

THE DELEGATE

Newsletter of the Bray & District Council of Trade Unions

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COUNCIL CONDEMNS CONTINUING HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS CRISIS

The December meeting of the Council was primarily taken up with the on-going housing and homelessness crisis that appears to get worse and worse. Recently the Tánaiste (and newly elected Taoiseach) Leo Varadkar told the Dáil that they've not been able to ensure enough homes have been built and this is contributing to a "very deep social crisis" and a "very deep" personal crisis for many people.

Vice-President, Mick Ryan, opened discussions with an update on the recent meeting of the Wicklow County Council Housing SPC, on which represents the Council/Congress. He reported that 662 housing units have been allocated by the Co. Council last year, of which 305 were in Bray

This was followed by a presentation by the Secretary, Kieron Connolly, on 'A New Deal for Housing' the policy paper from the Raise the Roof Campaign - which is supported by the Trade Union Movement.

In summary, the Campaign calls for the Government and key State bodies to now step in to deliver:

- A State-led housing programme with a mandate to deliver affordable homes for all.
- A new State body with responsibility for housing delivery.
- Emergency measures to reduce homelessness and shorten times spent in emergency accommodation.
- An end to 'no fault' evictions, a freeze on rents and long-term security for renters.
- A legal Right to Housing.

The Council has supported the Campaign and participated in several of the protest demonstrations held to highlight the issue over recent years.

The meeting then unanimously adopted the following motion submitted by the Executive Committee.

'That this Council deplores the continuing failure of successive governments to properly deliver on the provision of sufficient social and affordable homes that are desperately needed, and which has locked an entire generation out of the housing sector, denying countless thousands any prospect of secure independent living.

Accordingly, we demand new policies and measures to deliver an adequate supply of publicly owned housing to provide for those who require secure homes to rent according to their means, and to provide secure and genuinely affordable homes for workers who wish to buy their own homes.

We demand a system that protects people from eviction and homelessness and helps build thriving inclusive communities. We demand an urgent Constitutional referendum on the right to housing to underpin these basic rights for our people.'

Proposing the motion, Council Secretary Kieron Connolly, pointed out that census figures show that the population grew by 360,000 between 2016 and 2022, yet only 120,000 homes were built in the same period. Population growth far in excess of new housing is creating pent-up demand that will not be relieved unless supply increases 'substantially' according to the Irish Banking Federation Latest Housing Market Monitor.

Trying to squeeze so many people into so few new homes is keeping up house price pressure, along with strong demand due to the gap between rents and mortgage payments. house completions were up 62.5% in the third quarter but commencements dropped by 22% at the same time.

Average rents have increased 82% since 2010 compared to an average European increase of 18%, according to Eurostat data. However, house prices were far more comparable, with homes going up in value by 55% in the same period compared to 50% across Europe.

The average first-time buyer monthly mortgage payment was just over €1,000 during the first half of this year compared with an average monthly rent of over €1,400 at the national level, with the gap being significantly higher in Dublin.

The Secretary also pointed out that many people, including teachers and nurses, are unable to get accommodation in cities despite earning good wages. This is leading to a crisis in some essential services. *"There is clearly a difficulty in recruiting and retaining people and housing is a big part of the problem. Leo Varadkar has openly acknowledged this"*, he added. *"However, it is not just these professions, as many other essential front-line jobs such as production, supply chain and healthcare workers are finding it impossible to remain in many cities and towns"*, he concluded.

Seconding the motion, Margaret Moynihan (Unite) stated that HAP is a deplorable waste of public money and it is a very insecure situation for many people. John Anderson (Mandate) pointed out that in relation to HAP that people are getting most rent paid but the problem is there is no security of tenure.

Vice President Mick Ryan pointed out that the whole rent versus mortgage situation is crazy and the Government has done nothing to resolve the matter. Emmet Connolly (Connect) and Mary Hannon (TUI) both also spoke in support of the motion.

President Mary Diskin stated that there are two points to the motion; the need for both public and affordable housing. *"A lot of the media emphasis has been on affordable housing, but many people would prefer to rent if it is both affordable and secure. The Government policy is not housing for all! It is discrimination on people - it should be open to all"* she concluded. The motion was unanimously adopted.

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TRADE UNION RECOGNITION - A CONSTITUTIONAL AND HUMAN RIGHT

Dr. Daryl D'Art, author of *A World Still to Win: Trade Union Recognition - A Constitutional and Human Right* (recently published by The Workers' Party) gave an interesting and informative presentation on Trade Union Recognition to the Council at the November meeting.

In his presentation, Dr. D'Art examined the obstacles often raised against the possibility of any legislative enactment on statutory recognition. Opposition by Irish employers and their agents to such a

measure is assumed given their extreme reluctance to concede recognition even in individual firms. The experience of workers in Dunne's Stores and Lloyds Pharmacy and the continuing struggle in Ryanair is testimony to the fact.

Dr. D'Art principally concentrates on two questions. First, does the Irish constitution guarantee of freedom of association or the right of workers to form independent trade unions necessarily involve a corresponding and implicit obligation on employers to recognise and negotiate with such organisations? He considers that this is answered in the affirmative. Recognition, he argued, is already an implicit right. It follows from the constitutional guarantee of freedom of association or the right of workers to form trade unions. Essentially, workers join unions to collectively negotiate terms and conditions with the employer. Yet these negotiations cannot begin until the employer recognises a union for that purpose. Joining a union without a concomitant right to recognition renders the exercise of the right to associate meaningless.

Commentators who examine the question all agree that granting the right to associate in unions without a corresponding right to recognition renders freedom of association an insubstantial paper right. A 2008 judgement in the European Court of Human Rights has unanimously upheld and applied this line of reasoning. The Court ruled that the right to bargain collectively with the employer is an essential and indivisible element of freedom of association. A subsequent judgement of the court reaffirmed that ruling.

Secondly, Dr. D'Art questioned would legislation establishing statutory recognition be repugnant to the constitution, amounting to a constitutional impossibility? He considers that this question is answered in the negative as he believes a constitutional challenge would fail.

In support of this claim Dr. D'Art examined the plausibility or solidity of the arguments or obstacles often advanced against statutory opposition. For example, statutory recognition would constitute an interference with the employer's right of dissociation or infringe the constitutional protection afforded to private property or be incompatible with voluntarism.

On examination, these supposed impediments turn out to be mere bogeymen or the flimsiest of paper tigers. Yet the effort expended in deconstructing or critiquing these obstacles may be superfluous. Dr. D'Art pointed out that a form of statutory recognition has been on the Irish statute book since the 1920s. Since then, it has gone unchallenged and remains good law. So, apart from the inevitable opposition of powerful interest groups, there are no obstacles, constitutional or otherwise, to statutory recognition, he concluded.

(We have a limited number of copies of Dr. D'Art's publication available for anyone interested.)

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LABOUR IN DUN LAOGHAIRE RATHDOWN - ELECTION CANDIDATES; 1919 - 1999

***Labour in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown – Election and Candidates – 1919-1999* by Charles Callan and Barry Desmond is the latest book issued by Umiskin Press. Umiskin publishes limited editions of Trade Union, Labour History and Biographical material on a 'not-for-profit' basis.**

Over 312 pages, the book comprises two main parts. The first part, in six chronological sections, details local elections within the present County of Dun Laoghaire Rathdown. Those covered include the Urban District Councils of Blackrock, Dalkey, Dun Laoghaire and Killiney-Ballybrack, Rathdown No 1 Rural District Council, and Rathdown Board of Poor Law Guardians 1920-1930, Dublin County Council Electoral Areas 1920-1985, Dun Laoghaire Borough Council 1930-1985, and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County 1994-1999. Dáil elections covered include the constituencies of Dublin County 1922-1948, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown 1948-1977, Dun Laoghaire 1977-1997, Dublin County South 1969-1981, and Dublin South 1981-1997. All placed within the wider contexts and changes over the decades.

The second part, in 150 alphabetical sections, profiles those who stood as Labour candidates over the period covered. Although many are well known and reasonably well recorded, the majority are either already forgotten or are fast fading from memory. More than a third of the 150 of the Labour candidates over the decades 1919-1999 were elected public representatives.

Labour in Dun Laoghaire Rathdown 1919-1999 is Umiskin Press nineteenth title to date. Available in hardback (€35) and paperback (€25) plus postage and packing it may be ordered at: www.umiskinpress.wordpress.com or enquiries as to delivery options, bookshop availability, etc., may be directed to Dr Jack McGinley (Principal Umiskin Press) at: kmcginly@tcd.ie

This is an excellent comprehensive and informative work on the role of the Labour Party, its election candidates, and public representatives in Dun Laoghaire over the twentieth - century: from 1919 to 1999. It also includes a look at Labour and local electoral politics in the years prior to 1919.

The authors make it clear that this is not a 'history' of Labour in the Dun Laoghaire - Rathdown area as no records of labour movement organisations in the district seem to have survived so such is not possible. Also, of course, they have to take account of the changing political entity of what constituted the Dun Laoghaire - Rathdown area over the period.

This is an important work in terms of highlighting both the role of this Council of Trade Unions itself and also so very many of its delegates who were involved in the political struggle of the Labour movement during these formative years.

An indication of the prominent role played by the Council is probably best encapsulated in the opening chapter covering the period prior to 1919, as follows.

'The Bray, Kingstown, United Trades and Labour Council (Bray, Kingstown UTLC) was founded at a meeting in Bray Town Hall on 1 April 1917.

It was a remarkable body; in that it had several defining features that distinguished it from all other trades councils in Ireland before or since. Within a year it had in affiliation most of the trade unions in the district, with a combined membership of some 3,000.

It represented trade unions in two counties (North Wicklow and South Dublin), in five Urban District Council areas (Bray, Kingstown, Blackrock, Dalkey, and Killiney-Ballybrack), in two Rural District Council Areas (Rathdown No.1 and Rathdown No.2), and in one Poor Law Union (Rathdown PLGs). Besides its trade union role within the world of work and industrial relations, as the local political manifestation of the ITUC [Irish Trade Union Congress], it constituted the local Labour Party in all the areas mentioned. Although one organisation, it had two separate existences or manifestations in that it operated locally with its own hall in Bray, and also with its own hall in Kingstown. All the other trades councils in Ireland operated within the confines of one city or town. Its initial foundation, centred on Bray, may have been to ensure that the bogus, clerically led, 'Kingstown and South County Dublin General Workers Union' could not infiltrate, or become an affiliate, or an interference in its affairs.

It was the Bray and Kingstown UTLC that became and acted as the local Labour Party for the local elections of 1920, and it proved to be remarkably successful, gaining as it did, a significant Labour presence on Kingstown, Bray, Dalkey, and Killiney-Ballybrack UDCs. It also achieved an albeit tenuous presence on Rathdown No. 1 RDC and the Rathdown Board of PLGs.'

This book is invaluable for anyone interested in the local trade union history in the area as it highlights many of the prominent personalities involved during that period. These include; George Dixon (1887-1962) - Councillor on Dun Laoghaire Urban District Council; Edward Kelly (1879-1941) - who worked at the Commissioner of Irish Lights at Kingstown; Francis J. O'Reilly (1869-1950) - active on the Bray, Kingstown and District United Trades and Labour Council after it was founded in April 1917, and

was elected Treasurer in October 1918; and James Byrne (1889-) - Secretary of Dun Laoghaire Branch of the National (UK) Amalgamated Society of Painters & Decorators. It also includes a profile of former Council President and Life Member Bernard Connolly (1926-2004) - who was unsuccessful as a Labour candidate for Dublin County Council (Ballybrack Electoral Area) in 1967 and 1974.

The authors, Barry Desmond, and Charlie Callan (who has contributed many articles to this newsletter) are to be commended on their exhaustive research and this excellent book.

(Kieron Connolly)

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World Cup: We've seen courage and defiance, and shedloads of hypocrisy

In case you were wondering how much LGBT rights are worth to footballers; it lies somewhere between acceptable accessory and a single yellow card.

That is, after all, the supposed punishment that was enough to scare off the captains of England, Wales, Belgium, Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland from wearing the OneLove logo on their armbands as the World Cup kicked off in Qatar.

In the great arithmetic of value in a footballer's mind, making a stand on human rights ranks lower than taking off your shirt to celebrate a goal, or wasting a few seconds on a goal kick. The great irony, of course, is that the OneLove armband was intentionally designed to be as inoffensive a protest as possible. It had finally been given some bite by FIFA threatening to explore 'sporting sanctions' - so obviously all seven teams immediately folded, and none wore the armband.

The German team, before their first game against Japan, were the sole team to display any sort of defiance, with the players covering their mouths as they lined up for their pre-match photo. While the gesture is certainly more appreciated than simply complaining after the game and pretending the situation is completely out of their hands, it still feels a bit odd.

For starters, the German players' demonstration shifts the issue away from raising awareness over the draconian anti-LGBT laws in Qatar and onto how footballers have been silenced. Whether or not it was their intention, they have centered the issue on how it affects them.

Having seen their peers slated for bowing to the pressure and not wearing the armband, the German players have cleverly recast themselves as the heroes once more, all the while avoiding the pesky irritant of an actual tangible sacrifice.

Again, the mooted punishment here was not a point deduction or expulsion from the tournament. It wasn't even a suspension. It was one yellow card. For one player. Would FIFA be wrong to hand out such punishment? Absolutely. Could the players still take the hit and go ahead with it? Of course, if they wanted to.

So, I find myself categorising the whole thing under 'disappointed, but not surprised'. We LGBT fans are more than used to being told to be grateful for scraps in all walks of life, but especially in men's sports. Teams and organisations have been happy to pay lip service to the LGBT cause with campaigns like the rainbow laces - which, let's not forget, was originally a publicity stunt for a gambling company. But when push comes to shove, they'll leave us behind once it stops being easy.

The whole OneLove fiasco has confirmed that I was right to turn my back on the men's game. The failed launch of the European Super League (though the concept seems to be dormant rather than dead) was the final straw, but there was a time when I was a football obsessive. I even blagged my way into a career covering the Premier League, popping up everywhere from the BBC to Armenian TV to discuss "the beautiful game".

As a bisexual man the world of football hasn't been the most welcoming. At least not men's football, anyway. I've heard enough 'rent boy' chants to know that coming out isn't always a safe option in

footballing circles. That's not unique to football, though. Anecdotally, it feels like it's getting less safe to be queer, as there have been a number of homophobic and transphobic attacks here in Ireland over the last year.

In the early hours of Sunday morning [20th Nov] - Transgender Day of Remembrance and the day the World Cup kicked off in Qatar - the grandson of a Republican lawmaker went into a gay bar in Colorado Springs in the US and opened fire, killing five people and injuring scores more. In a show of true courage two unarmed Club Q patrons, Richard Fierro and Thomas James, subdued the shooter and prevented him from causing any more harm.

For all the progress we have made, this is still the reality many LGBT folk face, even in supposedly tolerant countries when the safe spaces we have carved out for ourselves can become targets.

And so the various issues with men's football have pushed me to the women's game - where stars such as Megan Rapinoe and Katie McCabe are unafraid to speak out. It's telling that it was Alex Scott who decided to wear the OneLove armband during the BBC broadcast, and not one of her male colleagues.

And if all of that is too abstract, then the English players only needed to look to their opponents on Monday to see what bravery looks like in the face of real oppression. The Iranian players refused to sing their national anthem, before speaking out against their government's violent crackdown against protests. While they were willing to risk everything, perhaps Harry Kane and Co can ask themselves why a yellow card was a step too far.

(Kevin Beirne, The Herald, 24th November)

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World Cup: Filipino worker' death spark probe

Qatar has launched an investigation after a Filipino migrant worker died at a training base used by Saudi Arabia during the World Cup group stage.

First reported by 'The Athletic', the worker, in his early forties, died at a resort after he slipped off a ramp beside a forklift and fell head-first to the ground. He was fixing lights in the car park and there are claims that he had not been wearing proper safety equipment while working. Staff at the resort were not informed of the man's death by officials.

The Qatar Supreme Committee says the incident occurred on a public road; therefore, the government has launched an investigation, rather than the tournament organisers. Nasser Al Khater, chief executive of the 2022 World Cup, offered a bizarre response to the incident when asked by journalists. "Death is a natural part of life, whether it's at work, whether it's in your sleep," said Al Khater. "We have a successful World Cup, and this is something you want to talk about right now. It's strange that this is something you want to focus on as your first question."

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It is expected that the next issue of *The Delegate* will be published in March 2023.

In the meantime, we wish you all a very happy Christmas and an active 2023.

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