

THE DELEGATE

Newsletter of the Bray & District Council of Trade Unions

November 2021

Issue 9/21

COUNCIL SUPPORTS 'VALUING CARE -RECOGNISING WORK CAMPAIGN'

The Council has called on the Government to urgently address the concerns of workers in the Voluntary and Community sector, where no pay rises have been received in over 12 years and many of them subjected to pay cuts.

Supporting the recently launched 'Valuing Care - Recognising Work' campaign by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions together with the three unions involved in the sector; Fórsa, the INMO and SIPTU, the Council has urged the Taoiseach to meet with the group of unions to discuss the issues raised including seeking to create a collective bargaining platform which fits with the government's commitments to address the low rates of collective bargaining and sectoral social dialogue.

"In a pandemic which has recognised the essential nature of the work of our members, it is incomprehensible that voluntary and community workers, who continue to operate on the front lines of society, providing scarce services to our most vulnerable, are themselves vulnerable whilst in the service of the State, said Council President, Mary Diskin.

"Being the primary funder of such services, but delivered through a fragmented sector, the Government can no longer deny their responsibility for the chronic terms and conditions which exist, including no provision for sick pay or pensions and a serious lack of security of employment, which sees them fall further behind comparative public sector workers, she added.

"In Wicklow alone, we have hundreds of workers across several organisations providing a range of services, such as those for the elderly; homelessness; addiction; mental health; and youth, all of which are unavailable or inaccessible elsewhere. These workers are vital in keeping our communities together and must receive decent pay and working conditions to enable them to continue this valuable work. That is why we, in the broader Trade Union Movement, are fully supportive of this campaign and will be working with unions, workers and other stakeholders locally to ensure that it is a success for those workers.

"We will also be lobbying local politicians to seek their support to work to improve the terms and conditions of workers within their own areas, many of whom are their voters. We hope that we can rely on them to speak out in support of our voluntary and community workers", she concluded.

The Unions representing thousands of workers in the Voluntary and Community Sector have served a 3% pay claim on their employers. The pay claim reflects the terms of the current public sector pay agreement 'Building Momentum'.

From 1987 to 2009 the pay terms of social partnership agreements were typically applied in employments across the Community Sector. This practice ceased following the collapse of the social partnership process in the aftermath of the economic collapse of 2008.

The Voluntary and Community Sector relies almost entirely on its funding from various government departments. The principal funding departments are the Department of Health, the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. While the Government is the principal funder, it has consistently denied any responsibility for the terms and

conditions of employment within the sector.

The adoption of this position by successive administrations has led directly to a highly dysfunctional industrial relations environment where recommendations by the Labour Court and other State Agencies remain unimplemented because the relevant government department will not fund the employer to comply.

The vast majority of workers in the Voluntary and Community Sector have not received any pay rise in over 12 years and, in a lot of cases, workers have endured pay cuts. Conditions of employment for workers in the sector are now well behind comparative workers in the public service. The majority of workers in the sector have no sick pay or pension provision and often have very little security of employment.

The Government is on record expressing their commitment to address the low rate of collective bargaining in the State. There is continuing dialogue taking place at the Labour Economic and Employers Forum (LEEF) to address this issue. There is also a commitment in the Programme for Government to sectoral social dialogue. The Unions believe that ultimately the only viable and sustainable solution to this pay claim and the further multitude of industrial relations issues which bedevil the sector is through the creation of a collective bargaining platform whereby terms and conditions of employment can be addressed and resolved.

* * * * *

ICTU CONFERENCE SUPPORTS DEVELOPMENT OF TRADES COUNCILS COUNCIL MOTION ON YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH IS ALSO ADOPTED

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions Biennial Delegate Conference 2021 adopted a motion which seeks to build on the progress and further develop the capacity of local councils of trade unions within the community.

The conference, a hybrid one - with delegates in attendance in Belfast or remotely - due to Covid-19 restrictions, approved the following motion submitted by Wexford Council of Trade Unions;

'Recognising the progress made under Motion 13 (2015) and acknowledging the work undertaken as part of the Local Trade Union Centre Steering Group, Conference notes the necessity to build on the current momentum within the Trades Council Network (TCN) to continue to make progress and develop the capacity of our movement in the community.

We welcome the recognition, evidenced by previous Conference commitments, that the building of a strong Trades Council structure is crucial to increasing the strength and scope of our movement. However, this commitment must be backed-up with tangible actions and resources delivered locally.

We therefore, call on the incoming Executive Council of ICTU to continue their commitment to the development of Trades Councils, in tandem with other initiatives at local level, and take the necessary actions to do this including;

- *Commissioning a full audit of currently affiliated Trades Councils to identify key resources and personnel required to assist in building capacity locally;*
- *Promote Trades Council affiliation through the local organisational structures of affiliated unions;*
- *Work towards the establishment of a fully functioning Trades Council in every county or local authority area;*
- *Establish a centrally co-ordinated fund from which Trades Councils could seek financial support for specific projects in order to develop and build their capacity;*
- *Identify constitutional or structural changes required to ensure that trade unions encourage their branch/local organisations directly affiliate.'*

Council Motion:

The Council motion on Youth Mental Health (Motion 40) was also unanimously adopted by the Biennial Conference. Proposed by Council delegate, Colm Kinsella, it was seconded by John Douglas (Mandate), who were both in attendance in Belfast. The motion was as follows;

'That recognising the prevalence and impact of mental health on young people, this Conference calls on the Government to demonstrate it's stated commitment towards youth mental health by removing the current barrier whereby people over age 16 cease to get free medicines and prescriptions for their mental illness under the Long Term Illness scheme.'

JOHN AND JUDY RE-ELECTED AS PARTNERSHIP OFFICERS

John O'Brien (SIPTU) has been re-elected as Chairperson of Bray Area Partnership for a further term with, the other Council representative, Judy Coolahan (INTO) also being re-elected as Vice-Chair. Both have represented the Council on the Partnership for a number of years and also served as officers over recent years.

Bray Area Partnership is the local development company working in the greater Bray and Greystones area. The Partnership work to:

- tackle disadvantage and social exclusion in the local area.
- increase equality of access to information, basic services, education, training and employment for the most marginalised local individuals and groups; and
- empower local people and communities to have a say on issues that affect them, identify their own needs and make positive change in their lives.

This work is implemented through support programmes in the areas of community and education, employment services and enterprise development. The Partnership delivers the Government's 'Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) for the greater Bray and Greystones areas.

They work with and provide services for; Unemployed people, Older people, Travellers, People with disabilities, Refugees and asylum seekers, Young people at risk, Parents and carers of young people at risk, Disadvantaged women and men, Homeless people, Ex-offenders, Low income households, Substance misusers, and LGBT people.

COUNCIL MAKES SPC CHANGES

Vice-president Mick Ryan has been nominated by the Council to the Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) for Housing and Corporate Affairs on Wicklow County Council to replace the late Derek Casserly who passed away in July. He moves from the SPC for Economic Development and Enterprise Support, and the Council has nominated Muireann Dalton (Mandate) as his replacement on that committee. Margaret Coughlan (Fórsa) continues in her role on the SPC for Transportation, Water and Emergency Services.

Strategic Policy Committees (SPC's) assist the County Council in the formulation, development and review of policy. The SPC system is intended to give elected councillors and relevant sectoral interests an opportunity for full involvement in the policy making process of the County Council by advising and assisting in its work.

COUNCIL NOMINATES REPRESENTATIVES TO CONGRESS COMMITTEES

The Council has nominated representatives to a number of Congress committees which are currently being reconstituted for the period 2021-2023. In addition, we have nominated Margaret Coughlan for Chair of the Women's Committee (Republic).

Disability Committee:

President Mary Diskin is continuing on this committee for a further term and she will be joined by Margaret Coughlan (Fórsa).

The importance of the work of the Disability Committee is illustrated by the fact that people with disabilities are only half as likely to be in employment as others of working age. Recent research has found that among the EU - 28 countries - Ireland had the fourth lowest employment rate among people with disabilities of working age in 2018 (36%). In addition, employment rates among this group did not benefit from the economic recovery that took place after the financial crash to the same extent as other workers. People with disabilities are also more than twice as likely to experience poverty and deprivation as those without disabilities. The Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath make action more important than ever. There is a large risk that the labour market situation for persons with disabilities will deteriorate further, as happened following the global financial crisis.

The reasons for this are complex. While many employers successfully employ people with disabilities, for others, limited disability know-how and a fear of the unknown can be issues. From the individual's side, research shows other reasons for low employment rates can include poor health, lower levels of education and skills, low expectations, fears around loss of benefits, and practical issues such as transport or work arrangements. The two most important supports identified by people with disabilities who would like to work are flexible work arrangements (something that has perhaps become more attainable since the pandemic) and modified reasonable accommodation. The Government continues to work towards the implementation of a Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities and Congress is on an implementation group.

Global Solidarity Committee:

Margaret Coughlan (Fórsa) has been nominated to the committee. The Council would like to fill the second position available and, therefore, invites other delegates who may be interested, or affiliated unions to submit nominations.

The committee was established by Congress in 1981 to "promote fraternal and co-operative relations with trade unions in other countries for the purpose of furthering the common interests of workers in all countries" (Object F of the Congress Constitution). The principle objective is to ensure that the Decent Work Agenda, International Development and Global Solidarity issues are included in the strategic priorities and core work of Congress and its affiliates.

Women's Committee (Republic):

Margaret Coughlan (Fórsa) and Muireann Dalton (Mandate) have been nominated to the Women's Committee, with Margaret also nominated for the Chairperson position by the Council.

The Women's Committee has the following specific functions under its Constitution:

- The co-ordination of policy or action by affiliated organisations catering for women workers on matters relating to the interests of women;
- The investigation of problems arising from the employment of women in industry, services and the profession;
- The preparation of reports on aspects of women's employment, conditions of work, remuneration etc and such other matters as the Executive Council may from time to time decide;
- The committee may submit to the Executive Council proposals for action and reports on matters of special interests to women workers and shall consider and advise the Executive Council on

any matters referred by it to the Committee.
In addition, the Council is entitled to nominate two representatives to the Congress **Retired Workers Committee (Republic)** and, accordingly, we invite any interested delegate or affiliated organisation to submit nominations.

* * * * *

MARGARET RECEIVES DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD FROM FÓRSA

At a recent national conference of Fórsa, Council trustee Margaret Coughlan was honoured with a distinguished service award in recognition of her 11 years service as a vice-president and her work on the union's executive. Margaret was the longest serving woman to hold the position of vice-president of the Health Division of Fórsa (of which 9 years was when the union was IMPACT).

Reflecting on her time as vice-president and on the union's executive, Margaret considered her main role and achievement was in securing funding to get things done within the Health Division, particularly funding for training for the championing of people with disability.

* * * * *

COUNCIL LINKS UP WITH IRISH SECOND-LEVEL STUDENTS UNION

The Council recently participated in the Irish Second-Level Students Union's (ISSU) Wicklow regional officers' training when Kieron Connolly (Secretary) ran a one-hour activist workshop focussing on campaigning, communicating, lobbying and negotiation. The training was due to take place in Bray on Friday 19th November but had to be held remotely at short notice due to Covid-19 issues.

The ISSU is the national student representative body for second-level students, of which there are close to 380,000 students in education at this level. Membership of the ISSU is through school student councils and currently they have 500 student councils in membership - close to 70% of all second-level schools. The Union work on the principles of democracy, collective voice, empowerment, equality and fairness.

It is the aim of the ISSU to encourage more students to engage in activism and empower them to speak directly to their teachers, principals and boards of management to make the school experience more positive and inclusive for all students.

The Congress contribution to the ISSU Regional Officer Training, of which there were 23 events taking place across 19 locations in November, was to provide a one-hour Activist workshop at as many of these events as possible. This is part of the programme to develop strong working relations between ISSU and the local trade union movement, whilst ensuring that our movement is visible and accessible to students and young workers.

It is hoped that these workshops will encourage and inspire students to identify issues of concern and take action in their own school. The aims of the workshop are to:

- Introduce students to the local trade union movement;
- Raise awareness amongst students of the role and activities of the trade union movement, nationally and locally;
- Draw parallels between the trade union movement and their own organisation, at national and local levels;
- Encourage students to become active in their own environment by using our experiences and successes (activism and campaigning) to illustrate the importance of activism;
- Provide students with information and opportunities to practice skills in the areas of communications, campaigning, lobbying and negotiation.

The long-term aim for ISSU is to secure a student representative role on the boards of management

of each school locally and to be included as an equal partner by the Department of Education and the Higher Education Authority on issues of interest to second-level students.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions has been working with the ISSU for just over a decade during which they have developed a close co-operative and collaborative working relationship. The aim of Congress is to develop a long-term framework agreement with ISSU which strengthens both movements through co-operation, develops strong working relations at national and local level, and introduces students at second-level to the role and importance of the trade union movement. According to OECD research, the rates of second-level students working in Ireland, is amongst the highest in the OECD group of countries. In a recent skills academy workshop, approximately 70% of students indicated they worked between 12 to 20 hours per week during school term.

* * * * *

AND FINALLY . . .

"Why do we still hear laments for the Germans who died attempting to flee over the wall but almost none for the countless refugees who have drowned in the Mediterranean in recent years, turning the sea into a giant grave? Why is it that the opening of the border in 1989 was something wonderful, but today voices cry out for new and stronger borders? What is the difference between these two groups of people who aspire to a new life, to this thing we call 'freedom'?"

Jenny Erpenbeck, one of the greatest contemporary writers to come out of the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany), meditates on the concept of freedom in a tribute after the death of a Nigerian refugee-turned-campaigner she's got to know while researching for her 2015 novel *Go, Went, Gone* which described the challenges facing Syrian refugees and was published just as Angela Merkel opened German borders to accept an influx of those fleeing the region.

Born and raised in East Berlin, Erpenbeck was 22 when the Berlin Wall came down on the 9th November 1989 - thirty-two years ago this month.

* * * * *