

THE DELEGATE

Newsletter of the Bray & District Council of Trade Unions

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'BECAUSE WE'RE WORTH IT !'

Recent revelations about sky-rocketing pay packages being awarded to the chief executives of some of Ireland's top companies put workers seeking pay rises to counteract the impact of 7% inflation firmly into perspective.

These reports that the median pay of the chief executives of some of the largest companies listed on Dublin's ISEQ that, have so far published annual reports for 2021, demonstrate that the pay packages of some CEOs have risen by up to 70-75% between 2020 and 2021 - ten times the current inflation rate.

Congress General Secretary Patricia King said: "Just before the pandemic hit, ICTU published a report '*Because We're Worth It - The Truth about CEO pay in Ireland*' which revealed that it would take the average worker over 200 years in some cases to earn what the CEOs of some of Ireland's top listed companies receive in one year. These recent revelations, indicate that this imbalance has only worsened over the past two years. In some cases, it would now take the average worker almost 300 years to earn what CEOs are now being paid."

It should also be noted that some of these companies are listed in the Revenue Report relating to the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme introduced in order to safeguard the jobs and incomes of workers in companies affected by the pandemic.

"Unlike some other European countries which introduced similar measures, Ireland did not adopt any conditions in relation to executive pay, such as a ban on bonuses introduced by the Netherlands. Pay rises of up to 75% for CEOs puts the campaign by workers to counteract the impact of rising inflation firmly into perspective", Ms King concluded.

(Source: Congress - 21st April)

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INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS IMPACTED BY UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

The Council has asked the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Simon Harris TD, if the government intend providing access to higher education here for international students displaced as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine where they had been studying.

According to the Ukrainian government, 76,548 international students from 155 nations are enrolled in the country's universities. Many from Africa and Asia have struggled to find shelter or evacuate since the invasion began on the 24th February. Tragically, there were at least two deaths of visiting students in the early days of the conflict.

Whilst Minister Harris has stated that work is underway to ensure Ukrainian people can access higher education in Ireland too, we consider that consideration should also be given to providing similar access to these other students impacted by the war.

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COUNCIL PRESIDENT ATTENDS UNVEILING OF WORKERS MEMORIAL IN FERMANAGH



(Council President Mary Diskin, front left, at the unveiling of the new Workers Memorial in Brook Park, Enniskillen, by Fermanagh Council of Trade Unions on Saturday 23rd April 2022)

Fermanagh Council of Trade Unions were the first Council of Trade Unions in Ireland to mark Workers Memorial Day in 2002 following the tragic death of an Enniskillen refuse worker, Seamus Millar in 2001.

At that time a weeping willow was planted in Brook Park in Enniskillen where the Workers Memorial Day event is held annually. In 2008, with the co-operation of the local municipal council and a number of affiliated trade unions, a small stone and memorial plaque were placed beside the willow tree. During the Fermanagh Council of Trade Unions centenary celebrations in 2019 it was planned to place a more significant memorial on the site but unfortunately Covid - 19 intervened and delayed these plans.

However, on Saturday 23rd April, the new memorial was unveiled at a ceremony in Brook Park which was attended by Council President, Mary Diskin. Mary conveyed fraternal greetings from the Council and congratulated Fermanagh council on it's initiative.

She also pointed out that our own Council had agreed in 2018 to examine the feasibility of initiating a project for the purpose of having a suitable memorial in Bray to commemorate and celebrate the prominent role played by the Trade Union Movement and workers in the development of the Bray and district area. Although this project had been stalled, mainly due to the pandemic, she was hopeful that

we could revisit this.

The main speaker at the unveiling ceremony was Geraldine Alexander, Assistant General Secretary of NIPSA (Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance) - with responsibility for health and safety. With the support of the Trade Union movement and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council this development will ensure that awareness about health and safety in the workplace continues to be developed and, as equally important, that those workers who have lost their lives in the course of their employment are never forgotten.

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CONGRESS EXPRESS CONCERNS WITH NEW SICK LEAVE BILL

The Congress of Trade Unions has expressed disappointment that the final draft of the Sick Leave Bill has not dealt with some of the key concerns raised with the Minister and officials on the design of this new workers' right to sick pay.

In a letter to Leo Varadkar, Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, on the 5th April General Secretary Patricia Kling stated;

"At pre-legislative scrutiny of the heads we set out our key concerns. It is disappointing to find that these have gone largely unheeded in the final draft of the Bill.

Notwithstanding our firm belief that the out-of-pocket expenses for a medical certificate will be a barrier for workers exercising their entitlement, the 13 week unbroken service with an employer required before an entitlement commences will leave hundreds of thousands of mostly women and foreign-born essential workers employed in low-pay jobs, who routinely have their service broken by their employer, without coverage for 3 months each year.

One example to illustrate this point are early years professionals working in ECCE (pre-school) services on 38- week contracts forced to sign-on social welfare during the summer. This is also the case for term-time workers in education and seasonal workers in tourism and horticulture.

We believe this is an oversight and is open to abuse. ICTU is urging you to amend the Bill by deleting 'continuous' from the service qualification under subsection 5 (5) or alternatively, include - 'in the case of successive fixed-term contracts with the same employer, the sum of those contracts shall be taken into account for the purpose of calculating the qualifying period.'

This simple fix will go a long way to improve the effectiveness of this landmark legislation."

(Source: Congress)

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INTO CALLS FOR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLCHILDREN

Primary teachers say the number of pupils with anxiety and mental health difficulties has soared since the pandemic disrupted children's education.

The annual congress of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) which took place in Killarney last week heard claims that social media and cyberbullying may also be factors behind a 40 per cent increase in referrals to child and adolescent services over recent years.

However, more than 2,000 children remain on waiting lists at any one time, with many waiting more than a year to be seen by experts, delegates were told.

Dublin-based teacher Órlaith Ní Fhoghlú said a lack of early intervention means that young children with less serious issues may often present with more acute problems as older adolescents. "No child deserves to sit on a waiting list as a number in a queue. As our general secretary said this morning in response to the Minister. It is absolutely deplorable that there is a lack of access to professional services for children."

INTO president Joe McKeown said Covid-19 has had an immeasurable impact on the lives of every

child in the country, but it has especially affected children in receipt of additional supports. "Schools must be provided with appropriate professional supports and services for children presenting with mental health issues in a timely manner to meet their ongoing needs."

Fiona Garvey, a delegate of the Cork city southeast branch, said children's "addiction" to the use of social media such as TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram can also lead to friction within the classroom. She said the issue of mental health at primary school was a "gaping wound" which schools were ill equipped to deal with.

Delegates at the congress voted to back a motion calling for increased funding for children's mental health services and improved access to appropriate supports for children. Members also called for the development of counselling services for primary schoolchildren and the introduction of on-site counselling in line with international best practice.

(Source: *The Irish Times* - 19th April)

The Council AGM in February passed a similar motion on the issue of mental health supports for primary schoolchildren.

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THE FORGOTTEN WORLD AT WAR

Revelations from Bucha rightly dominate headlines.
But beyond Ukraine, horrors are continuing to happen daily.

Back in mid-January, just weeks before Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine began, Yemen's Houthi rebels launched drone and missile attacks on Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates. The Iranian-backed Houthis killed three Indian workers and wounded several others. The Saudi-led coalition then retaliated quickly by targeting Sana'a, the Yemeni capital, killing 20 civilians.

Days later, the Saudis carried out airstrikes on a prison in Yemen, killing more than 80 people and wounding 260 more. UAE officials said they were responding to what they labelled a "sinister criminal escalation".

"From what I hear.... there are many bodies still at the scene of the airstrike, many missing people," said Ahmed Mahat, the Médecins Sans Frontières head of mission in Yemen. "It is impossible to know how many people have been killed. It seems to have been a horrific act of violence."

Western governments, outraged by what is happening in Ukraine - not least in Bucha, where mass graves have been discovered of civilian victims of Russian atrocities - are now facing troubling questions about their response to the world's other conflicts, largely in the Middle East, where what is happening in the besieged port city of Mariupol is more or less routine. Car bombs, airstrikes and shelling have become part of daily life in Yemen in recent years.

January was a record-breaking month for Yemeni civilian casualties. The country's impoverished economy is in ruins. Millions of children lack access to clean water and healthcare. The UN has estimated the war had killed 377,000 people by the end of 2021, both directly and indirectly through hunger and disease.

Saudi-led coalition attacks are increasing. Since last October, civilian casualty numbers and bombing rates have reversed the previous downward trend, escalating to a rate not seen since 2018, taking the monthly average of civilian casualties in bombings since October 2021 to 141. Yemen is witnessing the most sustained period of heavy bombing (at least 200 air raids a month) in four years, according to the Yemeni Data Project.

It is complicated to work out why what is happening in Ukraine matters so much more to the West. Part of the answer is its geographical proximity, thus the challenge facing Nato in the greatest crisis since the end of the cold war. Economic interest are obviously a factor in an increasingly globalised

world. Europe's dependence on Russian gas is another problem.

Middle Eastern states' changing interests have also influenced regional reactions to Putin's "special military operation" against his neighbour. That's why the UAE abstained when the rest of the UN Security Council (except China and India) voted to condemn Russia. That was because of the Yemen conflict and the US failure to take January's Houthi attack seriously enough.

In the big picture, the Joe Biden administration in the US is widely perceived across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) as having downgraded its interests in the region following Donald Trump's disruptive four years in the White House. Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2017; the abandonment of the Iranian nuclear agreement in 2018 as well as the 2020 Abraham Accords between Israel, the UAE and Bahrain were all his doing.

Biden, following Trump and Barack Obama, thinks it is right to focus on China and its growing global ambitions, including the aspiration to invade and annex Taiwan to the People's Republic. Thus the intense international attention focused on the US president's call with his Beijing opposite number, Xi Jinping, about Russia and his warning not to supply Putin with military or financial aid last month.

Syria is also playing a role in reactions to the Ukraine crisis. Bashar al-Assad is the only MENA leader to have voted with Russia in the UN General Assembly - along with Belarus, Eritrea and North Korea. That's because Putin has supported Assad since the 2011 Arab Spring uprising against him and, from September 2015, deployed troops and aircraft to support Damascus and reinforce his control.

In the years since then there have been many examples of Russian attacks on civilian sites - hospitals, schools, bakeries - all of which met weak responses from western leaders and drew little attention from war crimes prosecutors.

Obama's failure to use his "red line" threat if Syria used chemical weapons undermined America's global credibility. Assad is backed by Iran, which is another key player. Tehran has sent its Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp (IRGC) to Syria and is using Lebanon's Hezbollah to pursue its own interests, as well as Shia groups in Iraq and the Houthis.

On March 24, Assad went on his first trip to Abu Dhabi since 2011 and met Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, the UAE's de facto ruler. They discussed expanding bilateral relations. The visit was the clearest sign yet that normalisation with Syria's dictator is advancing across MENA. The big question now is who will follow the Emiratis. (Maybe the Saudis, whose intelligence chief visited Damascus last May?) Both Saudi and Emirati leaders have been "unavailable" to talk to Biden in the last few days.

Washington said it was "profoundly disappointed and troubled" by this attempt to legitimise Assad, who remains responsible for the death and suffering of countless Syrians, the displacement of more than half of the country's pre-war population and the arbitrary detention and disappearance of more than 150,000 men, women and children.

Iran could also benefit from the Ukraine crisis by weaponising its energy resources (it has the second-largest gas reserves behind Russia and the fourth-largest oil reserves behind Venezuela, Saudi Arabia and Canada) as an alternative source for Europe.

That may also affect the outcome of attempts to revive the 2015 nuclear agreement. The release of Iranian-British dual nationals Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Anoosheh Ashoori in return for the payment by the UK of a decades-long debt may have been a positive signal from Teheran.

Opponents of a renewed nuclear deal were alarmed recently when Washington was reported to be considering removing the IRGC from America's list of state terrorist organisations (imposed by Trump as part of his "maximum pressure" campaign) in order to signal willingness to Teheran about a return to the original agreement.

And then there is the uniquely toxic issue of Israel and Palestine. On March 20 the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelensky, who is Jewish, addressed Israel's parliament on Zoom, invoked the Holocaust and repeatedly used the term "final solution". Zelensky noted that February 24 was the date on which the Nazi party was founded in Germany in 1920.

The reason for his scathing speech is that Israel has refused to provide weapons to Ukraine and has not chosen to impose strong sanctions. It has echoed China (along with Turkey, Egypt and Jordan) by offering to mediate between Moscow and Kyiv. Israel has been seeking to avoid antagonising Russia, because of its presence in Syria, where Israel regularly carries out military action against Iran-linked groups, and is keen to preserve its "deconfliction mechanism" with the Kremlin.

On the other side of the fence, Palestinians are angered by the double standards of the world in responding so fast and with such unity to Russia compared with Israel's 54-year rule of the territories occupied since 1967. Some have even referred to 1948, when Israel was created following the end of the British Mandate - reflecting the increasingly perceived impossibility of achieving a two-state solution.

Food supplies are playing a key role in MENA reactions to Ukraine. Tunisia, Libya and Egypt are all dependent on Russian and Ukrainian wheat, and are hedging their bets. Even countries that are not may see a rise in food prices due to an increase in fuel and therefore transport costs, a reduced supply of fertilisers, and shrinking global agricultural productivity and supply.

Energy is not just a factor in the Middle East, but also for western countries, signalling that oil is more important than state repression. Boris Johnson's visit to Saudi Arabia was condemned by human rights groups not only because of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's involvement in the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, but because of 80 other recent executions in the conservative kingdom. The Labour leader, Sir Keir Starmer, accused the UK prime minister of "going cap in hand from dictator to dictator".

Saudi Arabia, with 2m barrels per day spare, and the UAE, with 1.1m bpd, are the only two leading oil producers with immediate capacity to offset a Russian shortfall. Qatar is the biggest gas producer in the region and the third in the world after Russia and Iran.

Beyond MENA, Afghanistan remains high on the global agenda, with the UN warning in February that it is facing a disastrous humanitarian crisis since the Taliban takeover in August 2021 following the chaotic US-led international withdrawal. And Afghans are understandably frustrated by the West's reaction to their plight or that of other non-Europeans compared with those white and Christian Ukrainians who have had to flee their homes because of Putin's invasion.

In short, both western and Middle Eastern states are pursuing their own strategic and economic interests in a rapidly changing world. In these uncertain and disturbing times, with the international community rightly focused on defending Ukraine from Russia's unprovoked aggression while trying to avoid a third world war, there is still an awful lot else to worry about.

(IAN BLACK)

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(Source: TNE, April 22)

WHERE ARE THE WORLD'S ONGOING CONFLICTS?

CIVIL WAR:

War in Afghanistan
Instability in Iraq
Libyan Civil War

Syrian Civil War
Yemeni Civil War
South Sudanese Civil War

INTERSTATES:

US - Iran conflict
North Korea crisis

India - Pakistan conflict

TERRITORIAL DISPUTE:

Russo - Ukrainian War
Israeli - Palestinian conflict
East China Sea Disputes

Nagorno - Karabakh conflict
Kurdish - Turkish conflict
South China Sea Disputes

POLITICAL INSTABILITY:

Instability in Lebanon
Tigray War in Ethiopia
Venezuela

Instability in Egypt
Instability in the DRC

TRANSNATIONAL TERRORISM:

Mali War
Al-Shabaab in Somalia and Kenya

Islamist militancy in Pakistan

SECTARIAN:

Rohinga crisis
Violence in the Central African Republic

Boko Haram militancy in Nigeria

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GAPS IN THE 'DECADES OF CENTENARIES'?

Ireland's organized Labour Movement, at all levels, has consistently failed to record and celebrate its many campaigns and achievements. If we do not record and celebrate our past, no one else will do it for us. Such was well demonstrated by the virtual absence of the labour movement and its contribution from the

programme of events of the 'Decade of Centenaries' that is now nearing its conclusion.

■ On Monday 24 April 1922, a century ago, the Irish Labour Party and Trade Union Congress (ILPTUC) organized a one day general strike against 'Militarism'. Dáil Éireann had adopted the Anglo-Irish Treaty in January, and the strike was a noble but doomed attempt to avert the Civil War that broke out in late June 1922. Although the last great ILPTUC demonstration against 'militarism' it was by no means the first.

■ In April 1918 the extension of conscription to Ireland (exempt since January 1916) was planned. The massive campaign against it was led by a coalition of the ITUCLP, Sinn Féin, the Irish Parliamentary Party and the 'All for Ireland' League. The leadership and organizing capacity of the ITUCLP was crucial to the success of the general strike and scores of mass demonstrations against conscription across most of the island (except Ulster) of April 1918. It was wholly successful in that conscription was never implemented in Ireland.

■ In December 1918, so as to ensure that support for the demand for self-determination was not divided, Labour decided not to contest the general election.

■ In January 1919, when Dáil Éireann convened for the first time, one of the four policy documents it adopted was the 'Democratic Programme' that had been drafted by leading officials of the ILPTUC.

■ In February 1919, at the Berne Congress of the Socialist International, the ILPTUC delegates secured separate and independent representation for Ireland. It was a hugely important achievement at the time and the first international recognition of Ireland's right to independence.

■ In April 1919 there was a two-week long general strike against militarism in Limerick City when what has become known as the 'Limerick Soviet' was organized by the Limerick Council of Trade Unions. It was against the use of 'permits' to travel into and about the city being imposed by the military

authorities.

■ In December 1919 and into 1920 there was a trade union campaign known as the 'Motor Permits Strike' against the a regulation that motor car owners and drivers had to have a military permit to operate.

■ From May 1920 there was a campaign by railway and dock workers against the carriage of military goods and equipment known as the 'Munitions of War' strike. Although not formally approved of by their union, the National Union of Railwaymen (it paid dispute benefit), some 2000 railway and dock workers, refused to handle or work trains carrying such goods, and were sacked as a consequence. The ILPTUC raised £120,000 (much of it from Britain) and paid each dismissed worker £3 each week. The strike continued until

December 1920. It was 1924 before all were re-instated and 1944 before their pension entitlements were recognized. During the campaign rail worked suffered intimidation and coercion from both sides.

■ In April 1920 the ILPTUC organized a two-day general strike demanding the release of some 100 men held in prison without trial that were then on hunger strike. Outside Ulster the strike was widely observed and the prisoners were released.

■ In November and December 1920 ILPTUC leaders conducted meetings with the British TUC, trade unions, and the various Labour Parties throughout England and Scotland reporting on events in Ireland and were instrumental in the appointment of a Commission to look into and report on events in Ireland undertaken by the British Labour Party. Its findings and the stance taken by the British Labour movement was critical in shaping British public opinion and in securing Ireland's objectives.

■ In the General Election of May 1921 Labour again declined to nominate candidates so as to maintain a united front in the campaign for self-determination. In its early years, over a short but crucial period of time, the Irish Labour Movement demonstrated its willingness to subordinate its own agenda to the interests of the people and society as a whole. Such was achieved whilst maintaining the essential unity of the movement, north and south, at national, regional and local level, and across diverse political, religious, and constitutional loyalties.

We must record celebrate such achievements. The best way of doing so is to support the work of the Irish Labour History Society, an all-Ireland, non sectarian organization, that is independent of all political parties, which have been working in this area on very slender means and resources since 1973.

(Charles Callan, Trade Union &

Labour Historian - April 2022)

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