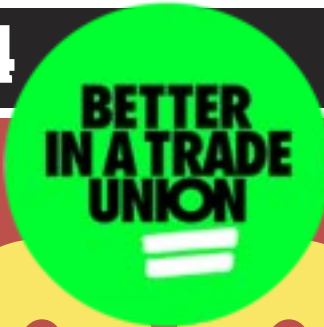


BIENNIAL DELEGATE CONFERENCE 2024

Gleneagles INEC arena
Killarney 22/23 April 2024



MANDATE TRADE UNION

MAY 2024

SHOPFLOOR

16 PAGES OF CONFERENCE REPORTS & PICTURES... Starts page 4



EMPOWERING WORKERS FOR 30 YEARS 1994-2024

Respect at Work campaign launched

A MAJOR new trade union campaign, launched in April, is pressing the case for collective bargaining rights in Ireland.

The 'Respect at Work' campaign is a joint initiative of Mandate, the Communications Workers' Union (CWU), the Financial Services Union (FSU) and SIPTU.

The campaign is demanding legal protections to prevent union busting, including the victimisation of trade union activists, along with enhanced rights for workers who wish to be represented by a trade union.

Ireland is an outlier in this regard, it is one of the few countries in the developed world where workers have no right to collective bargaining on pay and conditions of employment.

According to the campaign, this must be addressed as part of the new EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages.

Mandate Interim General Secretary Jonathan Hogan told *Shopfloor*: "Studies show that young workers view trade unions as 'essential' for navigating tricky workplace situations, guaranteeing people fair treatment and gaining real respect at work."

"Research from UCD shows that 67% of people aged between 16 and 24 years are positively disposed to trade unions. This underscores a significant and growing positive shift in attitudes towards trade unions in Ireland. This is a welcome breakthrough that offers real hope for the future."

Mandate Assistant General Secretary Lorraine O'Brien spoke on the "once-in-a-generation opportunity" that the EU Directive represents for workers in Ireland at the union's recent BDC in Killarney.

She told delegates it was the "most important pro-worker and potentially pro-union employment legisla-



Interim AGS Lorraine O'Brien for many years". (See page 7)

The Irish Second-Level Students' Union (ISSU) has also thrown its support behind the campaign.

ISSU national Student Voice organiser Maevé Richardson, who was a guest speaker at Mandate's BDC in Killarney, said: "Recent University College Dublin research showed that 67% of people aged between 16 and 24 years are positively disposed to trade unions."

"This underscores a significant and growing positive shift in attitudes towards trade unions in Ireland. This is a welcome breakthrough that offers real hope for the future."



Nadine Toye and Bel Nabulele from the ISSU at the early April launch of the Respect at Work campaign Picture: RollingNews.ie



Why Mandate members should get involved...

RESPECT AT WORK is a civil society campaign to improve workers' rights in Ireland. The organisers of the initiative say they are tired of big business setting the rules that the rest of society have to follow – and insist it's now time to demand better.

The campaign has six big asks, they are:

- Ban union-busting once and for all.
- Protect union members so that they cannot be victimised, discriminated against or dismissed for their union activity.
- Provide the right to join a union for workers that positively encourages union membership and protects them from victimisation.

- Introduce legally protected facilities for union representatives so that they have the means to discharge their functions for their members.

- Provide the right of workers to access trade unions so they can know their rights, talk and ask questions of their relevant trade union in their workplace.

- Public funding should promote collective bargaining, as per the EU Directive. Include collective bargaining as a positive attribute in all public tendering processes.

Sign Up (scan the QR code to the right) to the campaign for more info on these asks...



Industrial Officer Caroline Clifford & NEC member Carol McNamara with Sinn Féin Senator Paul Gavan



Mandate Industrial Officers Organisers Greg Caffrey (left) and Ken Reilly with Brid Smith TD



Mandate's Ken Reilly with Labour Party leader Ivana Bacik



LOBBYING

Getting our message out...

Mandate has also lobbied the following political representatives:

- Nessa Hourigan (Green Party)
- Paul Murphy (PBP)
- Duncan Smith (Labour)
- Minister Darragh O'Brien (Fianna Fail)
- Thomas Pringle (Donegal indep)
- Pdraig Mac Lachlain (Sinn Féin)
- Pearse Doherty (Sinn Féin)

FUNDRAISERS



DOUGLAS



CASTLEBAR



Letterkenny (above) and Douglas quizzers (below) answer some tricky questions...



LETTERKENNY



Charity table quizzes

Mandate staged successful table quizzes in Douglas, Cork; Castlebar; and in Letterkenny in early May to fundraise for a number of worthy causes. The Douglas and Castlebar events were supporting local Meals on Wheels initiatives, while funds were raised at the Letterkenny event to support a Mandate member who is battling Motor Neurone Disease.



MAY DAY

Use your voting power on June 7

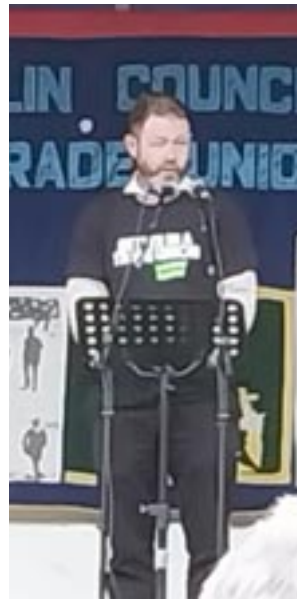
DUBLIN North Industrial Officer Organiser Ken Reilly quoted Jim Larkin – *Those who seek to divide the workers have resorted to the foulest methods* – as he spoke from the platform at the May Day rally in Dublin.

He said it remains a “great shame” that in 2024 there are no laws in place in Ireland to compel employers to “engage or recognise the union of choice of their workers”.

Pointing out that it was IBEC’s view that there was “little or no legislative change” needed to transpose the EU Adequate Minimum Wages Directive into Irish law, he suggested that if the employers’ organisation or the Government really believed this then a strong transposition covering all six

‘asks’ contained in the Respect at Work campaign would be “under-utilised” and “sit on a shelf collecting dust” and “contain absolutely nothing for them and their stakeholders to fear”.

Reminding the crowd of the upcoming Local and European elections on June 7th, he said: “You should be asking politicians when they knock on your door for their position on the EU Directive. Inform them this will have an impact on the way you vote. It doesn’t matter what party they represent, let them know that worker security, and worker prosperity, economic and social advancement are key factors for you, your family and your comrades.”



Ken Reilly (above) speaks from the podium on May Day. Mandate flags on display at the march through Dublin earlier that day

USE YOUR VOTE OR OTHERS WILL DECIDE FOR YOU

Mandate Trade Union members and activists are invited to attend the Trade Union hustings for the upcoming EU elections. Events will be held in Cork, Galway and Dublin. Scan the QR code for further details...

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS
7 JUNE 2024

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

'You are the only constitutive body that matters'

Denise Curran, in her final speech as Mandate president, told conference that the union had succeeded in "facing into, up to, and down many challenges" over the years, inspired by the likes of Michael O'Lehane, Patrick Moran, and Cissy Cahalan.

"More often than not, these greats of our movement and fore-founders of our organisation were criticised for their radical thoughts, opinions and approaches to defending and promoting the Irish working class.

"Their fearlessness in the face of incredible adversity serves as a testament to all about how we should manage their legacy in all our future work. Their pedigree in the struggle for a better Ireland shaped by and for the working class has been our pedigree – and I sincerely hope will continue to be."

She reminded delegates that the membership of the union was the "only constituting body that mat-

ters" and that this was clearly set out in Sections 2 and 3 of the union rulebook.

Curran also pointed to the loss of staff at the union over the last five years along with the accompanying loss of "invaluable experience and expertise" it represented.

Delivering

"Countering these staff deficits has been cumbersome and time consuming," she admitted but added, "...hopefully we are now starting to operate on full staff complement levels thus delivering for the wider membership."

Insisting that Mandate needed "clear, strong and confident leadership", she said: "Like every member who pays their dues, we must forge their legacy for our future success.

"We must dare to listen, dare to be criticised and understand the reasons for that. Dare to be confident and, above all, brave."



CONFERENCE MOTIONS

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Joan Gaffney, on behalf of the NEC, moved **Motion 1** on the proposed EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages. She informed conference that the countries – such as Ireland – with lower than 80% collective bargaining coverage had to present an action plan to the European Commission before November 2024 as part of the transposition process. Quoting from the Directive, she listed a number of its positive aspects.

Gaffney told conference that the best way of achieving the Directive's aims and objectives was through "wide-ranging improvements to the industrial relations legislation which empowers workers and their trade unions".

She called on the incoming NEC to continue "its



collaborative work with like-minded union and stakeholders" to campaign on a number of issues, including: a statutory framework for union recognition; access for trade unions within the workplace; penalties for union-busting activities; reform of the 1990

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INTERIM GEN SEC ADDRESS

Our proud tradition of empowering workers

In his address to the BDC, Interim General Secretary **Jonathan Hogan** spoke of a series of important anniversaries for the union – it was 40 years since the historic anti-Apartheid Dunnes strike; 30 years since the foundation of Mandate with the amalgamation of IDATU and INUVGATA; 20 years since the success of the smoke-free work zone campaign; and 10 years since the Right2Water campaign.

He also paid tribute to the Debenhams workers for their “courageous efforts” during the strike while acknowledging that Mandate’s work was continuing to “change and improve company and employment law” that was at the crux of the dispute.

Hogan told delegates that the union would build on its “proud tradition” of “empowering workers” and meeting new challenges, one of which was to confront racist and far-right ideologies.

“This island must be all-inclusive, diverse and a cultural advocate for an

independence and tolerance that belongs to all of its people,” he said.

On the international stage, he said Mandate condemned the “outrageous” events in Gaza – “the mass killings, the genocide and displacement of thousands of families”.

Nearer home, Hogan acknowledged the rapid change in shopping practices brought about by robotics, automation and AI and the resulting impact on retail jobs.

“Shopping practices have played a positive role in retail efficiencies while negatively impacting bricks and mortar retail,” he said.

“Mandate is calling on the Government to support bricks and mortar retailing and through effective policies bring in support mechanisms that sustain decent jobs in the retail sector.” Conference was told the union would have a number of key demands in the run-up to the next election – including the introduction of a living

wage and the abolition of the sub-minimum wage.

“This discriminatory provision facilitates profitable employers to pay young workers less per hour because they are of a certain age.

“My message to new Taoiseach Simon Harris is clear – no worker should experience for one moment longer the indignity of receiving a wage less than colleagues simply under the grounds of their age.”

Most flexible

He pointed out that retail and hospitality workers continued to be among the most flexible workers in the private sector on contracts forcing them to work at short notice between 7am and 11pm at night, noting: “Many workers are forced to work morning, noon, and night – not knowing if they are day workers or night workers.”

And Mandate would, he vowed, be

delivering on an industrial relations model “where work-life balance with decent incomes must become the driving force of our collective bargaining strategies”.

Hogan continued: “Better paying benefits have traditionally been the cornerstone of the union’s bargaining strategy and they will [continue to] be into the future – it’s the bread and butter.”

The union would also focus on working patterns, with an emphasis on certainty of earnings, fair rostering, and access to additional available hours, adding: “These must become standard objectives of our collective bargaining strategies.”

Hogan told delegates that Mandate would also do more to influence what he termed “the social contract”, explaining: “It’s an exchange for our contributions to the country. It’s the responsibility of Government to implement universal basic services [in health, education, etc].”

CONFERENCE MOTIONS

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Industrial Relations Act; and rights to access facility time for union education.

Noel Dunphy (Wicklow and Dublin South), supporting the motion, suggested union negotiators would be met initially by “attitude” from managers used to getting their own way.

“You’re going to have managers, section managers, team leaders, you name it, and you’ll get the word back, ‘I know nothing about it’. But the law is the law at this stage, and

hopefully it will be that. We will have a strong mandate that we can actually say ‘It’s your problem. You’ve broken the law – pay for it’.”

Calling for a system of monitoring to be brought in to log compliance, he insisted there should not “slipping back into the Irish way” of doing things.

“We’re in the 21st century... standards [in Ireland] are worse than they ever were... We’ve got to get back and take no prisoners. The law is the law and they have to be dealt with as such.”

Motion carried.

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Noel Dunphy

CONFERENCE MOTIONS

FROM PAGE 6

Comprehensive Motion 1 (covering Motions 28 and 29) on access to additional working hours for existing staff was moved by **Mary Stine**, on behalf of Blanchardstown Local Council.

Citing Mandate's 2023 *Smoke & Mirrors* report, she told conference: "This [motion] seeks to strengthen requests from workers to move from part-time to full-time hours. We ask the incoming NEC to follow the report [with regard to] 2018 Employment Miscellaneous Provisions Act and to campaign that the EU Directive is properly transposed into Irish legislation."

Motion carried.

Oisín McDermott, on behalf of Sligo Local Council, moved **Motion 3** on banded hours and full time work. "Erratic schedules not only disrupt personal lives but also hinder financial stability and overall well-being," he told conference.

Calling on the incoming NEC to seek "amendments and fair practices" to help workers secure reliable hours so that they could plan their lives. "Let's strive for a future where workers can thrive in consistency and security", McDermott added.

He also called for an employment ratio model of three part-time workers to one full-time worker.

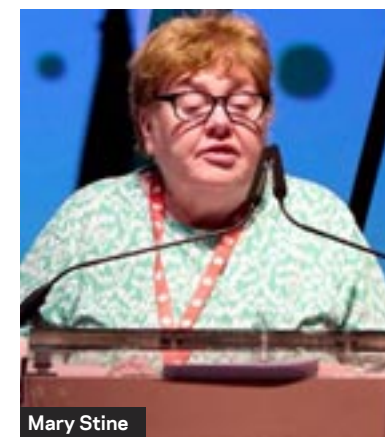
Pointing out that many retail workers had spent "countless years" years in employment and not been offered full-time contracts, McDermott said: "We want a ratio system that guarantees workers coming in to workplace guaranteed position of full-time employment."

An amendment to the motion put forward by Cork Local Council was carried.

Speaking on the amended motion, **Liam Farrell** raised concerns about the original wording and cautioned that equality legislation meant that temporary workers could not be treated less favourably to full-time workers.

"Employers will use this legislation against us should this original motion pass and become union policy and accuse us of direct discrimination against members based on service and contracts.

"Our amendment is simple – should a full-time position arise it should be advertised in the first instance internally to allow all existing workers in-store to apply for the position on a fair



and equitable basis."

He added: "We believe this is a much better and fairer approach."

Amended motion carried.

Suirtan O Piongaloid, on behalf of Artane Finglas Santry Local Council, moved **Motion 4** on the National Minimum Wage (Equal Pay for Young Workers) Bill 2022.

Reading from the text of the motion, he called on the incoming NEC "to lobby and to direct the union's officials to lobby Government to not only ensure this Bill is read a second time on the agreed date, but that it is in fact passed into legislation, and in so doing, bring an end to this discriminatory and unjust treatment of young workers."

O Piongaloid, who currently chairs Mandate Youth Committee, said young workers were "among the most exploited" in Ireland and were being taken advantage of by "blatantly discriminatory and severely outdated" laws on sub-minimum rates.

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INTERIM AGS ADDRESS

EU Directive is 'once in a generation' opportunity



The EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages and Collective Bargaining is a “once-in-a-generation” opportunity to “rebalance” the power relationships between workers and employers in Ireland, conference was told.

Mandate Interim Assistant General Secretary **Lorraine O'Brien** made the comment as she addressed delegates gathered at the INEC in Killarney for Mandate's BDC 2024.

The Directive, which requires Member States to boost collective bargaining rates to cover at least 80% of employees, must be

transposed into Irish law by November.

She told delegates: “It is estimated that approximately 34% of workers in Ireland have their wages and conditions bargained for collectively – so the implementation of this Directive has the potential to make a once-in-a-generation” difference to workers here.”

Though workers in Ireland have a constitutional right to join a trade union, the legal protections to safeguard against union-busting tactics – such as those used by Dunnes Stores and TK Maxx – aren't in place.

O'Brien described the Directive as the “most important pro-worker and potentially pro-union employment legislation for many years” which could put workers in Ireland “on a par” with their counterparts in other parts of Europe.

Negotiations

It is hoped the Respect at Work campaign, launched in early April by Mandate along with SIPTU, CWU and FSU, will influence the course of negotiations around the Directive.

The initiative seeks to highlight the need for a beefing-up of protections against victimisation,

discrimination, and even dismissal for workers conducting trade union activity.

And O'Brien insisted that union-busting on the part of bad employers was being put “front and centre” in the campaign. She cautioned, however, that the talks, involving Congress, employers groups and the Government, would not be easy.

“It's clear we have a real battle on our hands,” she said.

O'Brien claimed employers will argue that unions could negotiate on behalf of workers who are not members. This, she warned, would create a “massive

democratic deficit” with trade unions negotiating for workers from whom they had no mandate. “This is clearly not acceptable to us,” she added.

Urging delegates to support the Respect at Work initiative, O'Brien said: “It is crucial that everybody here realises that the voice of ordinary workers – especially those who have experienced union busting – is central to the campaign.”

She added: “This is a defining moment for the labour movement in Ireland.”

CONFERENCE MOTIONS

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As a result “ruthless employers” were getting away with exploiting young people's labour “with a profit-to-return that only rises exponentially”.

Calling for collective action “involving the NEC and every individual member”, he warned there was a “small window of opportunity” to “push the boulder up the hill as far and as fast as humanly possible” before the Bill was put before Leinster House for a second reading.

O Piongaloid added: “[We need] individual efforts from every union member here today, from Ballybofey to Ballymacoda, in order to see the optimal amount of change for young people who tend to make up a large – if not the majority of [workers] in our retail and bar



Peter Murray

centres.”

Peter Murray (Dublin North) said he was backing the motion because “when I was young... I was never in a trade union and never got a decent. I got buttons. If we want to keep our young people in this country, we have to pay them a decent wage.”

Motion carried.

Motion 5 on trade union access to the workplace was moved by **Kevin McCall** on behalf of Letterkenny Local Council.

With Mandate membership currently falling, he asked what would be the impact on numbers joining the union if “legally protected access at inductions” was secured.

“We know from our great speakers that workers – especially young workers – want

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CONFERENCE MOTIONS

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Audrey Bent

to join a union, and can see the value in [joining] a union. All that is missing is the opportunity.”

He said that across much of Europe, workers’ reps “have a seat at the table through works councils” whereas in Ireland – “the country of Larkin and Connolly” – union officials “can’t get their foot in the door”.

McCall suggested that the EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages was a “game changer” though he acknowledged there was “a long way to go and much work to be done”.

“We’re a retail union and younger workers are our future. The twin rights of collective bargaining and access are the keys we need to unlock their potential and [that of] our unions.”

Motion carried.

Motion 6 looked at violence and harassment in the workplace. Moving the motion on behalf of Wexford Local Council, **Audrey Bent** called on the incoming NEC to highlight the issue and urge employers to be more proactive in dealing with this problem as well as prioritising the health and safety of staff.

She told delegates the “ever changing face of retail” involved late night opening with its accompanying danger of interacting with “sometimes drunk, drugged, or aggressive customers”.

And “day-light robbery” had, Bent pointed out, become an “all-too-regular occurrence” in some stores, adding: “With this comes the aggression, threats, and actual assaults that our members suffer.”

She claimed that retailers’ use of “non-regular security [guards]” compounded the problem, leading to a “lack of continuity in dealing with repeat



Denis Campion



offenders”. They simply do not know who to look out for, putting us – the employees – in an often dangerous position.”

She suggested that this “rising tide” of aggression was having a negative impact on members’ working and home lives.

Motion carried.

EDUCATION

Conor O’Donnell, moving **Motion 7** on behalf of Letterkenny Local Council, spoke about the chronic underfunding of rural schools, “a vital piece of education infrastructure in our communities”, and the need to lobby local and national government on the issue.

Denis Campion (Cork Local Council), asking for amended

wording to the motion, told conference: “This issue unfortunately is not just unique to Donegal, it is a nationwide problem.”

Motion carried.

ENVIRONMENT

Edwin Cashman from Cork Local Council moved **Motion 8**, calling on the incoming NEC to

lobby the Government to put in place “adequate and functional” flood relief systems and to amend the standard emergency flooding scheme so that those impacted in private homes can avail of the same type of relief businesses receive. Cashman’s home town of Middleton, east Cork, had been one of worst

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PALESTINIAN AMBASSADOR



'It's our time to be free'

In an highly moving address to conference, Palestinian Ambassador to Ireland **Dr Jilan Abdalmajid** said that six months on from the beginning of the assault on Gaza there was nothing left for Palestinians "except misery".

Yet still, she added, the international community was failing in its obligations to stop "Israeli war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide against the civilian population".

She told conference: "At the minute more than 34,000 Palestinians have been killed. It's not a number, it's a family member, it's a neighbour. Every single family in Gaza have people who lost some [relatives]. Some families [have been] wiped entirely from the registry..."

"Being a Palestinian is enough to get you killed. Trying to help Palestinians is enough to get you killed."

She thanked Mandate for the invitation to speak at the conference and praised Ireland's response to the onslaught on Gaza.

"The Irish people have been constant and consistent in their support for justice, human rights and international law, and for the Palestinian people."

Dr Abdalmajid said Israel was continuing its "savage assault" of "unprecedented viciousness" weeks after the UN Security Council had adopted a resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire.

She continued: "Israeli massacres [are]



Standing ovation for Dr Jilan Abdalmajid

loud and proud. It has no respect for the Security Council, the General Assembly, the International Court of Justice, international community or international law itself. It doesn't hesitate to trample them all under the boots of a soldier... [It] disrespects all, vowing more vengeance, shredding the law, persisting with indiscriminate and targeted attacks claiming more innocent lives."

Conference was told that the war in Gaza "went beyond revenge" and was actually "a humiliation of a nation". Israel was perpetrating violations and crimes "wilfully and wantonly" – confident that it

will never face consequences for its "heinous crimes".

Dr Abdalmajid called on the international community to act now to ensure an immediate ceasefire is put in place to stop further loss of life and to recognise the state of Palestine.

She said: "It's our time to be free. It's our right to build our own free state of Palestine, on our land on the pre-1967 lines. It's our right to live. It's our right to live with dignity and raise our children without fear in our free state of Palestine."

Mandate delegates gave Dr Abdalmajid a standing ovation following her speech.





CONFERENCE MOTIONS

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Eoin Roberts

affected areas in the major floods of October 2023.

He told conference: “My landlady texted me this morning. She said I’d finally get in the kitchen this week. It’s been devastating for more than just myself. My neighbours, they’ve had to go looking for funding. One guy next door had no flood insurance. He’s basically living in an empty house.

“The entire funding system in this country needs updating. A standard emergency flooding relief scheme needs to be introduced to ensure every citizen is not left to fend for themselves against insurance companies who will drive their premiums through the roof.”

Eoin Roberts (Killarney Local Council) brought up the issue of retained firefighters not been given car insurance cover when answering red alerts. “It’s a disgrace,” he said.

Amended motion carried.

Calling for a substantial state investment in renewable energy, **Ian Daly**, moving **Motion 9** on behalf of Galway Local Council told conference the “decades-long” Government policy of handing control of Ireland’s natural resources to the private sector had to be challenged.

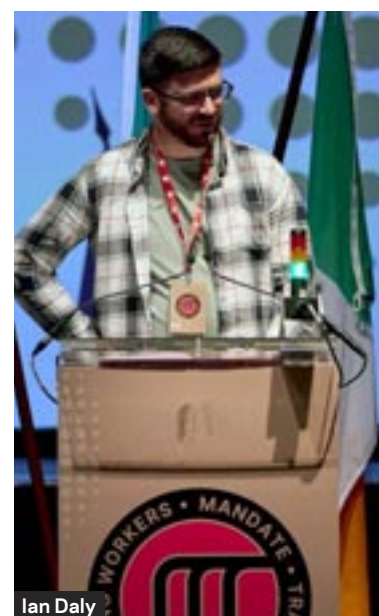
Citing what he called the “Corrib Gas giveaway” as an example, Daly pointed out that Irish consumers were now paying the same price for gas from County Mayo as gas imported from Russia or Norway, which was “farcical”.

He insisted the “political establishment” was trying to repeat this with Ireland’s renewable energy resources: “This giveaway of our renewable energy would make Corrib look like a drop in the ocean, no pun intended.” Daly claimed a publicly-owned renewable

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Sarah Byrne (SOC)



Ian Daly

Right to collective bargaining set out in new EU Directive is our holy grail

CONGRESS GEN SEC



ICTU General Secretary **Owen Reidy** has insisted the right to collective bargaining is “the most important issue of our time” for trade unions.

“There are hundreds of thousands of workers who are dying to join a union but are being kept out by the employer. That is the boil that we must lance.”

He made the comments in his address to Mandate’s Biennial Delegate Conference in Killarney on 22nd April.

Pointing out that because the right to organise in the private sector was currently “in the gift” of individual employers, it effectively meant that too many workers were being “locked out of trade unions”.

Citing recent positive polling that flagged up popular support among non-unionised workers for joining trade unions, he told delegates: “Some 44% of people at work in the Republic of Ireland not in a union wanted one. They would vote for one if they had the chance.”

He said that figure rose to 67% of the 16- to 24-year-old demographic, describing them as the generation that had been “sold a pup” and “shut out of rent and the prospect of ever owning their home... unless things change”.

Reidy said these figures were “a shot in

the arm for your union as a key private sector union and of every union across this country”.

And he asked how could the state can be called a “true republic” while at the same time denying hundreds of thousands of workers the right to “fully access” trade union membership.

But Reidy suggested that the EU’s Adequate Minimum Wages Directive – which he called “very radical, very progressive” – is key in securing this full access.

Protect

“It requires member states [of the EU]... to promote collective bargaining to ‘facilitate the right of workers to exercise collective bargaining’. That’s the holy grail – that’s what we want! And also to protect those engaged in collective bargaining.”

As a result of this Directive, he called for new primary legislation to be enacted protecting shop stewards as they did their work, safeguarding facility time and securing access to workplace colleagues.

“We need to get to a place where every worker who wants a union has access to a union without having to go through these ridiculous hoops. That has to be our number one priority and our ambition.”

CONFERENCE MOTIONS

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energy sector could enough provide secure affordable energy for everyone on the island and even allow Ireland to become net exporters of energy.

This, he suggested, would be “transformative” for the Irish economy and guarantee Ireland’s long-term energy security.

Motion carried.

HOUSING

Backing for ICTU’s Raise the Roof campaign was voiced by **Oisín McDermott** (Sligo Local Council) as he moved Motion 10.

May 2024 | **SHOPFLOOR**

On the housing issue, he said it was essential to campaign for “secure, affordable, and accessible housing for all workers”.

McDermott told delegates: “We must recognise this crisis is driven by systemic inequality in our society, supported by Government policies which prevent workers and marginalising people from accessing housing.”

There was an “emergency” in housing, he added, and this required the “harnessing of our collective power and resources as a union”.

“We are calling for us to work together with all unions and



continue to support ICTU’s Raise the Roof and build more houses.”

Patrick Killeen (Ballina Local Council) brought up the mica and pyrite scandal affecting homeowners in Mayo, Donegal, Sligo and Clare.

Motion carried.

Christina Dooley moved **Motion 11** dealing with the housing adaptation grant for people with disabilities on behalf of Galway Local Council. She called for the grant – currently available in sums of up to €30,000 – to be increased to keep up with rising construction costs.

Patrick Killeen (Ballina Local Council) informed delegates he

had to “jump through hoops” to get a bathroom adapted for a family member: “We had to get an engineer from the council and three different tenders from three different builders.”

Motion carried.

SOCIAL

Motion 12 (Castlebar Local Council) called on the incoming NEC to lobby, along with ICTU and “like-minded” unions, for the protection of the existing pension age.

Rowena Dempsey, who moved the motion, said she had been working for almost 40 years and was “absolutely

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Our proud history of working class struggle

MANDATE'S HERITAGE



A KEY FOCUS of the BDC in Killarney was a celebration of the 30th anniversary of the founding of Mandate with the 1994 merger of IDATU and INUVGATA.

There was great response from delegates to a museum-standard exhibition marking the event outside the conference hall at the INEC.

This charted the history of Mandate and its predecessor unions through a specially-curated selection of minute books, documents, posters, badges, and an audio-visual presentation.

Mandate Communications and Research Officer **Dave Gibney**, who co-authored a book to go with the exhibition, also gave a presentation to conference on the union's history.

Thanking the union for allowing him to do some "nerdy research", he noted that delegates had been "visibly moved" by Karen Gearon's testimony given earlier that day about the Dunnes Stores anti-Apartheid strike.

"That's one major proud story that we have in this trade union," he said, "but there's so many more that are not celebrated enough... and we need to delve deeper into our own history and look at this stuff."

In a wide-ranging talk, Gibney then spoke about the foundations of the union, representing the rights of draper's assistants, grocer's assistants and bar workers, which stretched back some 162 years to 1862.

He outlined the terrible effects on retail workers of the "exceptionally oppressive" living-in system - where employers made use of the vacant upper stories of shops to accommodate members of staff... for a price.

Life was certainly grim for these retail workers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Gibney related one story about how a shop owner had been brought to court after a carcass not fit for human consumption had been found on his premises.

There was an audible gasp from the conference floor when he said the shop owner had been let off on appeal "on the grounds that the meat wasn't for sale - it was



for the staff". Conference was then told about the pioneering "giants" of the union, Michael O'Lehane, Patrick Moran, and Cissy Cahalan, and of their great contribution to the labour movement in Ireland.

And given the steep decline in Mandate membership in recent years, Gibney read out what he considered an apt quotation from an editorial written by Michael

O'Lehane in the August 1918 issue of *The Draper's Assistant*: "It must be remembered that this revolution in shop life was not brought about by the wave of a magic wand as it were. It was brought about by years of hard, persistent plodding. Years of argument, years of effort by way of meetings and personal canvass in every city and town throughout the land."



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exhausted... I want to retire at 65”.

Motion carried.

Kevin McCall, moving **Motion 13** on behalf of Letterkenny Local Council, told delegates that the allocation of time off to care for children with chronic illnesses was “solely dependent” on the good will of individual employers and could not be guaranteed. He called on the incoming NEC to campaign for greater provisions to be made for workers who needed to take time off to care for sick children without it impacting on their careers.

Motion carried.

Some surveys have found that up to 83% of retail workers have suffered abuse at the hands of customers, **Sandra Rock** (Dublin North) claimed as she moved **Comprehensive Motion 2**, covering **Motions 30** (Dublin City Centre Local Council) and **31** (Longford Local Council). She insisted that increasing levels of abuse “had led to an exodus of workers leaving or considering their future in retail, and called on the incoming NEC to meet with relevant organisations to discuss the issue.

Rock also called for increased policing and beefed up legislation to protect those working in Dublin.

She told delegates: “During Covid, we were the ones out on the streets when they were empty going out to work when nobody else was. And here we are on those same streets, but we’re now in fear for our safety.”

Ian Hartigan (Leitrim), in his contribution, said he hoped “there’s something put in place” to better protect retail workers when the next pandemic occurred.

John Keogh (Longford Division) pointed out that a lot of companies were cutting their security personnel and expecting general floor staff to fill the gap.

He said: “My comment to management when something like that arises is, ‘If I wanted a security officer’s job I would have applied for it.’”

Motion carried.

UNION AFFAIRS

Motion 15 on increasing union subscriptions proved to be the most hotly-debated motion during conference. **Martin Mahony**, moving the motion on

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ISSU SPEAKER



Fighting for a better Ireland

In her speech, Irish Second-Level Students’ Union National Organiser **Maeve Richardson** emphasised the common bond between students’ unions and trade unions.

“We are both fighting for a better Ireland,” she told delegates, “We’re determined to get what life has to offer, not just for ourselves but for everyone – whether that is with better pay and conditions, showing global solidarity, fighting against rising racism... or fighting for Ireland to be a liveable country.”

Richardson said that ISSU “proudly supported” the Respect at Work campaign: “It is imperative that as workers, there is no conversations about us, without us. We need the legislative backing for our workers to be able to stand up for their rights. Students have this backing [and] so should workers. We have the same struggle, the same fight.”

She told conference that ISSU was now a formally affiliated partner of ISSU and that she looked forward to working with the union to campaign for the abolishing of sub-minimum rates of pay.

“Sub minimum rates of pay are nothing short of an insult to young workers,” she added.

Insisting that union membership had to become “a cultural norm again” she said that it was becoming harder for young people to see light at the end of the tunnel with a lack of exposure to trade unions.

“We need to bring people on the journey with us in the movement. We need the membership to increase to match the hard work and energy.”

Better

She continued: “We are better in a trade union and we need every young person on this island to know that... I implore you all to have to conversations wherever you are – at the dinner table, in your workplace, in the pub – to have the conversations about joining a trade union to whoever will listen.

“Speak about how far we have come as a society thanks to unions. Ireland is a kind and caring country – make sure everyone around knows that it is the kind and neighbourly thing to join a trade union and look out for your fellow worker.”



Sandra Rock



Kevin McCall

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behalf of the NEC, informed delegates that union subs had not increased since October 2016. He said the NEC was proposing that subscriptions be increased by 50 cents per week from June 2024 and that subs be subject to a yearly review going forward.

Bill Meehan urged delegates to vote against the motion. He said people “who are already giving so much to the union” were going through “a lot of hardship because” of the cost-of-living crisis.

Declan Merrigan (Tesco New Ross) said that some colleagues of his had indicated that they would leave the union if subscriptions increased.

He told conference: “Will they stand up to their threat? Or will they still stay in the union and be looked after the way I have been for the last 34-and-a-half years – with [the union] getting me bonuses, pay rises, etc through negotiations with the company. Don't be pushed by somebody else telling you what to do.”

Adam Fallon (Castlebar Local Council) said he “vehemently opposed” the motion but wasn't against increases to union subs in principle.

He told delegates: “We're currently living through a cost-of-living crisis. I prefer the term a cost-of-existing crisis. Our members in my store and other workplaces, though they are in full-time employment, are living on the breadline and barely existing.”

Fallon said the motion was a “slap in the face” of “hard working members” and said the union had to “come back to the real world”.

“We're have had to tighten our belts, I suggest we as a union do



exactly the same,” he added.

Speaking in favour of the motion, **Rory Corrigan** said: “I am aware asking people to spend more money when things are so expensive is a big ask. I would like to ask delegates how have much a packet of cigarettes gone up in your lifetime? Other unions have increased their

prices. Since mandate is an excellent union offering great services, I don't think 50 cents is too unreasonable [an increase] to ask.”

NEC member **Joe Quinn**, also speaking in favour, said the union already cut back as much as it could. “We provide excellent services and training courses.

Everything else has increased in our own private life. I understand it's difficult, but we have a union to run – and it needs to be run properly and correctly. We need the finances to do it.”

Kevin McCall (Letterkenny Local Council) said he could see both sides of the argument and

wanted the union “to do well and thrive”.

He added: “With the new EU Directive I think the union could be in a different place in two years time – and that could be the time to talk about increases in subscription.” *Motion falls.*

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Joe Quinn



Adam Fallon



Rory Corrigan

DUNNES STRIKER



‘We got a union instruction... and we followed it’



To mark the 40th anniversary of the world-famous anti-Apartheid Dunnes Stores strike, Mandate invited former IDATU activist **Karen Gearon** to speak at the conference in Killarney.

In an emotional recalling of the dispute that lasted two years and nine months, Gearon, who was shop steward at the Henry Street store, made it clear to the conference that the 10 strikers were not politically involved at the time.

“We were just ordinary workers – not members of a political party – but we got a union instruction and we followed it.”

Admitting that the Dunnes workers knew little about South Africa or Apartheid at first, she told delegates they just “couldn’t understand how you could be treated differently because of the colour of your skin.”

IDATU official Brendan Archibold advised the strikers the dispute would not last longer than two weeks. “Boy, was he wrong.” Gearon joked. “That was the only time that Brendan lied to us!”

She recalls the first six months were the most difficult as the strikers received little support from other trade unions.

Added to that, numbers were stretched on the Henry Street picket: “We had the picket line six days a week for about 12 to 14 hours a day and we had to cover three exits.”

Gearon also spoke about the mental and physical abuse the strikers suffered during the dispute: “We had priests in the pulpit telling people to pass the picket [line], that Dunnes

were [a] good Catholic family. We had the Irish government [stating] we had no right to say what goods we could [or could not] handle. And we had the Irish trade union movement thinking, ‘What are we going to do with this crowd of radicals?’, But we weren’t radicals... the one thing nobody banked on was our commitment to that the fight and [to the] struggle.”

She told conference there was a change in attitudes “when Bishop Tutu gave us his blessing”.

“The Catholic Church in Ireland began to sit up, the politicians in Ireland began to sit up, and they began to realise... we have a group of people that are not going to go away – because we weren’t.”

Support

By the time the dispute ended, there were more than 36 strike support groups dotted about the country which morphed into anti-Apartheid groups.

Gearon also spoke about the July 1985 trip to South Africa when the group was held under armed guard for eight hours before being put back on a flight to Heathrow.

Admitting it was “the most terrifying experience any of us had ever gone through”, she remembers getting to the top of the stairs of the plane bound for England: “I turned around and I put my fist up so we will be back when South Africa is free.”

Karen Gearon received a standing ovation following her speech.

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Motion 16 (Galway Local Council) called on the incoming NEC to examine the need to restructure the union rule book with a view to convening a Special Delegate Conference in early 2025 to either accept or reject any proposed changes.

An amendment to the motion, put forward by **Siurtan O Priogaloid** (Artane Finglas Santry Local Council), was subsequently withdrawn.

Divisional Organiser **John Carty**, speaking under Rule 43, had earlier spoken against the amendment and in favour of the original motion.

Addressing the concerns raised by the movers of the amendment, he said: "A Special Delegate Conference does not require three nights in a hotel. It's a one-day event in a location probably at our Head Office in Dublin. If the amendment is carried, it will delay the implementation of any rule change for two years.

Carty continued: "This rule book needs a major revision. There's a triple lock [contained] in this motion – it has to pass a sub-committee, then it has to pass the NEC, and then it will have to get passed at a Special Delegate Conference. You, the



Andrew Mannion



John Carty



Siurtan O Priogaloid

delegates, have the final say."

Amendment withdrawn. Motion carried.

EMERGENCY MOTION

Andrew Mannion, on behalf of a number of Local Councils, moved an Emergency Motion calling for Karen Gearon to be admitted as a member of Mandate "with immediate effect" and for her reinstatement to be backdated to her last application to join the union and "any arrears accrued to be waived".

He told conference that Karen Gearon was a role model and the "encapsulation of what a trade unionist should be".

Mannion continued: "We've talked a big game over the last couple of days. We've had some speeches and presentations talking about what this union stands for and what we want to do going forward but if we can't admit someone like Karen Gearon to this union, I don't know what we're doing..."

President **Denise Curran** told delegates: "Given Karen's unique affiliation and contribution to this union over many years, the NEC's agreed position is to accept the Emergency Motion in these exceptional circumstances."

Motion carried.

End of conference.





MANDATE CONFERENCE 2024

Full text of motions, go to:
<https://bit.ly/4btFxM8>

Pictures:
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President Denise Curran introduces Dr Jilan Abdalmajid

