

# THE DELEGATE

## Newsletter of the Bray & District Council of Trade Unions

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### COUNCIL SUPPORT PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

The Council has sent a letter to the Israeli ambassador condemning the recent attacks by Israeli forces in East Jerusalem and Gaza which was totally indiscriminate and disproportionate and in breach of international humanitarian law. We also condemned the continuing persecution and denial of human rights of Palestinians in Gaza and the Occupied Territories. A letter of support and solidarity from the Council has been sent to the Palestinian ambassador in the continuing fight against the Israeli occupation of their land. The Palestinian ambassador, Dr. Jilan Wahba-Abdalmajid, also accepted an invitation and addressed the Council at a special meeting on the 22nd June which was well attended and very informative (full report in next issue).

Whilst Israel has the right to defend its people this right does not negate the rights of the Palestinian people. Any use of military force in self defence must be in accord with international humanitarian law and must be both discriminate and proportionate. Once again, this was not the case last month. The 11 days of attacks claimed 250 lives in Gaza (66 children) and 13 Israeli deaths (of which 2 were children).

The Council fully supports the recent decision by Dáil Eireann that Israel's illegal settlement activity on Palestinian land is a 'de facto annexation', and we have called on the Government to use Ireland's position on the UN Security Council to demand implementation of the UN resolutions on Jerusalem and occupied Palestine.

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### UNIONS WELCOME WICKLOW HOSPITAL RE-OPENING

The Executive Committee welcomed the news that refurbishment works are now complete at Wicklow District Hospital which will reopen this month as an 18-bed short stay facility for older people.

Margaret Coughlan (Wicklow Health Branch, Fórsa) pointed out that herself and John Hubbard (SIPTU Health Division) together with the workers concerned and the wider community fought long and hard at the time to keep the facility open but failed and it was closed in October 2010. "We protested strongly against the closure and thousands took to the streets of Wicklow town to demand that the necessary minor refurbishment work be carried out quickly and that the hospital remain open but it was allowed to close. So, this is great news for the workers and the local community", she added.

The hospital was closed in October 2010 following a HIQA report on a fire audit of the building. However, the 'Save Wicklow Hospital Campaign' opposed the decision to close on the basis that the necessary work could be done quickly and economically to ensure the facility could remain open but the closure went ahead.

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### **NEW MATERNITY HOSPITAL MUST BE BUILT ON STATE OWNED LAND**

On the 25th May, the third anniversary of the repeal of the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, Council President Mary Diskin presented a letter at the constituency office of health minister Stephen Donnelly urging him not to gift the new National Maternity Hospital to the Religious Sisters of Charity.

Despite being publicly funded the new hospital which it is planned to build at Elm Park will not be owned by the State. It will be operated and managed by St. Vincent's Healthcare Group (SVHG), a private Catholic company currently owned by the Religious Sisters of Charity. This company, SVHG, will become a wholly owned subsidiary of St. Vincent's Holdings, a new company established to own and control a portfolio of hospitals including the new National Maternity Hospital.

Under present plans the Government will only be granted a 99 year lease, rather than freehold title to the land on which it proposed to build the hospital. Leasing the land, rather than gaining full title, is a mechanism for the nuns' company, St. Vincent's Holdings, to gain ownership of the new hospital.

The nuns have received conditional permission from the Vatican to transfer their shareholding to St. Vincent's Holdings. One of the conditions specifically included by Rome refers to Canon 1293.2: to avoid harm to the Church. It is difficult, in the context of conditions attached by Rome, to see how the new hospital will be able to provide the range of reproductive services, including abortion, available under Irish law but not permitted by the Catholic Church.

In this situation the State will have no power to intervene. A private hospital cannot be compelled to provide services which are contrary to its ethos. Although the building of the new hospital will cost the taxpayer upwards of €500 million and the State will have to fund all maintenance and running costs in the future the State will have no role in St. Vincent's Holdings, the company which will control the hospital's ethos. This situation is untenable.

The new National Maternity Hospital must be publicly owned and publicly controlled. It is being paid for by the tax-payer and its maintenance and operational costs will be paid for by the tax-payer in perpetuity. The only way in which we can guarantee a publicly owned secular hospital in which it can be guaranteed that the employment rights of staff will not be impacted by Catholic ethos is for the hospital to be on State owned land. The State must insist on a freehold title to the land on which the hospital will be built.

A similar statement was presented by North Wicklow Together for Choice and Equality calling on the Minister to ensure that the new hospital is built on land to which the State has full title so that the complete ownership and control of the hospital will be with the State.

This is a group of volunteers arising from the North Wicklow Together for Yes group and who are fighting for equality and human rights in the North Wicklow area.

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### **STATE MEASURES TO TACKLE CUCKOO FUNDS TOTALLY INADEQUATE**

The Council considers the new measures introduced by the government to tackle the activities of Cuckoo Funds in the housing market as wholly inadequate to deal with the growing crisis in the provision of affordable housing and has called on the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to initiate a national campaign to further highlight the failure of this government to properly intervene to deliver decent, affordable homes, cost rental and public housing to ensure housing for all.

Proposing a motion on behalf of the Executive Committee at the June meeting, Council Secretary Kieron Connolly stated that what makes Ireland so attractive to these speculative funds is that they forgo tax and the absence of affordable housing has resulted in local authorities entering into expensive, long-term rental and leasing deals with such funds in order to make up that shortfall.

Supporting the motion, Colm Kinsella (Unite Trade Union) pointed out that when these investors were invited in by the then Minister for Finance Michael Noonan they were given guarantees and they have the law on their side! "It is like the situation with the development across from Bray rail Station which has been leased by Wicklow County Council for 25 years after which it must be handed back in

the same condition - it is all a joke!" he concluded.

John Anderson (Mandate) pointed out that where he lives in Citywest this group appear to have cornered the market for apartments and houses. "They advertise that if you want accommodation that you contact them", he stated.

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#### **STATE-SPONSORED HIJACKING**

An emergency motion condemning the State hijacking of an Irish registered aircraft and its illegal detention in Belarus was unanimously adopted by the Council at the June meeting. The motion also called on the Irish government to immediately seek the release of journalist Roman Protasevich and his girlfriend Sofia Sapega.

Proposing the motion on behalf of SIPTU, Barry Nevin also called for an international arrest warrant to be issued for Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko because of this state hijacking which is in breach of all international air traffic legislation.

On Sunday 23rd May, Ryanair flight FR4973 was travelling from Athens to Vilnius when it was ordered by Belarusian air traffic controllers to divert to Minsk. The ruse that was used, a bomb warning, has been widely ridiculed. The incident in which the Belarusians dispatched a fighter aircraft alongside the Ryanair aircraft is in breach of all air traffic legislation and was choreographed to enable the seizure from the plane of opposition blogger Protasevich in what was a clear state-sponsored hijacking.

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#### **CALL FOR HOME HELP SERVICES TO BE UNDER DIRECT CONTROL OF HSE**

Confirmation that the private provider has withdrawn from the proposed transfer of the Greystone Home Help Service operation was welcomed by the Council at the June meeting and it was agreed to support the call by SIPTU that the not-for-profit community provider be taken under the direct control of the HSE.

It is clear that the board of management do not want to continue to run the operation and the best option, therefore, is that it be transferred directly to the CH06 section of the HSE which currently controls all home help services in Kildare and west Wicklow. Indeed, since 2010, services in Dublin, east Wicklow and Clare are the only ones not under direct control of the HSE. This is an essential public service and we consider that a case should be made to have all the services in east Wicklow brought under the direct control of the HSE.

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#### **HAVE A SAFE HAPPY AND ENJOYABLE PRIDE !**

Recent events in Hungary, where a new law was passed that discriminates against LGBTQ people while claiming to protect children, illustrates that homophobia is alive and well in the EU. Ireland has played a leadership role in promoting the rights of the LGBTI+ community in recent years but recent events in Waterford and Dublin illustrate that homophobia still persists and we cannot be complacent.

In the run up to this year's virtual Pride Parade Congress General Secretary, Patricia King, said that these events serve as a reminder of the importance of Pride and to wish all members a safe, happy and enjoyable Pride. Congress also wishes to acknowledge that while all of us have faced challenges during the pandemic, it has posed a greater risk to marginalised and vulnerable groups, including LGBTI people.

Surveys by LGBT Ireland and BelongTo have illustrated that 93% of LGBTI+ young people struggled with anxiety, stress, or depression during the Covid-19 restrictions, compared to 53% of the general youth population. Many are confined to unsupportive home environments due to public health restrictions and more than half (56%) of LGBTI+ young people surveyed in 2021 said they were not fully accepted in their home environment.

The reports also highlight the struggles of LGBTI+ people who are additionally marginalised including LGBTI+ migrants, Traveller and Roma, refugees, older, living with a long-term disability or intersectional

identities. LGBT Ireland additionally point out that the LGBTI+ community rely on community spaces, social connections, and the ability to take pride in their identities, together - all denied to them by the pandemic.

Our movement stands for dignity, respect and in the workplace and wider society. We have a proud record in the fight against workplace discrimination and harassment, while also being the early supporters of marriage equality. Liberty Hall roof will proudly light up in Pride colours this weekend as a symbol of our continued belief that our fortunes as working people rise and fall as one and our continued solidarity with our LGBTI+ members

(Congress, 23rd June)

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### THE BANALITY OF EVIL

Hannah Arendt wrote the groundbreaking work 'Origins of Totalitarianism', which was published in the 1950's, in which she examined the roots in anti-Semitism and 19th century imperialism in both Nazism and communism, dubbing them a novel form of government for using terror to control an entire population rather than just eliminate political opponents.

In 1961 she attended part of the five month trial in Israel of Adolf Eichmann, one of the key architects of the Holocaust. The first thing she noticed as she sat just a few feet from Eichmann was that he didn't look much like the personification of evil. In the dock he appeared entirely unremarkable, middle-aged, balding, wearing spectacles with misty lenses, listening glassy-eyed to the translations coming through his headphones and responding with droning inarticulacy. It didn't take too long for Arendt to realise that far from the living embodiment of pure evil, Eichmann could have passed for a low-level bureaucrat at any company anywhere in Europe. He was, as Arendt wrote in the 'New Yorker' and then her international bestseller 'Eichmann in Jerusalem', "terribly and terrifyingly normal".

The phrase everyone took away from the book was "the banality of evil", of which Eichmann at his trial was Arendt's archetype. He was not a fanatic and didn't express any kind of ideology. He displayed no guilt for his actions but didn't betray a particular hatred for the Jews he had dispatched in their thousands to the camps and ultimately to their deaths. His bureaucratic passivity and failure to engage with the nature of his crimes, Arendt wrote, was what made him so terrifying. It wasn't malice that drove him to unspeakable acts, she concluded, more an unthinking loyalty to a system. It was death by paperwork.

For Arendt the Holocaust was a failure in human morality that went way beyond political doctrines, something confirmed to her, she said, "when we heard about Auschwitz. Before that we said, well, one has enemies, that is natural. Why shouldn't people have enemies? But this was different. It was as if an abyss had opened. Amends can be made for almost anything in politics. But not for this".

(C. Connelly)

**Hannah Arendt (1906 - 1975) was a German-born American political theorist. Many of her books and articles have had a lasting influence on political theory and philosophy. Arendt is widely considered one of the most important political thinkers of the 20th century.**

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