most difficult chapter" in its history and facing a range of "very real and very many challenges".

Covid-19 had, as one consequence, accelerated the shift to online shopping "with lasting effects on bricks and mortar retail". This change in customer spending trends meant that the union now found itself "under a cloud of uncertainty".

She pointed out, however, that Mandate was "uniquely placed" to react to this because of its leading role in representing retail workers, but cautioned that if the union wanted to remain "the union of choice" for those workers, it needed to survive, "and to survive we must grow our membership".

Immediate action was needed "to work together to rebuild the union" and she called for organising and recruitment to "go hand in hand," insisting that "one cannot be exclusive of the other".

O'Brien told delegates: "Organising workers remains our objective. However, going forward every organising initiative must now be underpinned by the absolute necessity to recruit new members."

And recruiting new members was, she suggested, "everybody's job" and "every interaction" with retail workers should

become an opportunity to recruit and organise. "On every occasion that you talk with your colleagues you should promote the union and invite those colleagues to join Mandate," she said.

O'Brien noted the union was currently involved in a "comprehensive set of negotiations" with Tesco management and encouraged activists to grow Mandate's membership across its network of stores.

Broaden

"Think about what could be accomplished," she said, "The future pay and reward for Tesco workers is within their own gift if they are willing to join their union and work with us to achieve it."

The union was also looking to "broaden and deepen" its membership in Dunnes following the "huge win" of the consolidation of the 10% Covid premium into core pay. "Our membership numbers in Dunnes must increase if we are to be successful," she said.

Calling on delegates to "become the voice of Mandate on the shop floor," she urged them to "speak proudly of your union, ask non-union members to join, increase union density in your store to influence the agenda, [and] bring your union back into the workplace."



NATIONAL CO-ORDINATOR

CONFERENCE MOTIONS

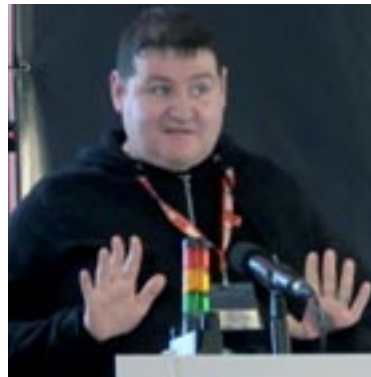
FROM PAGE 6

support those on strike. This is a loss of power for people, the workers and the trade union movement.

"The 1990 Act allows them to squash any uprising of workers and unions by getting injunctions against the strikers or bringing them to court."

Citing Debenhams as a "prime example," she pointed to the injunction brought by liquidator KPMG against the strikers, allowing them to be "forcibly removed from their peaceful, legal, constitutionally-allowed pickets" and brought to court.

May 2022 | SHOPFLOOR



"Look at what happened to Clery's – the Government said it would never happen again – well, it did with Debenhams because the Government didn't implement the Cahill-Duffy report. It was left there gathering dust on a shelf.

"There is now a new bill being put forward – nicknamed the Debenhams Bill – and it will enable workers to be looked after better. Employers see clearly that Debenhams are getting away with it without any dialogue with employees or unions. We need better tools for unions to fight with, so replace the 1990 Act now."

Patrick Killeen (NEC), in support, said the NEC motion specifically called for a campaign to repeal existing clauses in current industrial relations legislation. "I think this is important," he said, "if we can't have the Industrial Relations Act repealed in its entirety. We can make a start by having some of

the most offensive and restrictive parts removed."

Noel Dunphy, also in support, insisted to delegates that the only way you "get things fixed in this state" is if you "make it a scandal".

He told delegates: "23% of people in employment are working below the poverty line – that's why we need a change of legislation.

"Article 45, Section 2 says that the State shall endeavour to ensure that private enterprise 'shall be so conducted as to ensure reasonable efficiency in production and distribution of goods as to protect the public

CONTINUED PAGE 8



CONFERENCE MOTIONS

FROM PAGE 7

against unjust exploitation.”

Describing that reading of the legislation as “a foot in the door,” he continued: “The only way to change this country is to scandalise the people that are breaking the law, don’t care and don’t give a damn about us – because at the end of it that 23% will become 25%, will become 30%...”

Motion carried.

Industrial relations

Noting that Mandate members experience a “multitude” of “potentially divisive” varying pay scales and T&Cs both within and across retail employments, **Brian Feeney** (Sligo LC), moving **Motion 15**, called for the union’s future IR strategy to have “at its core” the equalisation of pay and terms and conditions. Motion carried.

Respect retail workers - robust legislation needed

Regina French (Galway LC), moving **Motion 16**, called on the incoming NEC to work with unions, political parties and individuals in initiating a campaign to bring forward legislation that would help eliminate all types of bullying in organisations and workplaces with stiffer penalties for perpetrators and organisations they work for by means of vicarious liability. Motion carried.

Communities against low pay

Eoghan Fox (Galway LC), moving **Motion 17**, while admitting the 1990 Industrial Relations Act had restricted the union’s capacity to mount effective industrial action, he praised the solidarity shown by groups and political organisations in helping strikers on the picket line in Galway.

He said that such displays of solidarity had helped form the ‘Communities Against Low Pay’ group and urged delegates to return to their local councils and build similar networks in their own regions.

Fox added: “We don’t know when the next big fight is coming but we need to be prepared.” Motion carried.

Family friendly policies

Motion 19 (Letterkenny LC) called for Mandate to conduct a survey of members to explore the feasibility of pursuing paid release to look after a sick child or loved one in any future industrial relations strategy. Motion carried.



The Living Wage

Martina O’Farrell (Navan LC), moving **Motion 21**, called on the NEC “to apply pressure in all ways it deems appropriate” to increase the minimum wage to become a living wage of at least 60% of the median wage. Motion carried.

Mental health provision

Yvonne Sheehan (Newbridge Kildare LC), moved **Comprehensive Motion 2**, on the issue of inadequate mental health provision for both adults and children. She described Ireland’s suicide rate – fourth highest in Europe for males aged 15-24 – as “alarmingly high”.

“These figures would be different,” she told conference, “if Ireland had a government that cared enough to put in place the facilities that are required.”

Sheehan called on the incoming NEC to call on the Health Minister to conduct a “root and branch assessment” of current provision and put in place “proper services and facilities as a matter of urgency”.

Brendan Gibbons (Ballina LC), in support, said there was a clear lack of public resources and called on the NEC to increase membership awareness of suicide using whatever methods or resources possible. Motion carried.

Autism

Keith Pollard (Division Organiser), speaking in favour of **Motion 24** (Ballina LC) on

CONTINUED PAGE 9



CONFERENCE MOTIONS FROM PAGE 8

autism, commended the local council on what he told delegates was a “pertinent and important motion”.

He said: “As a father of four girls we recently found out that my youngest daughter had been diagnosed with autism. To say that the last number of months have been difficult is an understatement – trying to get your head around what she faces.

“But the services that are [supposed to be] available are simply not there. We went through the HSC and my wife

was eventually informed that our daughter would be on the waiting list to be assessed and that could be in about four years time.

“We went private and got her assessed and got her diagnosed early and we are now in the fight of our lives to get Grace the assistance that she needs.”

Pointing out that being a trade unionist was “great training,” he told conference: “I know how to campaign, I know how to fight and it’s one fight that I swear to Jesus that I’ll do it!

“I am asking on behalf of all the parents of children with autism for the support of this great union in our fight to get the necessary educational and



domiciliary supports for Grace and for all children with autism – that we give them every chance, and the chance and the support that they need.” Motion carried.

Working beyond retirement age

Moving **Motion 29, Carol McNamara** (Limerick LC), called on the incoming NEC to lobby government to make it legally compulsory for employees to be offered an extension to their employment beyond the age of 65 and on existing terms and conditions.

She said: “I work in Penneys and when I reach 65 I will have given 48 years loyal service. My

contract states that I must retire. I will no longer be of any use to this company and I’ll be sent off to sit on the proverbial shelf or I can apply to have an extension to my employment by one year. This decision will be at the discretion of the company. I would like the choice to be mine.”

McNamara continued: “At the age of 65 one is older, not old; wiser not wizened; an asset, not a liability. Compelling workers to retire at 65 is a waste of talent and experience to the economy. Age does not define us.” Motion carried.

Stop 67 Campaign Motion 30 (City Centre LC)

CONTINUED PAGE 8

CONFERENCE MOTIONS

FROM PAGE 9

commended SIPTU's "exceptional" Stop 67 initiative over the Government's plan to raise the State Pension Age to 67 in 2021, and called on the incoming NEC to fully back the campaign and promote it among the union's membership.

Free travel pass extension

Regina French (Galway LC), moving **Motion 31**, called on the incoming NEC to campaign and lobby for the Free Travel Pass to those people already entitled to access the long-term illness scheme "as a support to these workers to remain in the labour market". Motion carried.

Report on setting up homelessness fund

Moving **Motion 32** (Galway LC), **Kerry Anne Cooke** claimed many Mandate members had been affected by the rise in homelessness in Ireland and called on the incoming NEC to commission a report on the setting up of a fund that could be used by members who find themselves in such circumstances.

She continued: "The report [will] consider whether this is funded from existing union subscriptions and/or a voluntary additional levy; the criteria to avail of the fund; and the necessary rule changes required should such a fund be established." Motion carried.

Mandatory pension scheme

Motion 33 (Tullamore LC) noted "with concern" the Government plan to bring in a mandatory private pension scheme for all employees, increasing pension contributions to 6% of earnings, which would, the movers claimed, be "an effective pay cut for low paid workers". Under the proposals, employers would contribute a further 6%.

Pointing out that Irish employers currently pay the second lowest social insurance contributions in Europe, Tullamore LC called on the incoming NEC to team up with "political parties, independent TDs and civil society groups" to start a campaign to have the full 12% of contributions paid by employers.

Taxation

Calista Reilly (North and West Division) moved **Motion 35** (Sligo LC). The motion recognised that successive governments had implemented policies that unfairly impacted on the lesser well off and called on the NEC to "do what it can" to highlight union policy on



FORMER GEN SEC

The bravest union

"When we formed Mandate in 1994, we formed something very special," former General Secretary John Douglas told delegates after he was called to the podium to accept a framed portrait of James Connolly.

"It's been the most left-wing, radical, bravest union in Ireland – and I say that without fear of contradiction. This union is something different and it's been a voice for workers not just in Ireland, but in Palestine and Colombia, and now the Ukraine."

Douglas admitted to conference that he "didn't have a clue" when he first started out and that most of his knowledge of trade unionism came from "being trained by workers sitting in canteens."

"I owe them an awful lot," he added.

"It isn't easy to take on your employer," Douglas continued. "It's not easy to take on huge multinationals. It's not easy to take on



the Government, but I've met extremely great people down through the years who had everything to lose and nothing to lose and were prepared to stand on picket lines for weeks on end."

He told conference: "You are essential workers. Whenever the pandemic is over, we're not going to go back and allow the employers to treat us as a disposable commodity."



"current taxation regimes" and "where possible" campaign on this issue. Motion carried.

The Far Right

The rise of the far-right in workplaces and communities across Ireland was noted in **Motion 36** (Athlone LC). The motion, which was carried, called on the NEC to work with other like-minded organisations and groups to curb the far-right "which should have no part in Irish society".

North West investment

Slamming the lack of government investment in the

North West, **Colette Conaghan**, moving **Motion 38** (Letterkenny LC), told delegates that this funding deficit needed to be "strategically addressed".

She said: "Look at the transport infrastructure deficit – years of broken promises and of neglect have combined to leave the North West isolated from the rest of the country."

"Laws have been enacted overnight to bail out the banks; money can be magically produced to repay a debt that we didn't cause; tax breaks and zero

CONTINUED PAGE 11

CONGRESS SPEAKER



No apologies for putting workers' wages centre stage

"I think you always knew you were essential workers and played a role that deserved to be respected. Now everybody knows and there's no doubt retail workers are frontline essential workers."

Assistant General Secretary Owen Reidy made the comments to Mandate delegates gathered for the union's 2020-2022 conference in Castlebar.

He told them unions were "all about collective action, working together, solidarity, trust, respect and a common cause," and expressed a personal preference for "face to face" engagement in transacting union business after a period of remote working during the pandemic.

He pointed to the "great sacrifices" made by retail workers during that pandemic as well as the significant move to online shopping at that time, insisting it was "essential" that activists in retail – as "union leaders" – were placed "centre stage" in any discussions on the future of the sector.

"High streets are workplaces and the concept and practice of fair work and decent work for all needs to be central," Reidy said.

Welcoming the conference theme – Essential Work, Decent Wages – he said it was crucial that low and middle-income workers were protected during "this cost-of-living crisis".

He told delegates: "I think we should make no apologies in seeking to ensure

we protect and improve workers' living standards."

And Reidy said he fundamentally disagreed with those economists who call for wage restraint during a time of inflation. "They came out from under the rocks at the last economic crisis," he noted, "and we're hearing [from] them again."

Flagging up the differences between past recessions and the current one, Reidy pointedly emphasised the key role played by trade unions at such a time.

Crisis

"What are workers to do if the Government either fails to protect people in a cost-of-living crisis or decides it won't protect people [in a crisis] that is largely caused by macro economic shocks?" he asked. Therefore, unions make "no apologies" for putting workers' wages "centre stage".

He said: "We all know collective bargaining, active unions, campaigning unions and demanding decent pay at the bargaining table is the best way to protect living standards and to make sure work pays." In the aftermath of Debenhams and P&O Ferries, "stronger, better, more robust legislation" was needed to protect workers.

"The message needs to be to our politicians not only must work pay, but work must be fair," he added.

CONFERENCE MOTIONS

FROM PAGE 10

tax take can be ushered in for multinationals."

Conaghan continued: "Ireland's natural resources are gifted to corporations and we ask nothing in return, yet families in Donegal have to move their families from their homes because of mica – sure, it's not Dublin, so leave them to struggle on their own and be made borderline homeless."

Motion 38 called on the incoming NEC to instruct Letterkenny and Sligo Local Councils to "to design and launch" a campaign "involving

appropriate political, community, fraternal and associated trade union councils" to highlight Mandate's consistent policy position on the issue.

Another speaker, in support, claimed home owners impacted by the mica scandal had been "put through the wringer by the government".

"Banks, insurance companies and even those made the defective blocks are off the hook and – as always – it's the people who are hit," he said.

"The reason it's the Government's problem is because there used to be a regulatory body that checked the blocks and it was done away with. Self-regulation never



works so the Government has to take responsibility for this. Donegal deserves better, we all deserve better." Motion carried.

Insurance costs

Liam Kelly, moving **Motion 39** (Letterkenny LC), welcomed Sinn Fein's campaign against the "exploitative money making practices" of the insurance industry in Ireland and called on the incoming NEC to write to SF TD Pearse Doherty to offer its backing to the initiative.

Dawn McLaughlin (Letterkenny LC), in support, said: "I'm 35 with 10 years driving experience and car insurance costs me €1,500, fire and theft only. More needs to be

CONTINUED PAGE 12



CONFERENCE MOTIONS

FROM PAGE 11

done to support this campaign. As someone from [a part of] rural Ireland with little or no public transport available, personal vehicles are crucial to daily life." Motion carried.

Tenancy and rents

Padraic Gallagher moving **Motion 40** (Castlebar LC) noting the continuing crisis in homelessness claimed that "certain political parties" had a "clear opposition" to legislating against "ongoing malpractices of landlords". The movers of the motion called on the incoming NEC to offer continued support to those seeking to address the "unfair imbalances" that "disadvantage tenants". Motion carried.

Raise the Roof campaign

"Nearly not enough is being done to improve homelessness," stated **Bill Meehan** as he read out **Motion 41** (Leitrim LC), which called for continuing and "stepped up" support for the Raise the Roof campaign. He told delegates: "The lack of action [on this issue] by our legislators is deplorable." Samantha from Monaghan said: "It is really important that we all get together and do something productive to help combat homelessness in this country." Motion carried.

Migrant workers

Linda Flanagan, moving **Motion 42** (Drogheda LC), called on the NEC to engage with relevant bodies to raise awareness of the exploitation of migrants and to work with them on legal loopholes that allows this to happen. Motion carried.

Increase workers' share of national income

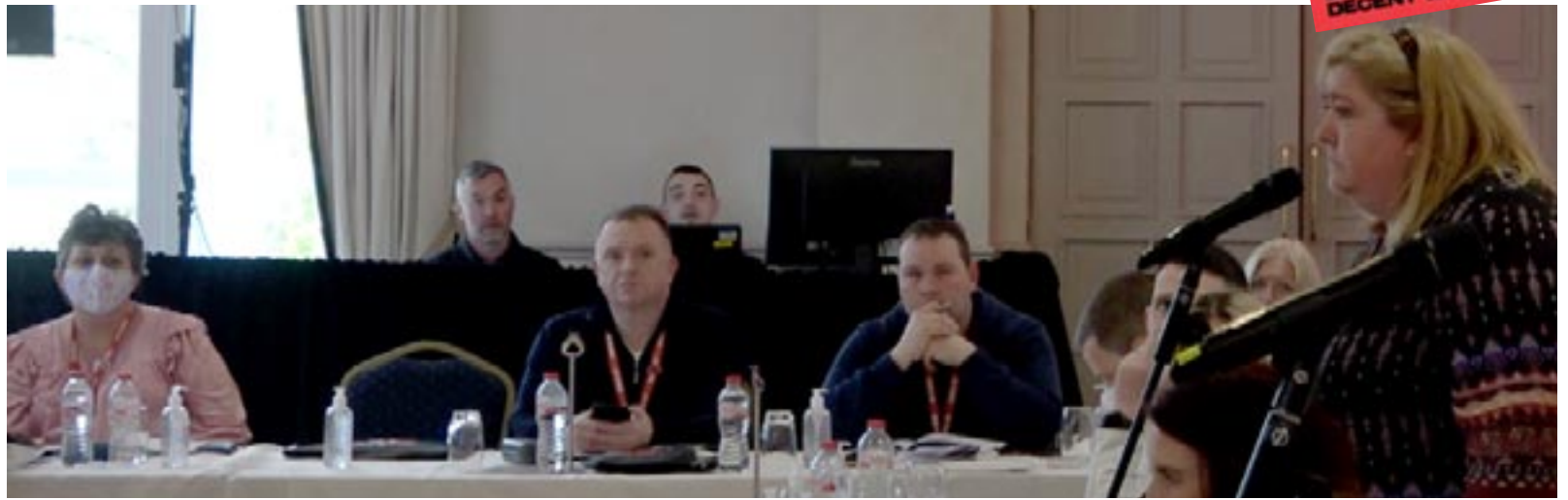
Damian Johnston, moving **Motion 43** (Dundalk LC), called for a campaign to increase the share of national income allocated to workers. Motion carried.

Anti-war and peace movements

Motion 44 (Athlone LC) called on the incoming NEC to "strongly counter" the erosion of Ireland's historic stance of neutrality in world affairs. Motion carried.

Climate change

Helen Gavan (Longford LC), moving **Motion 45**, said retailers had to take a "more proactive approach" to the environmental impact of the goods sold in their outlets. She called on the incoming NEC to meet with IBEC and other bodies



to discuss how retailers could play a more "responsible role" in cleaning up the environment. Motion carried.

Ukraine

Emergency Motion 1 (South Dublin & Wicklow LC) sent out a message of solidarity from the conference to Ukraine as well as

a strong condemnation of the Russian invasion of its borders. **Noel Dunphy**, who moved the motion, said: "We stand behind the right of all peoples to live and prosper without oppression. In a building 100m away we have people with their children and relatives far away from their own country. Back home,

windows are broken, bodies [are] on the streets, buildings toppled which will take time and millions and billions to rebuild."

He continued: "As regards the oppressor, bullying under any description is wrong and can never be accepted."

General Secretary **Gerry Light** informed delegates that the

situation in Ukraine had been brought "close to home two Mondays ago" when the union was informed that hotel arrangements for the conference had to be changed at short notice to make way to accommodate refugees.

"We clicked into gear," he said. "We knew what [was] the right thing to do. I hope the [Ukrainian] flag on the stage here today displays what we all feel. Our hearts and minds are with those people."

And he added: "Thanks, members, for the real spirit of genuine solidarity that you have shown in support of Ukrainian refugees." Motion carried.

Emergency Motion 2

General Secretary **Gerry Light**, speaking on **Emergency Motion 2** which was ruled out of order by the Standing Orders Committee, gave a commitment to its movers that it would be brought before the incoming NEC "to see if we can advance the principles and objectives of what is being attempted here."





RESEARCH PRESENTATION

Social wage can square the circle

In his presentation to conference, UCD researcher Dr Conor McCabe gave delegates a snapshot of the current situation facing the retail sector and its workforce in Ireland.

Drawing on data sets, Dr McCabe – who is currently doing research for Mandate to be published later this year – was able to tease out “crazy” figures on working hours between 2008 and 2021.

Pointing to a wildly-oscillating chart for that period, he said: “What this tells me is that there is a huge issue in terms of stable hours in retail. What this looks like is that retail workers have wildly unstable hours.”

And he asked: “How do you plan childcare? How do you plan schooling? How do you apply for a mortgage? What I see here is social instability and it’s a structural issue in terms of hours.”

Dr McCabe pointed out that though job vacancies in the sector were on the rise, those people when employed were working fewer hours.

He also flagged up the differing ways of defining what constitutes poverty in Ireland. The CSO, for example, measured it as being 60% of the average wage – €282 a week. The Living Wage group, on the other hand, looked at outgoings and what people needed to survive.

“What they [the Living Wage group] say is just to get through the week and not fall into poverty you would need a weekly wage of €520 in Dublin down to €384 in rural areas.

“Across the state, that’s an average of €503 or €12.90 an hour based on a 39-hour week,” he said, describing the figure as a “benchmark” in defining poverty.

Using the average hours worked each week by a retail worker – 29 hours – he calculated that the average retail worker would have to earn €17.24 an hour to reach that benchmark.

Dr McCabe cautioned: “I don’t know how many [retail] employers could make that jump, so we have a brick wall here. It’s a bottleneck – something needs to be done about hours before you get to [that] base rate.”

He suggested that one way of “squaring this circle” was to look at “the social wage” – specifically state services.

Brick walls

“If the trade union movement focuses purely on wages and hours it’s going to be hard to get your members through the week because there are actual brick walls here,” he continued.

“It’s not just about the hourly rate it’s about how many hours you work. Wages can’t make up that difference. Wages will only get you so far. What you need are state services, a properly functioning housing market, properly functioning childcare.”

On the problems faced by trade unions caused by the 1990 Industrial Relations Act, he told delegates: “The law is words – you get 81 plus people in the Dáil to change those words and the law is changed, so you can legislate and change those things.”



MANDATE CONFERENCE 2020-2022

Full text of motions, go to:
<https://mandate.ie/2022/05/bdc22/>



