

**Mr Gerry Light**  
**General Secretary**  
**Mandate Trade Union**  
**9 Cavendish Row**  
**Dublin 1**

**02 July 2021**

**Dear Mr Light**

I would like to acknowledge your courtesy in copying me some recent correspondence you received regarding my pending appointment on the oversight committee on the Solas Debenhams' Training Fund.

To avoid any future doubt, I would like to place on record the following:

- Mandate Trade Union approached me regarding participation on said committee, there was never or indeed would there be consideration of either fees or expense.
- I accepted in good faith the request of the Union. I did so as I felt that I might be of some assistance to the majority of ex-Debenhams workers.
- The tone and content of the two pieces of correspondence (one which purports to represent others) is such that I believe that accepting the position on the Committee would act against the best interests of the majority of ex-Debenhams workers. Therefore, please note that I will for this reason alone not be taking up the union's offer.

As to the contents of the correspondence, I state that I have no intention of justifying my actions, the actions of the National Executive Council or Mandate Trade Union, other than to record the fact that the National Executive Council of Mandate Trade Union at all times acted in the best interests of the majority of Debenhams workers in their struggle and continues to do so to this day and in this regard. I wish you every success with the thousands of pending cases against the Liquidators and the "old company" on behalf of these members. I also wish you and the ICTU the best in bringing forward legislation to prevent similar situations occurring in the future.

There are a number of specific and implied criticisms of me personally in both correspondences which at this stage I have noted, but please be aware that I will vigorously defend my name and reputation against unfair and unfounded allegations. I note that one piece of correspondence was copied by the author to a third party a tactic which I believe to be fundamentally unfair and totally unwarranted given that the matter at hand is an internal one proper to Mandate Trade Union.

For many reasons the Debenhams dispute was both difficult and challenging. From an early stage it was clear that some were intent to operate a parallel dispute within the official dispute. On numerous occasions the union was required to issue written instructions as to what was legally permissible principally to protect and maintain the legality of the picket lines. On many occasions decisions and actions were undertaken without any reference to the union whatsoever. I genuinely believe that a more beneficial settlement and an earlier end to the industrial dispute was possible if it were not for those who encouraged and participated in this type of behaviour. A case in point was the potential

deal brokered between the union and the liquidators which contained an offer of over €1m along with the creation of hundreds of permanent retail jobs.

I wish you, the National Executive Council and the majority of ex-Debenhams workers every success for the future. I know that without their union, these workers would have achieved little.

Again, thank you and I hope the Solas Training Committee will be allowed to work in harmony in the best interests of all ex-Debenhams workers.

**Yours sincerely  
& In Solidarity**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John O'Connell', written over the typed text 'Yours sincerely & In Solidarity'.