

# THE DELEGATE

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

July 2021

Issue 5/21

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### ICTU CALLS FOR WORKERS' VOICE ON HOSPITALITY WORKING GROUP

Following a recent meeting with An Taoiseach and other Government Ministers, Congress General Secretary Patricia King has called on the Government to ensure that the workers' voice be heard on the hospitality sector working group.

In a follow-up letter to An Tánaiste Leo Varadkar, Ms. King stated;

*'As you will recall ICTU, in the interests of constructive engagement and in the absence of any practical solutions from the sector representatives, put forward for your consideration a proposal to include:*

- 1. The immediate rollout of a vaccine offer to all over 18-year olds in line with current practise in other European countries with particular reference to the Netherlands model.*
- 2. The introduction of an Antigen Testing programme on a continuous basis possibly modelled on the meat factories experience.*
- 3. That all aspects of the 'Return To Work Safely' Protocol be implemented within the sector to ensure the safety of workers in their workplace.*
- 4. That a Monitoring Group with Public Health and Health and Safety Authority oversight be established without delay to oversee the measures at 2 and 3 above.*

*At the conclusion of the meeting, it was agreed to form a Working Group to assist in the development of overall solutions for the sector given current public health advice.*

*While I understand Government have already made a definitive decision relating to the proposal at 1 above which is welcome, we believe it is imperative that the workers' voice be heard in the Working Group. We would request that an ICTU representative be included in the work of this group.'*

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### BRAY TOWN RECOVERY TEAM

A Trade Union worker representative will be involved as a member of the Bray Town Recovery Team which has been set up by Bray Municipal District, WCC, as a post Covid-19 initiative.

The Team is to involve numerous stakeholders, representing sectors such as retail, tourism, youth, community and disability. The terms of reference to include; supporting local business, improving the community and visitor experience, and communications.

The Council requested to be involved as the local representative body of workers who are important stakeholders. In addition to worker issues, such as ensuring proper implementation of the 'Return To Work Safely' Protocol, the Trade Union representative will also have a close interest in the wider social agenda (such as children and disability) and the environment.

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## CONGRESS HIGHLIGHTS P.U.P. AND REDUNDANCY ISSUES TO GOVERNMENT

"The ICTU **cannot and will not** support the Government plans to cut the income of some of the lowest income workers in the State. When and how the PUP [Pandemic Unemployment Payment] is withdrawn must be based on concrete evidence and not on baseless and frankly insulting claims that workers 'do not want to return' to their jobs"

The above position was formally reiterated by Congress General Secretary Paricia King in a letter to An Tánaiste Leo Varadkar following an earlier meeting with Ministers and representatives of business organisations held on the 1st June last.

Whilst welcoming the progress that has been made in reopening the economy over recent months Ms. King stated that even the most optimistic amongst us would acknowledge that some major sectors will still not have re-opened fully by the 7th September next.

"It is very likely therefore that workers in sectors such as aviation, hospitality, arts and entertainment will still find themselves subject to public health restrictions and hence excluded from the employment and to be on reduced incomes. Planning to cut the PUP in those circumstances demonstrates little or no regard for the situation of these workers."

She further pointed out that the Government's intentions in this regard have to be contrasted with the myriad of supports, schemes and arrangements in place, and planned, to subsidise private business.

"While ICTU has always advocated and supported the need for the measures to support employment it is, quite frankly, deplorable that the Government has chosen not to afford an equivalent consideration for low income workers. At the very least, the Government must immediately put in place the mechanisms to ensure that no workers under public health restrictions suffers any loss in income."

On the matter of redundancy, Congress noted the Government's intention to continue the extension of the non-application of Section 12 of the Redundancy Payments Act, 1969, until the 30th September, and the General Secretary stated;

"The continuation of this measure will deny workers their entitlement to claim their statutory entitlement to redundancy payments where such arises. It is yet another mechanism utilised to serve the interests of the private business sector, with scant regard for interests of workers. This will be further exacerbated if measures are not put in place to afford redundant workers full credit for all reckonable service inclusive of the pandemic period."

Ms. King advised that Congress expected An Tánaiste, as a matter of urgency, to set out proposals as to how these issues will be satisfactorily rectified and that equity of treatment will prevail. She concluded her letter as follows;

"It took a pandemic to shed light on the many failings in how the State protects workers' living standards in the context of a temporary loss of earnings. And it also highlighted how many frontline and essential workers' were underpaid and undervalued.

Ireland's labour market was facing major weaknesses and challenges before the pandemic. Many of these have been exacerbated by the pandemic. It is our firm view that these can best and in fact can only be addressed by ensuring decent pay for every worker through collective bargaining by trade unions of their choice, radical reform of the social security system in the form of a shift away from our meagre flat-rated income supports to pay-related benefits, as well as the enhanced provision of comprehensive universal public services, in line with the services provided in other high-income European countries."

(Congress)

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## **AMBASSADOR OUTLINES ISRAELI VIOLENCE IN OCCUPIED PALESTINE**

**"Last week, our people marked the 54th year of a decades long racist oppression. Since the start of Israel's colonial occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip and Golan Heights, the supposedly temporary occupation has been entrenching and institutionalising an apartheid system of oppression of the Palestinian people. I am here today to brief you on the ever-worsening and unstable situation on the ground. There is no accountability for this illegal occupation's crimes and no sight on the horizon of a political process to bring it to an end."**

In a vivid and stark outline of the situation confronting the people of Palestine on a daily basis, ambassador Dr. Jilan Wahba-Abdalmajid addressed a special meeting of the Council (remotely) on Tuesday 22nd June 2021. She detailed the current situation since the recent ceasefire but pointed out that the violence continues as Israel's occupying forces and extremist settlers persist with countless human rights violations and war crimes against the Palestinian people. "All evidence points to the fact that Israel's extrajudicial killings of Palestinians are not just arbitrary incidents, but rather part of a systematic pattern of policies designed to control the occupied population through violence, repression and fear." she said.

She drew attention to the continued confiscation of Palestinian homes, lands and properties as Israel, the occupying Power, accelerates the forced transfer of Palestinians and its settlement colonisation schemes, especially in and around occupied East Jerusalem. "It is beyond apparent by now that this is all part of a systematic, deliberate plan to remove Palestinians - i.e. ethnically cleanse these areas - and de facto annexing the West Bank in grave breach of international law, including the UN Charter, 4th Geneva Convention and UN resolutions, including Security Council resolution 2334 (2016)." she continued.

The ambassador stated that the question to be asked and that is; is Israel held to the same laws and standards as every state? If so, why haven't any of the 800 UN General Assembly resolutions and more than 80 Security Council resolutions been implemented? Why are the Geneva Convention and the Human Rights Declaration not respected?

The ambassador also detailed some of the recent atrocities, such as 15 year old Mohammed Hamayel who was killed with live ammunition in Beita which is another village facing expulsion. Settlers built and expanded an illegal outpost on the stolen land of his village. Ahmed Zahi Dawoud, aged 16, was also shot in the head in the same village near Nablus. Four young Palestinians killed so far defending their land in Beita.

"How can any parents in Occupied Palestine assure their children of their safety, their well-being, their very presence in their homes and land after so many years of this illegal occupation, which continues to destroy, kill and terrorise them without consequence. Decades of inaction have gravely harmed the authority of international law and the credibility of the UN in specific, as the longest military occupation in modern history is permitted to continue running roughshod over all norms, rules and rights with impunity." she added.

Welcoming the ambassador to the meeting, Council President Mary Diskin, noted that Dr. Wahba-Abdalmajid was born in Gaza and has family still living there. Ms. Diskin stated that she watched a recent interview the ambassador did during the most recent attack and it was both moving and frightening to hear the trepidation in her voice as she described ringing home every morning and wondering if her mother would answer her call and it brought home the sheer personal suffering during those horrific days of every Palestinian person, both those at home in Palestine and those living outside of their country.

Dr. Wahba- Abdalmajid commended the Dáil on its support to Palestine and now we need to look at the best way of progressing this support. "Ireland will give great support and encouragement to

people for its stand on the illegal annexation of her country. It is important and it will put Ireland in a good place internationally.", she said.

Many at the meeting spoke particularly of the trauma and mental impact of the continuing conflict on many of the children, and also on giving firm support in solidarity. The Council agreed to consider actions in support of the people of Palestine, including asking Wicklow County Council to adopt a policy, similar to one passed by Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Council, of not using any goods or services from illegal settlements in occupied Palestine.

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### **CALL FOR WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL TO BOYCOTT ISRAELI GOODS AND SERVICES**

The July meeting of the Council agreed to support and campaign for a boycott of the sale of Israeli goods and services as a more tangible way of supporting and highlighting the plight of the Palestinian people.

As part of the campaign the Council called on Wicklow County Council to pass a motion similar to one passed by Dun Laoghaire- Rathdown Council at its June meeting as follows;

*"It is the policy of this council not to purchase goods or services produced or provided, in whole or part (as practicable), from illegally occupied territories by illegal settlers, and that any such contracts should cease as soon as allowed."*

The Council consider that such a firm gesture of international solidarity on a local level in support of a just cause against an internationally recognised apartheid state would be a small but hugely significant statement by Wicklow County Council.

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### **SANCTIONS IMPOSED ON BELARUS**

The EU has imposed sanctions on Belarus. The measures target the economy - specifically potash (a common fertiliser ingredient), tobacco industry exports and petroleum products - but are also aimed at hitting president Alexander Lukashenko and his allies. It follows the detention of journalist Roman Protasevich, who was arrested on the 23rd May after Belarusian flight controllers ordered a Ryanair jet to land in Minsk. Meanwhile, Protasevich and his Russian girlfriend Sofia Sapega have been moved from jail to house arrest.

The Council resolution condemning this state-sponsored hijacking of an Irish registered aircraft and calling on the Irish government to press for the release of Protasevich and Sapega was forwarded to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney.

In a reply on behalf of the Minister, it was pointed out that Ireland has strongly condemned the actions of the Belarusian authorities and, along with our EU partners, has called for the immediate, full and unconditional release of Mr. Protasevich and Ms. Sapega. *"This unacceptable act was a further example of the intensified repression faced by the Belarusian people, civil society, independent media and national minorities."* stated the Minister's Private Secretary, in her letter of the 8th July, and outlined in detail the situation and position of Ireland and our EU partners, as follows;

*"At the European Council meeting on 24 May, EU leaders agreed a set of concrete measures in response to the Lukashenko regime's flagrant disregard for international law. To protect EU aviation security, EU commercial airlines have been advised to avoid Belarusian airspace and Belarusian airlines have been prohibited from EU airspace. Ireland called for an independent and transparent investigation into the incident by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and we look forward to their report. Criminal investigations are also underway in Lithuania (as the destination of the flight) and Poland (as the location of registration of the airplane). Leaders also agreed to impose additional sanctions to make those responsible for the ongoing repression, and the forced landing of the Ryanair aircraft, accountable for their actions."*

*Sanctions play a role in delivering international accountability and as a signal of solidarity with the*

*Belarusian people. EU foreign ministers agreed a fourth package of targeted sanctions during the 21 June Foreign Affairs Council, bringing the total number of those sanctioned to 166 individuals, including Lukashenko himself, and 15 economic entities. Those targeted include those responsible for the ongoing repression, the coercive forced landing of the Ryanair aircraft on 23 May, the falsification of the August 2020 Presidential election results in Belarus, and those supporting or profiting from the Lukashenko regime. The EU has also imposed carefully calibrated economic sanctions that target the wallets of the regime. Ireland is playing a constructive role at EU-level in our approach to the situation in Belarus and we are open to taking further measures at a later stage should the situation not improve.*

*Ireland stands in solidarity with the Belarusian people in their dignified and staunch defence of their democratic and human rights. The international community have repeatedly expressed their strong concerns regarding the ongoing repression of the Belarusian people by the Lukashenko regime across a range of international fora. Along with our EU and like-minded international partners, we will continue to ensure that international attention remains focused on the appalling human rights situation in Belarus.*

*Despite repeated calls from the international community, the Belarusian authorities have shown no willingness to investigate violations of human rights in their own country and have permitted the security forces to act with impunity. Ireland and the EU have been clear that impunity breeds violence and we have taken a number of concrete steps to bring international accountability.*

*Ireland has made our deep concerns at the situation in Belarus clear in UN Security Council discussions on the matter. Ireland worked constructively to ensure the successful adoption of an EU-led resolution at the Human Rights Council that expanded the mandate of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to investigate the over two thousand reported cases of human rights violations in Belarus. The High Commissioner's team have begun their work, which will be complemented by the NGO-led International Accountability Platform for Belarus and investigations in EU Member States under the concept of Universal Jurisdiction.*

*We regret that the Belarusian authorities continue to deny the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus access to the country in her official capacity. Until she is given the opportunity to complete her important work, we will continue to support the renewal of her mandate, including during the ongoing forty-seventh session of the Human Rights Council. We will also continue to call on the regime to implement the recommendations of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) expert investigator, Professor Wolfgang Benedek, which are outlined in his November 2020 Moscow Mechanism Report.*

*Ireland and our EU partners continue to support the Belarusian people as best we can by redirecting EU funding away from the regime and towards civil society. Member States have also coordinated on efforts taken at national level to provide support. For our part, Ireland contributed national funds to two projects through the European Endowment for Democracy that seek to protect the human rights and media freedom of the Belarusian people. In a further signal of support, on 28 May the EU Commission announced a €3 billion economic support package for a future democratic Belarus.*

*Our focus remains on pressing the Lukashenko regime to protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Belarusian people, to adhere to their international commitments and to engage in a meaningful national dialogue that leads to fresh elections that are free and fair. That is what we will continue to do."*

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### **CONGRESS WELCOMES STATUTORY SICK PAY**

Responding to Government approval of the design of the statutory sick pay scheme, ICTU General Secretary Patricia King pointed out that Ireland is one of just a handful of wealthy countries globally that does not guarantee workers paid sick leave from their employer and that this is about to change.

"As a result of the ICTU's public awareness-raising campaign on a root cause of Covid-19 infection clusters in meat plants and our calls to make sick pay a workers' right, and our engagement with Government on the details of the scheme, legislation requiring employers to pay their staff when they are too sick to work has been brought forward".

Ms. King added "Legal recognition of employers' duty to their staff during periods of sickness is decades overdue. Unfortunately, it took a global pandemic to bring us to this point today. However, a concern for Congress is the requirement to be with your employer for six months to qualify for sick pay as this has the potential to incentivise some employers to opt for casual employment contracts to circumnavigate their obligation. Also, the qualifying requirement to have your sickness certified by a GP will place a financial burden on workers, who unlike their peers across Europe and in the UK and Northern Ireland have to pay out-of-pocket for primary healthcare."

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

"This legislation has overwhelming public support. Pollsters found 9 in 10 (87%) people believe workers should have a legal right to sick pay from their employer. ICTU will continue our engagement with TDs and Senators as the Bill makes its passage through the Oireachtas to ensure any unintended consequences are ironed out and that the new scheme is fit for purpose."

Ms. King said: "Having won agreement to introduce statutory sick pay our priority is now to ensure that the design of the new scheme will improve working conditions and protect workers' health and income, without undermining or displacing current collectively agreed sick pay schemes."

(Congress: 9th June 2021)

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### **LEARNING TO LOVE AN IMPERFECT PROTOCOL**

Northern Ireland's Unionists are extremely angry right now, with some reason. A Conservative government and indeed movement with which many sympathised - just trying to 'get Brexit done' - has ended up building a barrier down the Irish Sea.

That has cut Unionists off from the rest of the United Kingdom, only lightly practically but much more important symbolically - challenging their own sense of statehood and nationality in a changing world.

They have, to be quite honest, more than enough to complain about. It's not just that they have joined the long list of people betrayed by Boris Johnson, a roll call of rather dog-eared promises and hopes that will only grow longer over time.

It's that the British government went over their heads, as it has done so many times before, in negotiating with Dublin and Brussels, before presenting Unionism's leaders with something almost impossible to sell to their activists, and to Loyalism's more intractable adherents on the streets.

The point of principle is also an important one: why should Antrim and Armagh be treated any differently to Sussex and Surrey? If you are an employer in Northern Ireland, you should in principle have every right to move your or other people's goods, within your own country, just the way you like.

It's not rocket science.

That said, principle isn't everything, and there are many ways in which everyone in Northern Ireland may come to embrace (or, perhaps, grudgingly accept) the Protocol. The world is full of intolerable injustices, and many are close to home in a Northern Ireland that is still riven by divide and distrust: are sausage imports and (admittedly a lot of) form-filling really as important as they seem in the abstract?

One would think not, when set against the entirety of the infrastructure which the Brexit settlement lends to Northern Ireland. The Protocol unlocked everything, after years under Theresa May spent trying to batter down a door not so much nailed shut as bricked up and painted over.

It relied on a kind of magical thinking that Northern Ireland could at one and the same time live within the customs union that helps constitute the UK, but also follow most of the rules of the single market as they pertain to the trade in physical goods.

That meant, bingo: a full house. Goods could flow freely around the island of Ireland without the UK having to join the EU's own customs union, or shadow lots of its regulations. Everyone was happy: except Northern Ireland's exporters and especially importers, who would have to prove that everything was compliant with EU rules, and where everything was going to and coming from.

That full bingo card also conjured up or preserved a huge number of other benefits for the region, some new, some established. Northern Ireland now exists as a kind of half-way or clearing-house between the UK and the EU, and given a moment's thought that might make a lot of people very rich indeed.

Everyone born in Northern Ireland can claim an EU passport, and move around the EU as they wish; Northern Ireland's universities are going to continue as an integral part of the EU's student placement scheme, Erasmus, and they get all this without paying into the EU's budget at all. It really is a unique solution, and it explains why the Europeans become so exasperated when under pressure over the Protocol: they feel they've carved out a special set of advantages for Northern Ireland, not obligations.

It's also possible that the Protocol can be amended, so that it's less burdensome and bureaucratic - and so it offends sovereignty and statehood rather less. If Northern Ireland importers source more products from the Republic, and narrow down the range of goods they are importing from the EU, that will mean checks are streamlined and make the Protocol easier to work.

Although the UK is unlikely to accept EU veterinary and sanitary rules in full, a set of baselines could be established that, yes, cramp its style somewhat in future trade talks elsewhere - but at least can be presented as a joint, not a 'European', set of rules.

Then there is the reality of the Protocol's detailed provisions, rather than its mythology. Its actual text makes blindingly clear, throughout, that Northern Ireland remains a part of the UK's customs territory, and that it will take a full part in that country's new trade deals. It is explicitly designed to protect the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement of 1998, a document that itself not only sets in stone Unionist representation within the governance of Northern Ireland but the need for popular consent if there is to be any change in its constitutional status.

That reality, and the Protocol's true advantage, come together when you take a look at what can be gained by being inside the UK's customs area but the EU's single market. Northern Ireland's exports to the Republic have recently been surging. Although the numbers are likely to have been distorted by recovery from one low point of the Covid crisis in the spring of 2020, in the first four months of this year Northern Ireland's exports southwards rose by 60% (to £859m).

If the Protocol can be made to work, investors the world over will be casting a very interested eye over Northern Ireland as a new trading hub that could allow them to export as much as they like to both the UK and the EU. As one of the critical providers of high-end, specialist jobs in the area, that makes a big difference - and will be another reason why Unionist politicians may find their constituents urging them to keep the Protocol, not tear it up.

Last and by no means least, Unionists should consider whether this row could leave them altogether

high and dry. Northern Ireland is changing. More moderate and non-aligned voices are stirring themselves: the cross-community Alliance Party has been on the rise for some time. Unionist parties together can only just about command half the vote, something that the past few weeks of chaos with the Democratic Unionist Party won't have helped much.

Administering yet another kicking to the Protocol might not help them very much when voters respond 'well, you were the people who wanted Brexit in the first place'. That is an especially apposite warning to Unionist parties when not only did Northern Ireland that voted by 56% to 44% to stay in the EU, but polling reveals that fairly large minorities of Ulster Unionist Party and DUP voters also voted Remain.

Sound and fury over the Protocol are all very well. They are understandable. It is right for Unionism to make itself heard beyond all doubt. But strategy, diplomacy, economics and elections all point in the other direction: learning to live with the Protocol might be better than the alternatives.

(Glen O'Hara - The New European)

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## LOOKING BACK 1

### *'A Great ½ Day Out' - the IDAA, Greystones, May 1912*

May Day 1912 was an important milestone in the lives of draper's assistants and other retail workers. The 'Shop Act, 1912' became a reality from that date. The Irish Drapers' Assistants Association (IDAA – a forerunner of MANDATE) had campaigned on the issue since the union was established in 1901. The Act empowered Borough and Urban District Councils to adopt bye-laws regulating the trading hours of retail establishments. Some towns adopted the Act with alacrity, others were laggards, and some only adopted it partially, in that it applied to some streets and not others. Nevertheless, the provision of a weekly half-day was a significant break-through for all workers. For most workers, there were then no 'paid holidays' other than the four 'Bank Holidays' introduced in 1871, augmented by 'St. Patrick's Day' in Ireland from 1903. A weekly half-day was still being fought for, and denied, to tens of thousands of Irish workers forty years later.

To 'celebrate its enforcement' and to mark their first 'half-holiday' under the provisions of the Act, the Dublin Branch of the IDAA organised a visit to Greystones, County Wicklow, on Saturday 4 May 1912. Leaving by two trains from Westland Row (Pearse Station), almost 1,000 members and friends attended. On their arrival at Greystones each was presented with a 'well turned out little souvenir of the occasion, which contained a breezily-written article by the General Secretary (Michael J. O'Lehane 1873-1920) detailing the agitation made in Dublin and throughout the country for the Shop Hours Act ...'.

The day was overcast but warm, most enjoyed the local beaches and walks, whilst others drove to 'Delgany and other beauty spots in the vicinity'. Teas were served at intervals from 4 o'clock in the 'Grand Hotel' and from about 6.45 a dance took place in the ballroom to the music of 'Madam Murray's string orchestra'. An 'elaborate concert programme was also given' which featured one of the



country's best known sopranos, Miss Agnes Treacy, who was 'applauded to the echo and was generous in her encores'. IDAA members also contributed musical items. Earlier, a telegram had been sent to the former President of the Board of Trade (by then First Lord at the Admiralty) which read:

'On behalf of some thousands of Dublin shop assistants, who are today enjoying the great boon of a weekly half-holiday, we desire to send you greetings, and to thank you most sincerely for the great part which you played in making it possible.

J. Rankin President, B. Ring Secretary, Dublin Branch Irish Drapers' Assistants Association'

The reply, received by telegram, read:

'It gives me the greatest pleasure to have been of some use in securing this boon of a weekly half holiday and proper meal times for the shop assistants of Great Britain and Ireland. Long may they prosper to enjoy it.

Winston S. Churchill'

The revellers, celebrating that revolution in their lives, were back in Dublin for 10.20 pm: like Cinderella, in time to be under the roof of their master by midnight. The obnoxious 'living-in' system, to which thousands of workers were still subjected to, remained to be vanquished.



'On the rocks'

Some members of the Dublin Ladies Committee enjoying the weekly half holiday at Greystones.

Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> May 1912

'The Drapers Assistant' June 1912

(Identifiable: Far Right)

Mary (Cissie) Calahan (1876-1948) suffrage and trade union Campaigner, President, Irish Union of Distributive Workers And Clerks 1921-1923, the first woman to hold that office, ILPTUC executive member 1922-1923

(Charlie Callan: Labour Historian)

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## LOOKING BACK 2

Helen Chenevix (1886 - 1963), President of the Irish Trade Union Congress (ITUC) in the year 1950 - 51, was only the second woman to have held that position, the other being Louie Bennett with whom she was associated in many causes. Chief among these were women's rights, trade unionism and international peace. Along with Louie Bennett she founded the Irish Women's Suffrage Federation in 1911 and was led by her concern for women's political rights into fighting for their economic rights. She became an official of the Irish Women Worker's Union after it separated from the ITGWU in 1917 and succeeded Louie Bennett as Secretary of the IWWU in 1955.

Helen was an active IWWU delegate to this Council from at least the AGM in January 1950 (we have no attendance records prior to this) until 1957, and indeed chaired the Council meeting on occasions.

We reprint below extracts from Helen Chenevix's presidential address to the Irish Trade Union Congress, 25th July 1951 - 70 years ago this month;

*Fellow Delegates - The year that has passed since our last Annual Congress has been one of great activity for all Trade Unions. The rapidly soaring prices of essential commodities have necessitated a vigorous wage campaign, without which the workers' standard of living could not be maintained, much less improved. But until a serious limitation of profits goes hand in hand with wage increases there is little prospect of any real advance. Workers may secure higher wages by dint of persistent pressure, with or without recourse to strikes, but they are still denied any share in the financial management of the industries sustained by their labour, with the consequent tendency to carry on industry as a 'cold war' rather than a joint enterprise in which the interests of all participants is fully recognised. Amidst the clamour of wage claims the Unions need to work out a long term policy aimed at securing an effective measure of control ...*

### **... Trade Union Unity.**

*The urgency and the universality of the organised workers' task, and the difficulties which may be anticipated in the coming year, make it the more regrettable that Irish trade union unity seems as far off as ever. For this we cannot blame the Irish Trade Union Congress which adheres to its faith in unity for the whole of Ireland. We are proud that our Congress is one of the links that bind together Irish men and women in all parts of our country, and glad that preparations are being made to strengthen that link by a fresh development of Congress activity in Northern Ireland. Unity cannot be achieved in a moment, but given goodwill and an honest determination to see the other person's point of view, there is no reason why there should not be closer co-operation between separated Trade Unionists, leading eventually to full unity ...*

### **... Equal Pay.**

*During the past two years the International Labour Office have focussed the attention on the question of 'equal pay for equal work' as between men and women. This is a problem which bristles with difficulties, and cannot be solved off-hand either by the academic feminist who has never entered a factory or the male worker who is quite content to see the woman who works beside him drawing half, or less than half, his wage. One thing is clear. Whatever should be the basis*

*of wage standards, it should not be the sex of the worker. If a man and a woman are doing exactly the same type of work with equal skill and training, there is no justification for paying one of them less than the other. At the same time certain lines of demarcation may have to be drawn between men's and women's work, arising out of the fact that most men who enter industry enter it for life, whereas only a minority of women remain in industry permanently. The whole question demands the serious consideration of both men and women workers, to both of whom the exploitation of women as cheap labour is disastrous.*

### **... Social Legislation.**

*In the matter of social legislation the Republic still lags behind the North. Mr Norton's Welfare Plan was never given the chance to come into operation, and Dr. Browne's Mother and Child Scheme was rejected with dramatic suddenness. The Trade Union Congress, being concerned with the industrial rather than the political side of the workers' movement, is not called upon to comment on all the aspects of these happenings, but it is our concern to uphold the principle that the best medical aid for all who need it and the best care for children and old people should be available to all alike, without distinction of class or income. Our people have too long endured the miseries of the dispensary system, and the poverty that comes with old age. It is a disgrace to any community that a worker in the closing years of his life should be unable to receive a pension connected with his work without at the same time losing his pension from the State, to whose upkeep he has long contributed by at least indirect, if not direct, taxation.*

*There is at the present moment a live interest in Health, connected with the controversies surrounding the Mother and Child Scheme, and in the North, the various problems arising out of the administration of the Health Scheme, still comparatively new. There is also a growing recognition of the fact that our National Health Insurance in the Republic is totally inadequate to tide any worker over in illness, a recognition exemplified in the fact that an increasing number of firms have instituted sickness funds for their workers. Clearly now is the time to press forward, and keep pressing, in this matter of health services. A comprehensive and practical scheme for mothers, infants and school-children would be a good beginning, but the adult worker and the aged need consideration also. We cannot stop short of anything less than a service to include all sections of the community...*

**(Source: National Archives; 'Workers In Union' - Edited by Fergus D'Arcy & Ken Hannigan)**

**We hope to publish a biography of Helen Chevenix in a later issue.**

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