

THE DELEGATE

Newsletter of the Bray & District Council of Trade Unions

May 2022

Issue 3/22

LYNNE FREEMAN RIP

The Council passed a vote of sympathy at its last meeting to the family of Lynne Freeman, a teacher at Ravenswell Primary School in Bray, following her death in a tragic swimming accident on the North Beach in Greystones on Saturday, 23rd April.

A member of the Craobh Chualann branch of the INTO, which is affiliated to the Council, Ms Freeman has been described as "the kindest and most hardworking teacher and colleague", in a tribute from her school. She also previously taught at Delgany N.S.

Council President Mary Diskin expressed her shock and sadness at the news; "Our thoughts are with Lynne's family and friends at this devastatingly sad time".

'Ar dheis Dé go raibh a hanam dílis'.

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NOTICE OF MOTION ON ILLEGAL SETTLEMENTS DEFEATED

A notice of motion calling on Wicklow County Council not to purchase goods or services from territories occupied by illegal settlers was defeated at its meeting on the 16th May.

The notice of motion was proposed by Cllr. Anne Ferris and seconded by Cllr. Paul O'Brien (both Labour Party) and dated back to July of last year when we requested that our local authority adopt the motion which is similar to motions passed by Dublin City Council in 2018, South Dublin County Council and Dun Laoghaire - Rathdown County Council in 2021.

Legal advice from Wicklow County Council's Law Agent stated that the notice of motion wasn't actionable and would be in breach of international trade agreements, and therefore it wouldn't be possible to adopt the proposal.

Cllr. Ferris explained that it only referred to goods in settlements which are illegal under international law and not all Israeli goods. "These settlements are illegal under international law and are an obstacle to peace. It's an injustice for innocent families to be emptied from their land and homes by illegal settlers." she added.

The notice of motion was also supported by Sinn Féin and a number of independent councillors but was defeated by six votes to nine against, with nine abstentions and eight not present at the meeting.

Expressing disappointment with the decision, our President Mary Diskin stated that it would have been a small but highly significant gesture of solidarity from Wicklow to the oppressed people of Palestine.

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BRAY HOUSING UPDATE

The April meeting of the Council heard a report from Mick Ryan (Vice President) on the Housing & Corporate Affairs Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) of Wicklow County Council on which he represents the Council/Congress.

The Housing SPC meets every second month. Aside from issues of urgency or special agendas, the usual agenda includes; Homelessness, Traveller Accommodation, Housing Maintenance, Housing Supply, and Affordable Housing.

His report concentrated on the situation in the Bray area and he gave an update on the recent larger developments; 70 plus apartments at Bray rail station (the Co. Council will rent these for social housing for 25 years at 95% of the market rate) and 208 units on the Southern Cross (provided by Lioncor and Co-Operative Housing Ireland) - which will be used to accommodate households currently on the Co. Council's housing waiting list. Co-Operative Housing Ireland will own and manage the development.

A number of projects are also at development/discussion stage; on the Dargle Road at the entrance to Fassaroe and also on Rehill's land across the river; and Berryfield (Fassaroe) where 15% of the units will be for social housing.

A new pilot project for re-letting works has also been agreed by the county council. Re-lets are the maintenance and repair work the local authority does between tenancies. Due to the increase in units available in Bray for 2022, and the subsequent expected movement of tenants, there was a budget deficit identified for re-let work.

A pilot project was brought forward whereby units would be inspected, brought to minimum rental standard (some decorative/cosmetic works would not be completed), and put out to choice based letting. Prospective tenants would be advised that the social house is being let as seen and further renovations by the council are not planned. If they decide not to take the house, this would not affect their place on the housing list. At least 30 plus houses are currently boarded up in the Bray district that could become available to re-let.

A thorough discussion and analysis has been held over several SPC meetings, where issues around climate, equality, protection of vulnerable people, logistics of the scheme, and national funding were raised. Bray Municipal District also held a special meeting to discuss the pilot project at the requests of councillors Grace McManus, Dermot O'Brien and Joe Behan.

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SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RESPONDS TO COUNCIL RESOLUTION

A reply was received on behalf of the Minister for Education, Norma Foley TD, in relation to the Council resolution on the lack of support and resources and in particular the lack of clinical support, available to primary school age children with social, emotional and behavioural needs.

The Private Secretary to the Minister advised that the Department's approach to supporting wellbeing and mental health of young people is set out in its Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice first published in 2018 and refreshed in 2019. The approach proposed is a whole school and preventative approach which has multiple components providing children and young people with opportunities to: build core social and emotional skills and competencies; experience supportive relationships within the school setting; and be part of a school environment and culture that feels both physically and psychologically safe, in which they feel a sense of belonging and connectedness, that their voice is heard, and they feel supported.

Embedded in the whole-school approach is the recognition that members of the school community may have different needs at different times and that a continuum of support in relation to wellbeing should be made available.

Since the wellbeing policy was published, work has taken place to realise the vision set out in the Department's Wellbeing Policy. Following an action research project involving thirty schools, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) has developed Continuing Professional

Development (CPD) to support schools as they engage in a wellbeing promotion process. This national rollout of CPD commenced in March 2022 and is available to all schools.

This CPD will be supplemented with a parallel resource for schools developed by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), offering a series of webinars on the promotion of wellbeing and resilience in schools, including on trauma-informed approaches. The approaches outlined in the webinars are based on research findings, on the experience of experts in their fields and on the experience of practicing psychologists working in schools. The workshops will be available to build the capability of school staff in both primary and post-primary settings, including for school leaders, teachers and SNAs.

NEPS also provides educational psychological support to all primary and post-primary schools. This involves direct support in the event of a critical incident, access to national and regional support and development work to build school capacity to support students, access to a NEPS psychologist for responses to queries arising, and access to individual pupil casework where there is a need via a NEPS psychologist. NEPS works closely with the HSE and its agencies to ensure those who may require the provision of therapy or counselling are referred on to the appropriate clinical services for intervention and support.

The NEPS Support and Development service, reaching an estimated 25,000 teachers annually, is an applied psychological service for school staff to help build their capability to the wellbeing, academic, social and emotional needs of all students, and particularly those who are experiencing barriers to their wellbeing, learning inclusion and participation. Professional learning activities to support children/young people with social/emotional/mental health difficulties and to promote positive wellbeing in school include the FRIENDS programmes. These are evidence-based prevention and resilience building programmes, which foster self-concept and a sense of school belonging using Cognitive Behavioural Therapeutically-informed approaches. The programmes help students to develop resilience by teaching them effective strategies to cope with, problem solve, and manage all kinds of emotional distress, including worry, stress, change and anxiety. The Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management programme is an evidence-based programme that equips teachers to manage their classrooms effectively to prevent and reduce behavioural problems while promoting children's wellbeing and emotional and social competence.

A dedicated wellbeing portal has been developed and is now available, bringing together all the wellbeing supports and resources that have been developed by the Department and the Department's support service together and these are available on the gov.ie website.

The Department has built strong links with the Department of Health and both Departments are exploring ways to improve supports for young people, including around increased awareness, promoting help-seeking behaviour and sign-posting to the wide range of available services.

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MARGARET NOMINATED TO CONGRESS RETIRED WORKERS' COMMITTEE

Margaret Moynihan of Unite the Union has been nominated to represent the Council on the ICTU Retired Workers' Committee. A current trustee and long serving member of the Council, Margaret has previously represented us on other bodies including the Congress Women's Committee.

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CONGRESS DISABILITY COMMITTEE

At the April meeting of the Council Mary Diskin reported on the first meeting of the newly constituted ICTU Disability Committee which took place on the 8th April. The Committee considered the Council motion on youth mental health costs which had been adopted at the ICTU biennial conference and agreed to consider further at the May meeting so as to be able to advise Congress on progressing the issue. The Council considered that as this is now Congress policy that it is likely to be included as part of its next pre-budget submission. Mary agreed to advise the Committee accordingly.

The recent Government report 'Pathway to Work' which considers the general employment picture in the country has specifically referred to people with disability needing special focus. The Committee consider that this is probably the first time the matter of people with disability has been mainstreamed into a general report.

The Committee also considered the OECD and ESRI reports which were launched last October. The reports found; Ireland among the the fourth worst of countries in the EU regarding the employment of people with disability; people with disabilities did not benefit from the economic recovery; and early intervention a key in relation to people seeking work.

The plan of work for the Disability Committee includes; Reasonable Accommodation in the Workplace which is key - Employers for Change / Neurodiversity, psycho-social matters following Covid-19 / Training for Advocates.

Last Summer Minister O'Gorman announced a review of the Equality Act and one of the issues relates to the definition of disability. The definition in the Act has been criticised as very broad. The view of affiliates is that the broader the definition the better and any change would likely be regressive. This may also lead to confusion around fears of a medical definition being imposed.

The Committee also received an update on the Comprehensive Employment Strategy which is "a cross-government approach that brings together actions by different Departments and State Agencies in a concerted effort to address the barriers and challenges that impact on employment of people with disabilities". Fergus Finlay is the Chair. Currently the third phase of the strategy is being drafted, involving ICTU, IBEC and people with disabilities. It is hoped to sign off on this in the next few weeks although there has been concerns raised around the level of impact the strategy has had.

The Disability Committee has also been working closely with Employers for Change, a relatively new group which has been doing a good job at involving employers, including having an input in to the IBEC report on barriers facing people with disability. Open Doors has been working closely with this group to support people with disability looking for employment.

The Committee also received a presentation by Lorna Fitzpatrick, Advocacy & Engagement Manager, from the National Council for the Blind Ireland, on their "Seeing Your Career Report" - which essentially highlights how Ireland fairs very poorly in relation to supports for people with a disability when compared internationally.

Finally, the ICTU Disability Committee continues to link up with it's counterpart in the British Trade Union Congress (TUC) as many issues are similar.

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FOREIGN STUDENTS IN UKRAINE

In April the Council wrote to the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Simon Harris TD, raising the plight of foreign students in Ukraine, particularly those from Africa, many who have found it difficult to get out of the country following the Russian invasion. The Minister had stated that we have places for Ukraine students displaced, and we queried as to whether consideration had been given to those non-Ukrainian student similarly affected?

The Private Secretary to the Minister replied as follows;

"In line with the European Council Decision of 4 March, the Government is applying the rights afforded under the International Protection Act, 2015 to:

(a) Ukrainian nationals residing in the Ukraine before 24 February 2022;

(b) Third Country Nationals who were granted permanency residency rights in Ukraine before 24 February 2022;

(c) Stateless persons, and nationals of third countries other than the Ukraine, who benefited from international protection or equivalent national protection in Ukraine before 24 February 2022; and

(d) Family members of the persons referred to in (a) and (b).

This International Protection Act 2015, as set out in Section 60, confers the right to access the labour market and education to qualified persons on the same basis as citizens of Ireland.

Persons other than above wishing to come to Ireland to continue their studies are welcome to apply for an appropriate visa via the normal Department of Justice immigration channels.

Further, the Department has also been working with the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to put in place a national helpdesk to assist students and researchers coming from Ukraine that are seeking to continue their higher education here. I am pleased to inform you this helpdesk has now been established ..."

Following consideration of the letter of reply the Executive Committee has further requested that the Minister should raise the situation of these non-Ukrainian students at the EU level.

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THE UN GETS LITTLE RESPECT. IT DESERVES LESS

Vladimir Putin has done more for the liberal international order in one month than anyone else has managed in the decades since the cold war.

Europe and the US have realised they need to coordinate with each other to manage effective international responses to Russia's aggression and to similar actions in the future. The European Union is realising that its neglect of coordinated foreign and defence relations is anything but benign - and putting attention in that direction.

The ailing Nato alliance - brought to the brink under Donald Trump - is reinvigorated, looking likely to expand its membership, and with existing members renewing their commitments to spend more on defence. After a decade in which internationalism was on the wane, it is back in force.

None of that, though, can be said for the international body that is supposed to be at the top of the pyramid: the United Nations. Not only has the UN played absolutely no meaningful role in handling the crisis, but no one even expected it to do so.

In fact, the UN did little more than add insult to injury: at the very moment that Russia invaded Ukraine, Russia's representative to the UN was chairing security council meetings, changing on a pin from arguing that a Russian invasion was not even a possibility to explain why it was a necessary action. Nothing could show more clearly that Russia cared even less about the UN than George Bush did when he acted against Saddam Hussein and invaded Iraq in 2003.

The UN receives little respect and deserves even less: the values it espouses and the values it practises have absolutely nothing to do with one another - it has helped to cover up corruption, helps dictators to launder their reputations, and grinds endlessly to a standstill with meaningless debates. Statistics from the think tank UN Watch - which is a regular critic of the United Nations - show the sheer hypocrisy present in just the makeup of its committees. On the Human Rights Committee at present are representatives from China, Russia, Eritrea and Venezuela - none of them exactly known for their strict adherence to human rights principles. Russia was a member until its recent suspension over Ukraine.

Despite that, the UN human rights council's website piously states that "With membership on the

Council comes a responsibility to uphold high human rights standards. This is a criteria insisted on by states themselves when they adopted resolution 60/251 in March 2006 to create the Human Rights Council."

Similar chutzpah is at play with other committees and councils. Saudi Arabia sits on the commission on the status of women, while China and Russia - both of whom have cracked down on civil rights groups - sit on the committee for non-governmental organisations, which grants or suspends the credentials of human rights groups for the UN.

Membership of the UN's most significant council - the security council - is a relic of a bygone era of great power politics. As the avowed nuclear powers at the time of its formation, the US, UK, France, China and Russia all have permanent membership of the council and a veto against any motion, rendering the rotating other members largely meaningless.

Given the adversarial relationship between the key countries on the council, there is absolutely no meaningful resolution in the world that could ever hope to pass., rendering any security duties on the UN moot - and for those who like to throw such words around, absolutely every war "illegal". The general assembly, meanwhile, is a talking shop granted no actual powers to act.

When it does manage to pass its symbolic but empty resolutions, there is one country with which it is focused to the point of obsession. Since 2015, the UN general assembly has never once passed a motion condemning China. It has condemned Iran six times, North Korea seven times, the US eight times and Russia fifteen times.

Over that same period, Israel has been the subject of at least 125 condemnatory resolutions. Clearly, the actions of the Israeli state in relation to Palestine are worthy of scrutiny (and condemnation) - but does it really warrant four times more motions than China, Russia, Iran and North Korea combined/ What is it about Israel that fascinates the UN so?

When wrapping up its session last week, the UN's human rights committee condemned Israel - which had suffered five terror attacks within a single week - an additional four times, making no mention of the killings.

As a rule-making or rule-enforcing institution, the UN is entirely hollowed out - but surely it does good work elsewhere? That is debatable. The UN had a spectacular scandal in the 1990s and early 2000s through its oil-for-food programme with Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

The programme was supposed to help ensure Iraqis didn't starve, while keeping oil sanctions in place against Saddam. But it emerged that an astronomical sum of between \$10bn and \$20bn was siphoned out of the programme - much of it presumably going to Saddam, but also numerous others. Almost no one was convicted in connection to the years-long scandal, and the UN only ever published one of more than 50 investigations into the affair, fiercely resisting any efforts to publish more.

Similarly, the UN has never truly tackled the scandal of its "peacekeepers" raping civilian women they were supposedly there to protect - sometimes even fathering children with them.

Western democracies and richer countries rarely supply more than a token number of troops to UN blue helmet schemes, leaving poorer countries to send often poorly trained forces, as a revenue raiser for the government. If a soldier in that situation is credibly accused of rape, the UN sends them home - but on multiple occasions, such soldiers have simply been redeployed as blue helmets in another country, sent by their home country once again.

That leaves initiatives like the UN World Food Programme, which provides almost \$10bn of emergency food assistance a year, often to war zones or crisis-hit areas - a genuinely commendable aim, but not necessarily one that needs to be attached to a festering institution like the UN.

The funding of the World Food Programme is not something that keeps most of us up at night - but the reality of it is that there is no agreed governmental levy or tithe, and almost no funding from "central" UN funds. In reality, the programme is funded every year entirely by voluntary contributions, most of them from national governments.

Last year, more than half of the World Food Programme's income came from just two donors: the US and Germany. If you add in the next three donors - the European Commission, UK and Canada - those five alone cover two-thirds of the programme's total spend.

It is right that richer countries contribute generously to funds designed to alleviate gross poverty - though thanks to the voluntary nature of these contributions, they are less than is required and many wealthy countries come nowhere near to pulling their weight (Portugal, for example, gave just \$201,441 last year).

But when the UN is routinely used by autocrats and human rights abusers to draw false equivalences with western democracies - often helped by useful idiots within those countries - they rely on people believing that the UN has respectability and moral authority. It's schemes like the World Food Programme that confer that.

In other words, western democracies are using billions of their aid and international development budgets to help the autocrats that are forcing people to become refugees, or to starve - conferring legitimacy on the body that they use to force international inertia, and to draw bogus moral comparisons.

Many of us reflexively feel a need to defend the UN, or what it supposedly represents, because the alternative is disconcerting: what if there is no one in charge, no effective international body, no effective international rules?

But merely pretending that those rules exist or are effective when they are not is surely worse than admitting that they are ineffective. For as long as we carry on with a cargo-cult international order, we won't even start to consider anything more effective.

Should we not use this moment of international cooperation between democracies to reassess what the free world actually gets out of the UN? Why are we still playing along?

(James Ball, TNE, April 22)

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