

THE DELEGATE

Newsletter of the Bray & District Council of Trade Unions

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Issue 10/21

MANDATE ASKS PUBLIC TO SHOW RESPECT AND SUPPORT TO SHOP WORKERS IN RUN UP TO CHRISTMAS

Mandate Trade Union, which represents 30,000 workers in the retail sector, has received worrying reports of increased abuse towards shop workers in recent weeks. The union is calling for customers to respect essential frontline workers, including those working in shops in what is the most stressful time of the year.

Mandate General Secretary Gerry Light explained that Christmas is always a difficult time for retail workers, but the prolonged nature of the Covid-19 pandemic and the recent spike in numbers is clearly exacerbating the stress levels this year.

"We are asking customers to have heightened levels of awareness of the difficulties facing shop workers. Abuse is not part of the job and it costs nothing to show respect and support to the workers who have kept our shelves full throughout the pandemic," said Mr. Light.

He added; "Shop workers have been on the frontline and were the hardest hit cohort during the second and third wave of the virus. There's no doubt that they have been impacted heavily by this current wave too. The least they deserve is a bit of patience and respect."

Mandate has also renewed its call on employers to adopt a zero tolerance approach to the application of all health and safety / shop safety guidelines.

"We have seen videos of customers verbally abusing workers in recent days. Employers must do all they can to support their staff when this happens," said Mr. Light.

"Employers need to ensure that Covid guidelines are adhered to in order to protect the health of their staff and the public principally by ensuring that shop workers are not put in the firing line by requesting customers to wear masks or to social distance. It is the employers responsibility to ensure there is adequate hand sanitizer and that there are no overcrowding issues," said Mr. Light.

(Source: Mandate - 7th December)

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UNIONS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR TO SEEK PAY INCREASES IN 2022

The Private Sector Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, in conjunction with the Nevin Economic and Research Institute, has issued guidance to unions on pay bargaining in 2022. The guidance advises unions that they should seek pay increases in the range of 2.5 to 4.5 per cent in the coming year.

The guidance takes account of:

- Strong and rapid economic growth is expected in 2022 with personal consumption growing very strongly next year as pent-up demand increases and household savings unwind (this projection assumes minimal disruption from Covid-19 restrictions).
- Within a tightening Labour Market, the economic-wide and private sector job vacancy rates

(JVR) of 1.5 and 1.6 are at their highest since 2008. The Central Bank and the European Commission project that compensation per employee will increase by 4.5% and 5% respectively.

- On inflation, the Nevin Institute is of the view that inflation will peak in the fourth quarter of 2021 before settling back to circa 2% in the second half of 2022 and a average of close to 2% thereafter.
- 'Inflation plus Productivity', based on Department of Finance forecasts will be close to 3.5%. A tightening labour market affords workers the opportunity to obtain wage growth in excess of the long-run average.

(Source: ICTU - 13th December)

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MARGARET SECURES CHAIR OF CONGRESS WOMEN'S COMMITTEE



The Council achieved a notable success with the election of Margaret Coughlan as chair of the influential Women's Committee (Republic) of the Congress of Trade Unions this month.

Nominated for the position by the Council, Margaret was unanimously elected to the position, the first time such a position has been held by a representative from the Council. "The fact that Margaret was elected unopposed is clear testimony to the high esteem that she is held within the trade union movement generally and particularly for her tireless work in advancing and encouraging women to be active in their workplace and within their trade union", Mary Diskin, Council President, stated in congratulating Margaret on her success.

The role of the ICTU Women's Committee includes the co-ordination of policy or action by unions representing women workers on matters relating to the interests of women, and the investigation of problems arising from the employment of women in industry, services and the professions.

A resident of Wicklow town, Margaret is branch secretary of the Wicklow health branch of Fórsa Trade Union. This is her third term as chair having previously been nominated by her union. She first became a trade union member at 18 when she worked in a non-union company and had to sneak in to

Liberty Hall to pay her union dues. Since then she has been a trade union member wherever she has worked, including at one stage being a member in the printers' union, and has always been active. She joined IMPACT (now Fórsa) twenty-four years ago and became a member of the branch committee in her first year of membership.

She is a strong advocate for a greater role for women in unions and was instrumental in the setting up of a leadership course for women by the Congress of Trade Unions which has proved very successful in recent years. She was supported in this by Congress General Secretary and fellow Wicklow woman, Patricia King.

"We have so many talented and capable women in the Movement but some are just lacking the confidence to become more involved. I firmly believe that no matter how educated or otherwise you are, if you have your heart in the job then you will succeed. That is what we need to instill in to many of our women members who can bring so much to the cause." said Margaret.

The Council is also represented on the Women's Committee by Muireann Dalton (Mandate) who is serving her first term, which is for the period 2021 to 2023.

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WICKLOW LOSES A GREAT LABOUR AND TRADE UNION MAN



The Council is saddened by the death of Liam Kavanagh, former Labour councillor, TD, MEP and Minister, who passed away peacefully in his 87th year on the 13th December, after a long illness.

A nephew of James Everett, Liam was first elected to Dáil Éireann for the Labour Party in the 1969 general election and retained his seat through a further eight general elections, until narrowly missing out in 1997. He also served three times as an MEP, being appointed in 1973 and 1977, and winning election from Leinster in 1979.

His Ministerial service began in 1981 when he was appointed Minister for Labour and the Public Service, and he took over as Minister for the Environment in 1983 remaining in that office until 1986. His time in the Department of the Environment will always be remembered for the huge investment in

social housing, when he clearly put his commitment to social justice in to action, with record numbers of social houses built.

"One of Liam's great legacies is the thousands of council houses he built during his tenure as Minister for the Environment in the 1980's. In the worst of economic times, Liam ensured a comprehensive building programme was put in place and delivered on. His example is one that shows what the State can do when the political will is there to deliver public housing," said Labour Party leader Alan Kelly, who described Mr. Kavanagh as a 'giant of Wicklow politics over many decades'.

"Liam Kavanagh was of enormous assistance and support to this Council over the years both as a Wicklow TD and as a Minister. He met the Council on numerous occasions to discuss whatever issue we had; be it unemployment, housing, health, education or whatever, and he gave us the benefit of his knowledge, advice and support every time. He was a true Labour and Trade Union man to the bone. He was unique in that as a politician he never lost his sense of modesty and decency, and that is all you can ask of any person." said Kieron Connolly, Council Secretary.

The Council extends condolences to his wife Margaret, his daughter Rosemary, grandchildren and extended family.

'Ar dheis Dé go raibh a h'anam dílis'

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THE FOOTBALL CLUB MAKING A STAND FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

On October 14, a couple of days before its local teams Lazio and Roma took on the Serie A giants of Inter and Juventus, a long-awaited murder trial was about to begin in Rome. Four senior Egyptian military officials were to stand accused of killing Italian student, Giulio Regeni.

Or so everyone thought, apart from them. The four did not turn up, their lawyers argued that the men did not even know they were supposed to be there, and to further complicate matters, the Egyptian authorities are now refusing to release details of their whereabouts. Finally, the case was kicked back down to a preliminary court, who will decide if the trial can resume.

Yet despite the frustration - shared by Regeni's family, who declared, "We are not going to give up" - the fallout from the student's death continues to reverberate. This is in part because of the shocking nature of his murder and the strong suspicion that remains of a cover-up. But it's also partly to do with a campaign for justice launched by an obscure amateur football club from Italy's capital.

Regeni was a Cambridge graduate who went to Cairo in October 2015 to research independent trade unions, a sensitive subject for a government which made those unions illegal later that year. His work prompted the authorities to monitor his movements in the belief that he could be a British spy.

In January 2016, Regeni was tortured, electrocuted, beaten beyond recognition and dumped in a ditch by a desert road which runs from Cairo to Alexandria. One of several false explanations for his death was that he was robbed and murdered by a gang of criminals posing as policemen.

Officials in Rome immediately questioned this version of events - Regeni's death bore the hallmarks of state-sponsored murder.

This also prompted Amnesty International to join forces with the Italian Coalition for Civil Liberties, and Antigone, an NGO advocating human rights for prisoners. Collectively, they started a campaign to keep Regeni's case in the public eye and seek the truth about what happened to him.

That campaign began in earnest on April 3, 2016, with a protest by a football team from the third division of an amateur district league in Rome. Before kick-off, Atletico Diritti's players each held up a letter that spelt out "Verita Per Giulio Regeni" ("Truth for Giulio Regeni").

On its own, this may not have amounted to much more than a noble gesture. But it was the catalyst for Serie A and Serie B clubs to get behind the campaign and parade banners before every match played on the weekend of April 23.

The one exception was AS Roma, who didn't want the banners visible when the players came on to the pitch. The club said it would put their Egyptian forward, and future Liverpool star, Mohamed Salah, in an awkward position.

But football gave the campaign momentum. No easy feat for a bunch of amateurs. Then again, Atletico Diritti is anything but an ordinary club.

Translated, it means Athletic Rights and the squad is made up of prisoners, detainees, refugees and students. The team's shirt sponsor is Made In Jail, an arts co-operative based at Rebibbia Prison in Rome.

Images of Atletico Diritti playing at Campo Gerini, a dusty, clay pitch on the outskirts of the Eternal City, have been used countless times around the world. You can buy one of the pictures in the form of a 400-piece jigsaw for €33.

But the team is barely known outside Italy. Atletico Diritti was founded in 2014. It was born out of two action groups, Progetto Diritti and Antigone. "Even when I was younger I was interested in politics and criminal justice," says club president Susanna Marietti, who is also national co-ordinator for Antigone and conducts research into European criminal justice systems.

"There was some overlap with Progetto Diritti, who are mostly made up of lawyers providing legal assistance to migrants. So we decided to collaborate.

"We gave birth to a multi-sport society in which migrants and people in detention could play. But we wanted our teams to be about integration, so we worked with Roma Tre University. The university now runs a human rights and refugee legal clinic within its law faculty.

Soon after, Atletico Diritti was launched, the president of a Roman municipality got in touch, Marietti recalls: "The President was involved in dealing with migrant issues. When she heard about Atletico Diritti, she wanted the team to play in her neighbourhood at Campo Gerini because she felt it sent out a positive message to her community."

Campo Gerini also happens to have one of the most extraordinary backdrops to any football pitch in the world. It is situated on the edge of the Parco degli Acquedotti, which features in *La Dolce Vita*; the film that reinvented Rome. The ruins that you can see in the background from the pitch are from the Felice Aqueduct. Built between 1585 and 1587, 'Acqua Felice' was part of a plan to renovate a water system first built in ancient Rome.

Marietti then received another call, this time from Alessandro Marinelli, a young award-winning filmmaker who wanted to follow the team throughout its first season. The end product was an hour-long documentary, *Frammenti di Libertà* (Fragments of Freedom), that was screened at the Human Rights International Film Festival.

In the film, one of the players talks about fleeing Libya during the 2011 civil war and how he thought he would die on a boat crossing from Tripoli to Italy.

Marietti says; "I remember some players telling us 'this is now my family. This is something that can change my life.' We said, 'no, this alone will not change your life. But we are together, like a family'."

Diritti also have basketball, table tennis and cricket teams. Then there's the women's football team who only ever play at home because they are all doing time in Rebibbia.

The president of the chamber of deputies (the third highest-ranking office in Italy) met the players in 2019 when they hosted a tournament inside the prison.

In April last year, during lockdown, the team captain was given special dispensation to leave Rebibbia, visit the Vatican and meet God's representative on Earth aka football fanatic Pope Francis.

Marietti says the teams can help change perceptions about prisoners, migrants and detainees. Atletico Diritti also provides a platform for campaigns such as Truth for Giulio Regeni. Marietti used that campaign to highlight the fact that hundreds of people disappear in Egypt every year. Some are found murdered, having clearly been tortured.

The men's football side kicked off a new season at a new home in Piazza Bologna, although they did

spend pre-season at Campo Gerini. It lacks the drama of the club's first home, but you won't get skin burns making a sliding tackle.

Although the team may now struggle, having won promotion to the second tier, the fact that Atletico Diretti exists means that every time they walk on to a pitch it's a victory on some level.

Football is often accused of being simultaneously awash with money and morally bankrupt. But, it can be argued, footballers can be more effective than politicians at holding people to account. And sport, more generally, is one of the few things that cuts through increasingly polarised societies.

"Sport is an extraordinary tool for integration and affirmation of the values of solidarity." says Marietti.

"Access to sport must be a right for everyone, whether they are free or in prison. We hope Serie A players take a strong position on issues like discrimination. Yes, they do it sometimes. That's important because it's a message that reaches out to so many people. Football can communicate with every section of society."

For Giulio Regeni's family, the hope is that football taking a stand on the issue will eventually contribute in some way towards closure on the death of their son, and that truth will out.

(Ryan Herman - TNE)

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THE SANTAS WHO SET UP A UNION

One of the most unusual moments in trade union history has emerged from a battered file at the UK's National Archives full of documents about the responsibilities of supermarket Santas and the rights of their elves.

So popular were Father Christmasses 35 years ago that an attempt was made by unemployed actors, part-time bar staff and others donning the redsuit to create a Brotherhood of Father Christmas and Santa Claus trade union.

Their straight-faced application set out to impress the official Register of Friendly Societies, which decided the eligibility of would-be-unions in the 1960s, by requiring members to "to endeavour to bring the spirit of fantasy to bear on each child's visit". Prospective members were also to be bound "not to make any promises, unless they intend to keep them in reality".

The application was made to the registry in 1969, with voluminous correspondence between the Santas' solicitors and government officials, who were initially fazed by some of the language involved.

One civil servant struck out the word "blah" and added a terse memo describing it as "completely meaningless," while other vetters rejected the first draft because it failed to explain what benefits the union would provide.

The application eventually accepted barred any member of the union from claiming to be the sole and genuine Father Christmas, but appointed an executive director with the title of Super-Santa and a treasurer called Sterling Santa.

The registry was absorbed into the Financial Services Authority in 2001 but the BFCSC seems to have gone the way of most smaller and odder trade unions by then.

"The register does not go behind the motive of a society," said an FSA spokesman. "But we have to receive annual proof of accounts, which we chase up. If, after a certain time, we still don't hear anything, we can deregister them."

The more unusual groups often faded out after a couple of years when the individual who was their driving force died, got tired, or found some other hobbyhorse, he added.

Katie Norgrove of the National Council of Archives, said: "Who would have guessed that hidden in a government file were the rules for a proposed trade union for Father Christmasses? We thought it was

an April Fool, but it's the real thing."

(The Guardian - Dec 2004)

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UNEMPLOYED 'HUNGER MARCH' TO RATHDRUM - 85 YEARS AGO

If you Google it, you will note that it takes about 35 minutes to drive and 7 hours 40 minutes to walk (if that's your preference!) the 38.6 kilometres from Bray to Rathdrum. For any of you that know the main route you have a fair idea of what's involved, straightforward enough with decent enough roads, in this day and age.

Well, eighty-five years ago, just after midnight on Sunday 3rd January 1937, between 50 and 70 unemployed men left Bray on a march to Rathdrum in protest against delays in giving home assistance to about 350 men who had been employed on relief schemes during the Christmas period.

The march was organised by the Bray Unemployed Workers' Association, who claimed they should have received home assistance on Monday, 28th December, instead of Thursday, 7th January.

The marchers were led by Luke O'Connor, Chairman of the Association, from 6 Castle Street, Bray, and Séan Dunne, Secretary, from Killarney Road. Other members of the committee were; Thomas Murphy (Wolfe Tone Square), William Kearney (15 Cill Mhaintain Park), Patrick Flanagan (13 St. Kevin's Square), Andrew Mooney (Jones's Terrace) and James Jones (Wolfe Tone Square).

Before leaving Mr. O'Connor told reporters that on the 23rd December about 350 men had received 25 shillings apiece for three days' Christmas work on relief schemes, and that as a result of that they had not since received any home assistance. He maintained that they were entitled to home assistance from Wicklow Board of Health and they intended to make a protest that morning at a meeting of the Committee of Rathdrum Board of Assistance. They would also be putting in a demand for home assistance in addition to the 'dole' for married men with large families.

Mr. O'Connor said that if there were any reasonable chance that their demands would be granted they would ask leave to rest the night at the Union and march back to Bray on Tuesday, when they intended to hold a public meeting on their return. About 30 men have said that if their demands were not met they would ask to be allowed to stay at the Union indefinitely. He also said that the march was non-political, as the men belonged to various parties.

The marchers were preceded by an advance party under Michael Fitzpatrick, of Wolfe Tone Square, with a pony trap which carried provisions for the journey. These consisted of 2 lb. of tea, 12 lb. of sugar, 4 lb. of butter, 6 lb. of homemade jam, 14 lb. of cooked meat, 26 loaves, 6 tins of milk, 500 Woodbine cigarettes and 6 oz. of tobacco. A collection for the provisions had been made among the shopkeepers and the general public of Bray.

The men left Bray in an orderly manner and there was a large force of gardai on duty when they started, under Superintendent M. A. O'Reilly and Det-Sergt. J. McDonald. A car load of detectives accompanied the march all the way (Det-Sergt. McDonald and Detective-Officers E. White, J. Kelly, J. Dillon and B. Walsh). There were also garda patrols along the way.

Banners carried read; 'Bray Hunger Marchers', 'Work or Full Maintenance', and 'Stop Eviction of the Unemployed'.

At Kilmurphy the men were joined by Mr. M. Power, Chairman of the Dublin Committee of the Unemployed Rights Association, and Mr. T. Purcell, one of the committee, who had travelled from Dublin. Several unemployed men joined along the way, and the party was 70 strong when it had gone six miles out of Bray.

The route of the march was through Kilmacanogue, Glen-of-the Downs, Kilpeddar, Newtownmountkennedy, Ashford (where the men had breakfast), Rathnew, Glenealy village, and into Rathdrum. The route at that time was 27 miles (43.45 kms).

The marchers reached Newtownmountkennedy about 2.50 am and Ashford before 4.30 am. Most of the men were married and aged between 25 and 30. An *'Irish Independent'* reporter who travelled with the men stated that; "with great determination they forged their way across some wild and hilly country".

Many of them were barefooted, because they could not walk in their worn shoes, which were too tight to allow for comfort. In fact, one young man commenced the journey wearing his sister's shoes (size 4), but before long he had to discard them and resume the march in his socks.

The last five hours of their trek was carried out in a heavy rainfall. However, despite the dreary and bitterly cold morning and the fact that their clothing, saturated with rain, hung heavily around them, they sang marching songs, led by some of their companions playing mouth organs and melodions. Not one man had fallen out of the ranks during the long march which ended when they reached their Rathdrum destination shortly after 8 am

The hazardous journey, however, commenced to tell its tale. The men, having reached their goal, rested against the railings of the County Home, since, as the gates were closed against them, they could not go inside. The marchers gathered around the gate were becoming restive against the treatment meted out to them at not being admitted. However, the men's leaders displayed great restraint and succeeded in keeping them under control

Just as they had reached the gate Michael Jones, a young man from Boghall Road, had collapsed, thoroughly exhausted. With Francis O'Boyle, from St. Patrick's Square, who also suffered from exhaustion, he was admitted to the institution after being treated by Dr. E. C. MacDermot, medical officer.

As the car conveying them from the doctor's house arrived back at the Home and the gates opened to admit it, the marchers, who had been refused admission without tickets, took advantage of the situation and rushed in behind the car, leaving the attendants, who tried to close the gate against them, helpless.

Their feet blistered, many of them carrying their boots in their hands, a number of the marchers lay down to sleep under the hedges and at the main door of the County Home, until the members of the Board arrived.

Despite their terrible hardships the men were very cheerful, and expressed their gratitude to the nursing Sisters of the institution, the Poor Servants of the Mother of God, who before the Board assembled sent them hot water and milk for their tea.

When the Board met, and after a long discussion, it was decided to grant home assistance to tide the men over until the end of the week. It was decided to send Miss A. M. Byrne, Superintendent Home Assistance Officer, to Bray that day to help Mr. J. Lynch, Home Assistance Officer, in allotting assistance to applicants according to the merits of each case. It was expected that about £100 would be spent in total.

When the decision to pay the men's rail fare back to Bray was taken, the Chairman, Cllr. Edward Byrne (grandfather of John Byrne), who had given the marchers considerable help during the day, stated that this was "not to be taken as the establishment of a precedent."

Mr. T. Byrne, acting secretary of the Board, pointed out that the members would be liable to surcharge, but said he thought they could take it that the surcharge would be remitted.

The following voted in favour of paying the rail fare: - The Chairman, Miss M. Kelly, Messrs. C. M. Byrne, J. Everett, TD, and P. P. O'Reilly. Messrs. D. Condren, J. J. Bourne, P. Doyle and M. Timmons opposed the resolution.

The meeting also decided to request the Government to provide industries in Co. Wicklow, especially in Bray. The Board protested against the Governments "undue delay in the payment of maintenance after the Christmas period."

The marchers who suffered most had their feet bandaged and by authority of the Board the men

spent the day at the Home and were given a hot lunch and tea before they left for their train. Before they left the men applauded the Board's decision and gave three cheers for the newspapermen who had accompanied the march.

A large crowd gathered at Bray railway station to welcome back the marchers, who arrived at 7 o'clock. Cheers were raised when the train drew into the station and relatives and friends surrounded and applauded the men as they left the station.

A procession was formed and, headed by Mr. J. Dunne, a member of Bray Urban District Council, and committee members of the Bray Unemployed Workers' Association, marched through the streets singing popular wartime songs, such as 'John Brown's Body', 'Pack Up Your Troubles', and 'It's A Long Way To Tipperary'.

(K. Connolly. References: *Irish*

Independent and Irish Press)



Early morning outside the closed gates of the County Home, Rathdrum.



A marcher has his foot dressed by comrades
on arrival at Rathdrum.

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WE HOPE YOU ALL HAVE A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY AND SAFE 2022

(PS: It is intended that the next issue of *The Delegate* will be in March 2022)

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