

# Liberty

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## Public transport needs more State funds

by Scott Millar

**An attempt by Bus Éireann to impose cuts which would cause massive damage to its services and workers' conditions of employment has highlighted a wider crisis in the public transport sector, according to SIPTU representatives.**

The seriousness of the situation at Bus Éireann, where management is advancing an agenda of subsidising government cutbacks through cuts in workers' pay and conditions, while also running down a public service to the benefit of the private sector, was emphasised by SIPTU Transport, Energy, Aviation and Construction (TEAC) Division Organiser, Greg Ennis.

He said: "The issues that have given rise to the current Bus Éireann dispute should be a source of serious concern to all workers across and beyond the semi-state sector. This is nothing short of 'Phase 2 Austerity' for Bus Éireann workers. It must be vigorously opposed for the sake of the travelling public, our members and indeed workers

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Early Years educators, Elaine O'Connor, Julie O'Sullivan and Annemarie Sweeney (L-R) from Killorglin, county Kerry with Valentine's Day cards for their local TDs and senators. Activists from across the country are sending cards to politicians as part of their campaign for quality, affordable childcare with decent pay. See page 5. (Picture: Darragh O'Connor)

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## Strike at Tim Hastings after workers paid no redundancy

**SIPTU members conducting a strike action at Tim Hastings Volkswagen in Westport, County Mayo, have highlighted the fact that they have not received any redundancy payments of any kind despite claims to the contrary by their employer.**

SIPTU Shop Steward, Brian Vahey, said: "We began our strike action on 3rd February and will maintain our work stoppage until management agrees to implement

the full terms of a Labour Court recommendation concerning the dispute. Since we began the strike we have been overwhelmed with the level of support from the local community.

"Despite claims to the contrary no redundancy entitlements, either statutory or ex gratia, have been paid to the workers let go and management has stated that it will not respect the recommendation of the Labour Court."

SIPTU Organiser, Ashling Dunne, said: "In August, manage-

ment implemented the compulsory redundancy of three of our members in the garage. However, the process by which these workers were selected to be made redundant was not acceptable to our members.

"The Labour Court recommended that one of the workers made redundant be given the choice of returning to his employment or accept an ex-gratia redundancy payment. An ex-gratia redundancy payment was also recommended for those workers whose positions were genuinely made redundant."

## Support staff vote for strike action in selected hospitals

**SIPTU members employed as health service support staff have voted by 94% to 6% in favour of taking strike action in selected hospitals in a dispute concerning breaches of the national public service agreements and their exclusion from concessions provided to other emergency department workers.**

The ballot of the over 10,000 SIPTU members employed as health service support staff was

counted on Monday, 13th February.

SIPTU Health Division Organiser, Paul Bell said: "The issues in dispute include a failure by management to adhere to the fully binding provisions of the Lansdowne Road and Haddington Road agreements. The most crucial elements that have not been adhered to include the re-introduction of a job evaluation scheme and the application of incremental credit to interns.

"The other central issue in this

dispute involves the granting of concessions by the HSE and the Department of Health to nurses working in emergency departments which have not been extended to other workers."

The strike involving over 10,000 health support staff workers will initially take place in 39 acute hospital facilities across the country. The list of hospitals where workers have voted to take strike action can be viewed at [SIPTUHealth.ie](http://SIPTUHealth.ie)

*Continued from page 1 — Public transport needs more State funds*

across the island of Ireland."

He added: "A line was crossed in this dispute when management stated that it intended to unilaterally cut workers terms and conditions of employment from 20th February. These are workers who have not received a pay increase in almost nine years."

He added that it was completely unacceptable that workers were being targeted with pay cuts in order to subsidise a publicly owned transport company, which has experienced a 35% reduction in its state subvention between 2009 and 2015. Bus Éireann did receive €40.8 million of state subvention in 2016 but this was still almost €10 million less than what

it received in 2008.

The seriousness of the situation at Bus Éireann overshadowed discussions at a meeting of SIPTU representatives from the company with their Irish Rail and Dublin Bus colleagues on Friday, 10th February. This meeting declared unconditional support for the workers in Bus Éireann as did the TEAC Divisional Committee at its most recent meeting on 31st January.

SIPTU Transport Sector Organiser, Willie Noone, said: "The representatives of our members in Irish Rail and Dublin Bus have indicated that they are willing to take whatever appropriate actions are necessary to support their col-

leagues in Bus Éireann, as they all are members of CIE companies and have corresponding conditions of employment and work locations."

In a separate dispute in the sector, SIPTU representatives at Dublin Bus announced the commencement of a ballot for industrial action over the breach by the company of the terms of settlement agreed at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) in September 2016.

The management of Dublin Bus has refused to accept that any increase in basic pay must be recognised for pension purposes from 1st February last.

*See pages 5, 16-17*



## Strike ballot underway in Dublin Fire Brigade ambulance dispute

The refusal of senior management in Dublin City Council to resource an additional four ambulances to meet service demands in the city has resulted in a strike ballot by SIPTU members in Dublin Fire Brigade (DFB) which will be completed during February.

SIPTU Sector Organiser, Brendan O'Brien, said: "Due to the importance of their work our members in Dublin Fire Brigade only contemplate industrial action in the most acute of situations. However, the refusal of senior management in Dublin City Council to adequately resource their work so that they can provide the necessary emergency cover for the residents of Dublin is such an acute situation."

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) has identified that there is a capacity issue in relation to the operation of the ambulance service in Dublin. The management of Dublin Fire Brigade advised Dublin City Council that it was prepared to put four additional ambulances on the streets so that its Emergency Medical Service (EMS) can achieve HIQA targets. Dublin City Council has not made the resources available for these ambulances to go into operation.

SIPTU Public Administration and Community Division Organiser, John King, said: "There is growing concern among our members that the management of Dublin City Council is increasingly only concerned with divesting itself of responsibility for providing ambulance provision within the city by running down the Dublin Fire Brigade service. This is something which our members, the public and city councillors have indicated they are completely opposed to."

**At their January and February meetings, Dublin City Councillors backed motions calling for more resources to be made available for the Dublin Fire Brigade ambulance service.**

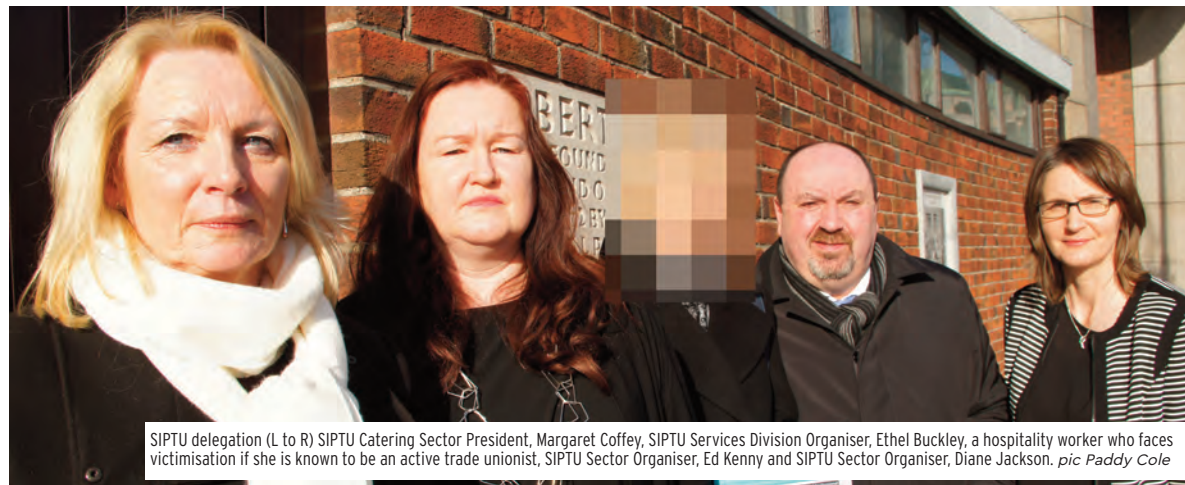
# Hospitality workers say no more claw back on wages

**The Low Pay Commission has been informed by a SIPTU delegation that hospitality workers cannot accept any increase in the amount employers can deduct from workers' pay for the cost of board and lodgings.**

The delegation, which attended a meeting in the Low Pay Commission offices in Adelaide Road, Dublin 2, on Wednesday, 8th February included hospitality workers, SIPTU Organisers, SIPTU Services Division Organiser, Ethel Buckley and SIPTU Catering Sector President, Margaret Coffey.

During the meeting, the delegation outlined the contents of its submission to the Low Pay Commission regarding board and lodgings.

Margaret Coffey, said: "In reality the imposition of higher deductions for board and lodgings would



SIPTU delegation (L to R) SIPTU Catering Sector President, Margaret Coffey, SIPTU Services Division Organiser, Ethel Buckley, a hospitality worker who faces victimisation if she is known to be an active trade unionist, SIPTU Sector Organiser, Ed Kenny and SIPTU Sector Organiser, Diane Jackson. pic Paddy Cole

be used by many employers in the sector to claw back the already insufficient minimum wage improvements to date."

"There is no definition of what constitutes and does not constitute board and lodgings", Ethel Buckley said, "Clear definitions need to be agreed. The best vehicle

for setting forth definitions is an Employment Regulation Order (ERO). Unfortunately, the creation of such EROs for the hotel industry and the catering industry is being hampered by the refusal of employers in these sector to engage in sectoral or enterprise based collective bargaining on wages and

conditions."

Currently employers can deduct €54.13 a week or €7.73 per day for full board and lodgings, €32.14 a week or €4.60 per day full board only and €21.85 or €3.14 per day for lodgings only.

## Migrant workers attend successful two-day SIPTU training course in Galway

**A successful two-day residential training course which brought together migrant worker activists from ten different nationalities was held by the SIPTU Migrant Workers Support Network in Galway on Friday, 27th and Saturday, 28th January.**

Among those who attended the two days of training classes in the Clayton Hotel were workers originally from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Spain, Hungary, Brazil, Turkey, Malawi, Romania and Italy. The training focused on areas of importance for workplace organising including employment rights, procedures for addressing grievances and collective bargaining.

The group was welcomed to Galway by President of the Galway Council of Trade Unions and SIPTU Organiser, Mark Lohan. He said: "The aim of the Support Network is to organise and support migrant workers to effectively and fully participate in union activity. Workers regardless of their country of origin have a shared objective in sustaining and improving working conditions."



SIPTU Migrant Workers Support Network and supporters in the Clayton Hotel in Galway on Saturday, 28th January. Pic: Graham Seeley

Support Network coordinator, Joanna Ozdarska, said: "Support Network activists work in collaboration with like-minded progressive groups and organisations

across the community sector and civil society to campaign for a just, inclusive and equal society for all."

SIPTU Migrant Workers Support Network is supported by the SIPTU

Manufacturing Division and SIPTU Services Division.





Jack O'Connor, Stella McConnon the granddaughter of Jim Larkin and Lord Mayor of Dublin Brendan Carr follow the piper at Glasnevin Cemetery on Monday, 30th January Pic: Paddy Cole

## O'Connor warns of drift to xenophobic nationalism across Europe

Speaking at a commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the death of labour leader, Jim Larkin, in Glasnevin cemetery on 30th January, SIPTU General President, Jack O'Connor, warned about people being driven into the arms of xenophobic parties.

He said the policies of austerity imposed by centre-right leaders across the EU have devastated the lives of millions of working people and assisted the rise of xenophobic nationalist parties.

"Their brutal strategy has fundamentally undermined the legitimacy of the

European project in the eyes of tens of millions of workers and young people," Jack O'Connor said.

He called on left parties "to invest their political capital in helping create a more positive, and productive programme and strategy. That is the real test of leadership. Look at the example that is being provided by the parties of the left in Portugal where they have established an alliance for government, reversing austerity, reinstating workers' rights and charting a course for a progressive future."

## Concern over precarious jobs in third level education

**The SIPTU Education Sector hosted a seminar on the future funding and precarious employment in the third level education sector in Liberty Hall Theatre on Wednesday 18th January.**

The seminar entitled 'Towards a World Class Funded Education System?' was attended by delegates from third level institutions from across the country including the main Dublin universities, NUI Galway, Cork and Maynooth.

Speakers included Peter Cassells, chair of the government appointed expert group on the future funding of higher education, Tom Healy, Director of NERI, Liam Berney, ICTU

and John King SIPTU Public Administration and Community Division Organiser.

SIPTU Education Sector President, Jack McGinley, said: "There was consensus at the meeting that in order for Ireland to have a world class third level education system it must be appropriately and directly funded by government.

He added: "SIPTU activists in NUI Galway, outlined the specific effect of precarious employment in their workplace and the campaign they have launched in order to mobilise union members against the continuation of such practices by management."

## BNM unions criticise purchase of UK company

**Union members have expressed disappointment at the decision by management at Bord Na Móna (BNM) to purchase White Moss Horticulture (WMH), a UK compost manufacturing company.**

BNM Group of Unions secretary, John Regan, said the purchase of WMH has raised the prospect of the displacement of existing jobs at BNM.

## Cork County Council workers ballot for strike action

**SIPTU members in Cork County Council have commenced a ballot for industrial action and strike action in a dispute related to the refusal of management to engage with the workforce planning**

**process and recruit more staff to adequately deliver statutory services.**

The ballot is scheduled to be counted in Connolly Hall, Cork City on Friday, 17th February.

## Airport terminals must stay in state ownership

**SIPTU TEAC Division Organiser, Greg Ennis, has reiterated the opposition of union members to any proposal to sell publicly owned airport terminals to private interests.**

He said media reports on 2nd February that Aer Lingus CEO,

Stephen Kavanagh, has questioned the continued public ownership of airport terminals was "a further example of the agenda of some to drive down the terms and conditions of workers employed across several state owned transport companies."



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## Tesco strike starts on Valentine's Day

**An all-out strike by workers in eight Tesco stores across the country is due to commence on Tuesday, 14th February. Another nine stores are due to join the dispute on Friday, 17th February, while Mandate trade union members in several other Tesco branches are being balloted to join the strike.**

In solidarity with the striking Mandate members, SIPTU General President, Jack O'Connor, called on all trade union activists to lis-

ten to their conscience when considering their shopping options until the Tesco dispute is resolved.

According to SIPTU General President, Jack O'Connor, the Tesco dispute is about the imposition of grossly inferior terms of employment on a minority of its workforce who have the longest service.

"The retail grocery sector is now increasingly populated by non-union players who do not apply the decent trade union negotiated terms enjoyed by the longer serv-

ing Tesco workers. Low pay and zero-hour contracts have increasingly become the order of the day," he said.

The dispute results from an attempt by Tesco Ireland to impose changes to the contracts of employment for approximately 250 workers employed before 1996 which would result in some workers experiencing reduced incomes of up to 20%.

The list of stores affected by the strike action can be viewed at [tescoworkers.com](http://tescoworkers.com).

## One Cork project calls for Local Authority housing plan

**SIPTU and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions are supporting a proposal that local authorities should engage in a major house building programme to deal with the pressing homeless crisis, rent uncertainty and the lack of social housing across the country.**

The proposal, which was endorsed unanimously by the executive of the ICTU in December, is based on a detailed analysis of the housing crisis prepared by the One Cork project.

One Cork is a group of 20 trade unions in Cork city and county which has published a radical and practical proposal as to how local authorities employing direct labour immediately begin a house construction programme for low and middle income families who cannot at present afford to buy or rent decent housing.

The document, "Housing our Communities: A Sustainable Foundation for the Future" outlines how the immediate establishment of Municipal Housing Authorities by city and county councils across the country can develop, fund and maintain an extensive building programme by pooling the skills and resources of directly employed construction workers, architects and engineers as well as accessing finance and procurement expertise, land banks and vacant council properties already under their control.

"The new authorities would have direct responsibility for the public housing portfolio which would include construction of new builds and ongoing maintenance of the mixed income rental properties," said Barry Murphy of the One Cork project.

"Rather than rely on the private sector, municipal authorities can

access land, including vacant properties the councils already control, and finance from the Housing Finance Agency, the European Investment Bank and other sources at a time when the long-term cost of Irish borrowing is at historically low levels and the public finances are improving. It can be done without breaching Eurostat rules. The proposal to engage in a refurbishment programme of current vacant local authority owned properties using direct labour has already been accepted as practical and necessary by the Housing and Environment Strategic Planning Committee of Cork City Council. "There is no reason it cannot be rolled out across the State where tens of thousands of people are unable to obtain affordable private rental accommodation or gather the necessary deposits for the few houses that are being privately built."

## Early Years educators present TDs with Valentine's Cards

**Early Years educators involved in the SIPTU 'Big Start' campaign delivered hundreds of Valentine's Cards to TDs and Senators in Leinster House, Dublin 2, on Valentine's Day, 14th February.**

The cards are from Early Years

educators from across the country and call upon politicians to show their sector "some love" by recognising its importance and funding it accordingly.

SIPTU 'Big Start' Campaign Co-ordinator, Darragh O'Connor, said: "It is time for the government to show some love to the Early Years sector. Sadly, many

feel undervalued and underpaid. Early Years Educators deserve decent pay. If we want a quality childcare service, we need to recognise and reward those who are delivering it."

For regular updates on the Big Start campaign see [www.bigstart.ie](http://www.bigstart.ie) or follow 'BigStartIreland' on Facebook.

## SIPTU appeal Clerys development to An Bord Pleanála

**An appeal against the granting of planning permission for the Clerys Department Store site in central Dublin has been lodged with An Bord Pleanála by SIPTU. The union's call for a public hearing on the proposed development also received the backing of Dublin City councillors at their meeting on 6th February.**

The appeal highlights the loss of retail space in the proposed development and concerns about

the lack of analysis on the architectural effect the redevelopment would have on the GPO and the surrounding area, which is of major historic significance. The appeal follows an objection to Dublin City Council concerning the development by the union.

SIPTU Services Division Organiser, Ethel Buckley, said: "The new owners of Clerys have still not met the SIPTU representatives of the hundreds of staff who lost their jobs when it closed in highly controversial circumstances in 2015."

She added: "The support SIPTU has provided to our members in the Justice for Clerys Workers campaign is part of an increased focus on improving the lived environments and workplace settings of our members. This is part of the Working City Initiative, through which SIPTU wishes to work with the city council and local businesses to create a better and more economically successful city."

## Bus Éireann workers left with no alternative



By  
Greg  
Ennis

**A senior management decision to launch a unilateral attack on their terms and conditions has left Bus Éireann workers with little choice but to invoke their mandate for strike action.**

Workers across all sections within Bus Éireann are cognisant of the important public service role that they provide and are acutely aware of the hundreds of thousands of people who depend on their services on a daily basis. These workers recognise that the public will be adversely affected should strike action commence on 20th February.

However, with a management team intent on forcing through cuts that endanger the very future of our public transport system, particularly in rural areas, our members in Bus Éireann feel duty bound to take action. SIPTU will vehemently support our members in this dispute and whatever action they decide to take.

At its core this dispute is quite simple. The State should not need to operate a 'for profit' bus service but rather one that provides an efficient and effective service to communities across the country. Recognising this over 300 bus routes across the country are categorised as Public Service Obligation (PSO) routes and receive subvention allowing them to break even.

Clearly, Bus Éireann's intercity operation, Expressway, needs to be re-examined with certain of its routes needing to be re-categorised as PSO. There is also the issue of establishing a Sectoral Employment Order for the bus industry, which would remove workers' pay and conditions from competition between public and private operators. This would end the race to the bottom in the industry in terms of workers' employment standards thus ensuring decent jobs are maintained and crucially safety standards are upheld.

It is sadly ironic that in recent days the government has promoted its 'Rural Ireland Framework' and its 'National Planning Strategy 2040' and yet it seems intent on presiding over the demise of public transport in rural Ire-

land. If there was ever a case of talking out of both sides of your mouth, well this is it. Already, as a direct consequence of operational changes implemented by the management of Bus Éireann on 16th January, we have seen negative effects on rural PSO routes resulting in citizens being stranded without their necessary public transport.

As the dispute at Bus Éireann has worsened, workers and the public have awaited deeds and not just flippant words from the the Minister for Transport, Shane

There is also the issue of establishing a Sectoral Employment Order for the bus industry, which would remove workers' pay and conditions from competition between public and private operators

Ross. However, he continues to 'twiddle his thumbs' while conflict looms large over the whole transport sector. As it is Government policy which lies at the centre of this crisis it is undoubtedly the responsibility of the Minister, his Department and by association the National Transport Authority and the Department of Social Protection to get involved in efforts to resolve it.

Surely, the travelling public outside the greater Dublin area are entitled to no less a public transport service than that which exists within the capital and its suburbs? Our members in Bus Éireann believe that is the case as they also believe bus workers deserve to have decent jobs. That is why they are committed to persevering until they win the upcoming battle. It is also why they believe that the travelling public, rural TDs and all fair minded citizens will support them if they are forced to take strike action.

*Greg Ennis is Head of SIPTU, Transport, Energy, Aviation and Construction Division (TEAC).*



# Funding, pay and privatisation key concerns for Community Sector

**THE High Level Forum for the Community Sector, bringing together SIPTU officials and representatives from several government departments, will meet on Friday, 24th February to discuss a range of serious issues facing the sector.**

SIPTU Community Sector Organiser, Eddie Mullins, told *Liberty*: "At this meeting SIPTU representatives will be raising three key issues for workers across the sector – these are the funding of the vital services they deliver, problems associated with creeping privatisation and the need for movement on pay and related issues.

"All three of these issues directly impact on tens of thousands of workers and hundreds of thousands of community sector service users across the country. It is hoped that progress can be made in discussions with the relevant government departments but in order to get positive action on these issues our members are also

launching a nationwide political campaign."

The campaign will include meetings between community workers and local TDs to discuss the problems in the sector, meetings between SIPTU representatives and the leaders of the all the main political parties; and protests to highlight the threat to services.

SIPTU Community Sector President, Donnie O'Leary, said: "SIPTU members in the Community Sector provide crucial support to many people within our society including people with disabilities, older people, young people and vulnerable families. Work in the sector is focused on areas such as providing childcare, combating poverty, supporting those with mental health issues, human rights advocacy and family support.

"It is completely unacceptable that workers providing such vital services to their communities have lost their jobs without receiving their full entitlements. It is also in-



tolerable that employers in the sector are ignoring Labour Court recommendations despite being fully funded by government departments and that workers haven't had a pay increase in nearly nine

years.

"Privatisation is also a growing threat. In particular, private sector for-profit companies are forcing out service providers in the job ac-

tivation area. This process goes against the whole ethos of community development which is not about generating profits and merely hitting performance targets but is focused on delivering quality outcomes in terms of employment and social inclusion."

He added: "Our members are exploring every avenue to get justice. This includes considering industrial action if it is necessary."

The campaign pillars of more funding, stopping privatisation and improvements in pay and conditions will be the focus of discussions at the SIPTU Community Sector Annual General Meeting in Liberty Hall on 22nd March.

In the coming days, representatives from the sector will also be meeting with Labour Party leader, Brendan Howlin, to discuss a private member's bill he is sponsoring which seeks to ensure community workers who are made redundant receive their full entitlements.

## SIPTU calls for early referendum vote to ensure water supply is kept in public hands

**SIPTU has called for a significant increase in funding to guarantee the highest standards of Ireland's water supply and for an early referendum to ensure it remains in public hands.**

In its submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Future Funding of Domestic Water services, the union has argued that "retention of the public water supply in public ownership and control of its operation and infrastructure" is essential.

The submission backs the suggestion put forward by the Expert Commission late last year that measures should be taken "to alleviate the concerns of those who believe that the eventual privatisation of Irish Water remains a possibility".

In its submission, SIPTU points out that none of the parties represented in the Oireachtas have promoted the privatisation of the public water supply.

"All of them now appear to support the concept of a constitutional referendum to amend the Constitution to prohibit privatisation. Despite the fact that none of the parties currently represented in the Oireachtas favour privatisation, circumstances could change dramatically if the solvency of our



Picture: Sinn Féin (CC BY 2.0)

sovereign debt were to become an issue again."

SIPTU argued that this could happen if there was, for example, "a disorderly departure from the Eurozone or even the EU by any country".

The submission continued: "Accordingly, it is imperative that early agreement is reached be-

tween the political parties on an appropriate wording for the referendum in order to allow it to proceed well before the end of 2017.

"This entire issue has divided our society for long enough. The amendment should focus on the wider concept of 'The Public Water Supply' as distinct from the narrow parameters of 'Irish Water'.

"The opponents of water charges have correctly argued that given the essential requirement for water to sustain human life, that it should be available freely at the point of use and funded by progressive taxation."

It continued: "The statement by the Expert Commission that the Service Level Agreement (SLAs) with local authorities "could become a barrier in the drive towards ever-improving efficiency" is rather unique in the context of the overall report. The other conclusions are generally reasonably well supported by reference and source material. However, this statement is advanced without so much as a scintilla of evidence. It doesn't withstand scrutiny and is repudiated by the experience since the SLAs came into being. Crucially, given the fragility of much of the current water infrastructure the input of the 'local knowledge' of a range of local authority staff will be absolutely essential to guarantee secure delivery of supply for several years until major developmental and remedial works are completed. Indeed, otherwise, on the issue of efficiency, this cross over arrangement also facilitates response in times of extreme weather events and other environmental crises.

The SIPTU submission stated that income tax was "more socially equitable and progressive" than other types of charges or indirect taxes, "despite the distorting affects of various allowances available to the better off".

"However, the benefits which accrue to those on lower incomes are undoubtedly considerably offset by virtue of the requirement to pay for the water that others waste, even if the payment is through progressive taxation. The concept of a full supply of all the water people require to fully meet all of their domestic needs free at the point of use is virtually beyond reasonable challenge, but it doesn't hold true in respect of wasteage.

"Accordingly, given the need for conservation the idea of a tariff on waste makes sense. However, it should apply only after the level of 'average usage' as objectively determined had been well exceeded and generous provision is made for those requiring additional water for health or other reasons.

"It should also be accompanied by a range of positive measures to incentivise conservation. It should not in any circumstances be introduced until after the referendum."

**For full submission go to [www.siptu.ie/media/publications](http://www.siptu.ie/media/publications)**



# Learning for action

**The modern trade union movement was born out of workers learning how politics, economics and society really worked and in whose interest. A commitment to placing such an educational drive at the centre of SIPTU activities underpins the plans of the new Head of SIPTU College, Tish Gibbons, plans over the coming years.**

"As part of becoming an organising union I think there is a very natural inclination to refocus on education," she told Liberty. "In SIPTU College we do training very well in terms of how to be a shop steward or union official but now there is a need to focus on why we are building our union."

Tish highlights three key areas which are part of a new strategy

on union education recently adopted by the SIPTU National Executive Council. "One is that we will expand the reach of our existing education programmes; the second is to design new programmes, where needed, and thirdly there will be a focus on making the delivery of all union education more flexible."

Fulfilling these aims has seen the union working on a new learning support and delivery methods. These include a new learning support website, [s iptu learn .ie](http://s iptu learn .ie), utilising new forms of education aids including films and developing new 'pop-up training courses' – which will see classes delivered to activists after other SIPTU meetings.

There has also been launch of the 'Educate to Organise' programme, which seeks to provide activists with the knowledge of history, economic and social theories they need to inform their



Tish Gibbons, Head of SIPTU College  
Pic: Paddy Cole

## SIPTU College Courses

### Basic and advanced shop stewards courses -

provides union activists with the skills in terms of industrial, legal and organising they need to represent workers.

### Trade Union studies -

QQI Certified Course which focuses on areas such as economics, human resource management, collective bargaining, equality and diversity procedures.

### Educate to Organise -

a course covering Irish history, economics and social development which seeks to enhance the political education and motivation of activists.

Last year also saw the launch of the 'Educate to Organise' programme, which seeks to provide activists with the knowledge of history, economic and social theories they need to inform their actions.

actions. Already nearly 100 activists have taken the course throughout the country.

In all these initiatives Tish has played a key role, drawing upon contacts with international unions, studies of learning techniques developed by other organisations and her doctorate in researching work from London Metropolitan University.

Tish has already had an extensive career in the trade union movement. Originally from

Mayo she joined the Federated Workers Union of Ireland (FWUI) in 1982, becoming a full-time employee in that union's Galway office in 1986. She worked for the FWUI Western Area Branch, which organised approximately 2,000 workers across many sectors "from Cavan to Cork and everything west of that." She remained based in Galway following the 1990 merger between the FWUI and ITGWU which formed SIPTU.

From a family with a history of activity in progressive politics, Tish sees promoting learning about the history of the organised working class in Ireland as a priority. "People must be aware of where what we have in terms of rights as workers came from. We are all aware of the great Lockout of 1913, but we must also be aware of how a laundresses strike in 1945 won us the right to two weeks paid holidays, that the five-day working week was a result of a strike by construction workers.

"It was not the Government or the employers that gave workers these rights, every bit of it was hard won. It is important that we always reflect on that and see the politics in it."

Over the coming years, Tish says her aim is to "develop a vibrant SIPTU College, that is reaching the union's members with political, skills and vocational education that they need."

## Kerry Group dispute over shift change

**Four more 24-hour work stoppages have been scheduled by SIPTU members at the Kerry Group plants in Charleville, County Cork, in a dispute which results from the company's refusal to attend the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC).**

The stoppages have been announced for Tuesday 14th, Friday 17th, Tuesday 21st and Friday

24th February. SIPTU Organiser, Terry Bryan, said: "Workers at the food ingredient plants have already conducted three 24-hour work stoppages as part of this dispute. Unfortunately, the company took the highly provocative step of utilising strike breakers to run one of the plants during our members' work stoppage on Thursday, 9th February.

"This was done to undermine

our members while they are engaging in a legitimate trade dispute and it would be very much hoped that management will not repeat this provocation."

The items that are in dispute at the Kerry Group plants include proposed changes to shift patterns and terms, job rotation and appointments. Management have refused to attend a conciliation meeting at the WRC.





# SIPTU Health is on the move



By  
Paddy Cole

**Since its launch at the SIPTU Health Biennial Delegate Conference in October 2016 the SIPTU Health smartphone app has grown from strength to strength.**

Over 2,000 members have now downloaded the app and it is planned that 2017 will bring exciting new additions that will attract more members to use this dedicated organising, communications and campaigning online platform.

SIPTU Shop Steward in Cork University Hospital, Lorraine Collins told Liberty she found the app to be a great example of trade unions making their message relevant and accessible to workers who might otherwise have not engaged with the union on a day to day basis.

"Talking to members around the hospital, the app is great way of en-

couraging people to get more active in the union. To see what's going on, and to know what the story is nationally and locally. It's an ice breaker, a conversation starter and a great way to recruit members into our union. No one can say they 'never hear from the union'. Now, our union is in their hand."

Speaking to Liberty, SIPTU Health Divisional Organiser, Paul Bell said that he was encouraged the app is off to a promising start and is confident more members will download this exclusive service for health members, especially when the public service pay talks get under way in this spring.

"The feedback from our Shop Stewards has been very positive. The Division has embraced the fact that the way working people communicate with each other and their communities has fundamentally changed so the labour movement cannot be left behind. Every day more and more workers are getting their news and information straight into their hand from their phones so it's important our union can compete with that reality."



SIPTU General Secretary, Joe O'Flynn, pictured with the SIPTU Health app available to download from the App Store and Google Play now.  
Pic: Paddy Cole

## SIPTU cautiously hopeful about outcome of nursing and midwifery recruitment talks



**SIPTU Nursing representatives have said they are cautiously hopeful concerning the outcome of talks with senior management at the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Department of Health aimed at resolving a dispute concerning the recruitment and retention of nurses and midwives.**

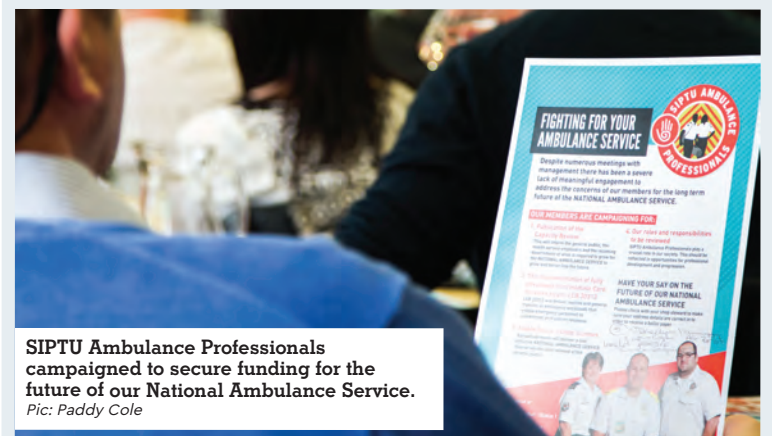
SIPTU Sector Organiser, Kevin Figgis, said: "Our National Nursing and Midwifery Committee met on Wednesday,

8th February, to discuss proposals after a long night of talks concluded at 4.00 a.m. that morning. The outcome is a small step towards potentially increasing the level of nursing and midwifery posts, structured educational opportunities and provides a roadmap to fill any nursing professional vacancies, as they arise."

SIPTU Organiser, John McCamley, said: "After difficult and intense negotiations over the past number of weeks, a structure that

can lay the foundations to restore nursing and midwifery staffing levels is potentially in place. The document offers additional scope for enhanced recruitment, enhanced educational opportunities and includes an assurance from management that all graduate nurses and midwives will be offered permanent jobs. We are cautiously hopeful that this provides an opportunity to begin to meaningfully tackle the deficit in nursing and midwifery staffing levels."

## SIPTU Ambulance Professionals make submission to Pay Commission



SIPTU Ambulance Professionals campaigned to secure funding for the future of our National Ambulance Service.  
Pic: Paddy Cole

**A comprehensive proposal aimed at addressing all issues relating to recruitment and retention of Ambulance Professionals has been submitted to the Public Service Pay Commission.**

SIPTU Sector Organiser, Sean Nolan told Liberty that the union is now following through on a strategy devised by shop stewards and members and which ensures Ambulance Professionals receive the recognition they deserve.

"SIPTU members campaigned throughout 2016 to secure the investment for effectively resourcing the National Ambulance Service over the next five years.

We believe to recruit and retain badly needed Ambulance Professionals it is time to examine our members' overall pay and conditions package in its totality. Our members believe that to provide a quality public ambulance service, we must continue to work might and main to ensure that the National Ambulance Service can compete in a volatile labour market. Our submission concentrates strongly on providing solutions that offer a fulfilling career for SIPTU Ambulance Professionals with opportunities for self-development and career progression that gives motivation to meet the expectations and requirements of a world class ambulance service."



# Payment of Wages case outcome significant victory for all workers



By Tom O'Driscoll

**A NUMBER of SIPTU members who were employees of Complete Highway Care Ltd secured a significant victory for workers throughout Ireland in the High Court last month.**

And in the process they saved the Payment of Wages legislation for use as a valuable weapon in the fight against unlawful deduction of wages by employers.

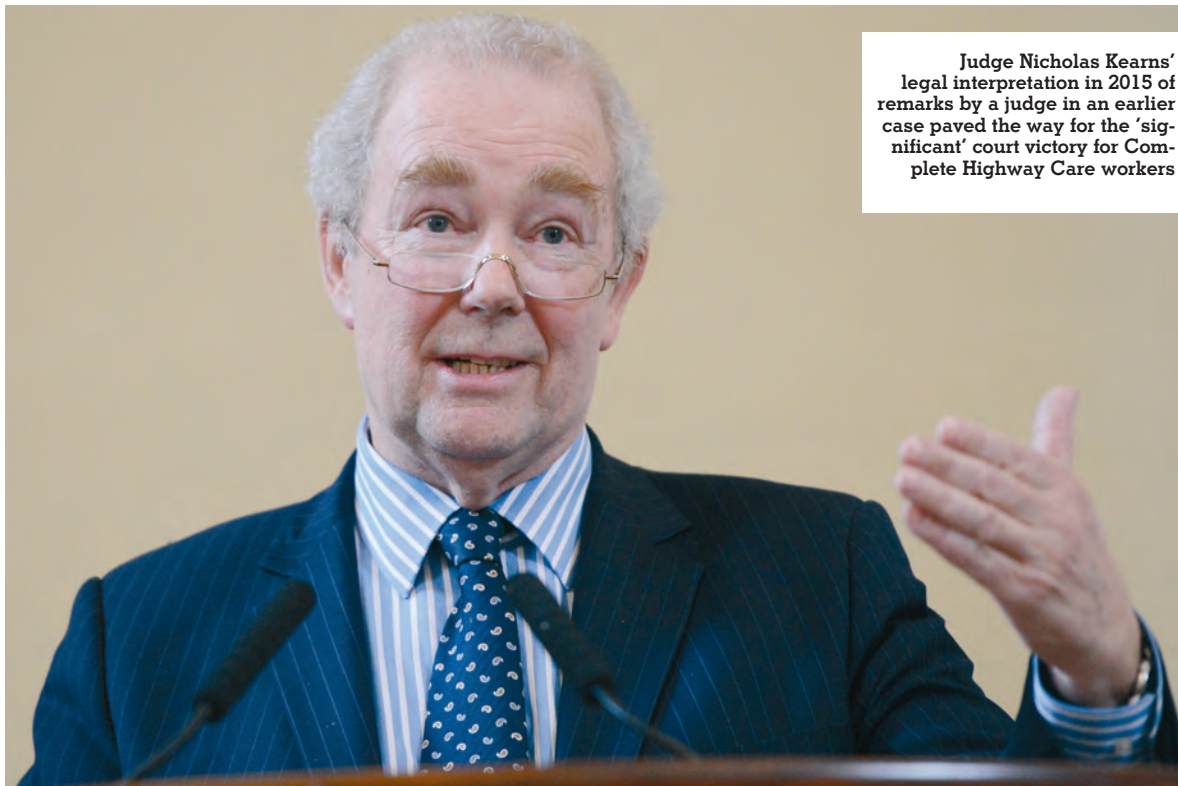
The High Court in *Petkus and Others V Complete Highway Care Ltd* issued a judgment on Friday, 20th January 2017, the details of which represent a huge victory for workers.

This judgment reverses a previously-held incorrect belief among many decision makers that a reduction in a worker's income was not a deduction from their wage and therefore the worker involved had no case to bring under the *Payment of Wages Act 1991*.

A total of 21 SIPTU international workers at the Complete Highway Care company had their wages cut by 10% in 2009 as well as having their bonus cancelled in 2010.

SIPTU took a case to the Rights Commissioner service, which found in favour of the 21 workers in 2013. The employer subsequently appealed it to the Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT) which overturned the Rights Commissioner's decision.

The Tribunal concluded that a reduction in wages was not the same as a deduction. This decision fell in line with a common interpreta-



Judge Nicholas Kearns' legal interpretation in 2015 of remarks by a judge in an earlier case paved the way for the 'significant' court victory for Complete Highway Care workers

tion of the Act by some bodies.

This arose from a comment by the High Court judge in the 2010 McKenzie decision. On that occasion, the judge gave an opinion on the *Payment of Wages Act 1991* to the effect that a reduction in wages was not the same as a deduction.

The Act was not up for interpretation in McKenzie – a fact admitted by the judge in his written decision – but nevertheless the comment was liberally misinterpreted.

Subsequently, SIPTU argued at hearings that some tribunals had misinterpreted the significance of McKenzie, in particular that the comment had been made by the judge "in passing" and therefore could not have a decisive effect on

future interpretation.

Nevertheless, significant damage was done to the effectiveness of the Act for workers through this incorrect interpretation until a 2015 judgment by then-High Court President Justice Kearns in *Earagail Eisc Teoranta*, which also involved SIPTU members. Mr Justice Kearns made it clear that the comments on the "reduction v deduction" issue were indeed said "in passing".

This argument has been continually submitted by SIPTU at various Rights Commissioner and EAT hearings. The battle was half-way won but it took the Petkus case to finally give the *coup de grace* to this erroneous interpretation.

The workers at Complete High-

PICTURE: RollingNews.ie

It is unfortunate that workers had to wait so long for a comprehensive decision that has reinvigorated this important piece of legislation

way Care took the point of law case to the High Court where Judge Michael White has ordered that the case would be sent back to the EAT, as the tribunal fell into an error of law in failing to consider the entirety of the circumstances.

In his decision, Judge White stated that the McKenzie judgment has "unfortunately [...] caused particular confusion to the determinations of Employment Appeals Tribunal and Rights Commissioners on the issue of section 5 of the *Payment of Wages Act 1991*."

He clarified the fundamental point that McKenzie is "not precedent to allow a reduction in wages which does not offend s.5 of the *Payment of Wages Act 1991*."

Ultimately, he found for the workers who argued, among other things, that "the EAT fell into an error of law in failing to consider the entirety of the circumstances of the matter and failed to properly consider or apply the correct interpretation and intention of that legislation protecting the payment of wages of workers under the Act and the Constitution."

There is no doubt that the *Payment of Wages Act, 1991* was effectively decommissioned from 2010 onwards as an effective foil against employer attempts to reduce wages without the consent of workers.

The intention of the Oireachtas in originally passing the Act was to protect the wages of workers. It is unfortunate that workers had to wait so long for a comprehensive decision that has reinvigorated this important piece of legislation.

The old cliché was never so appropriate as of now – better late than never.

Tom O'Driscoll is Head of SIPTU's Legal Rights Unit/Workers Rights Centre.



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## Workers Rights Welcome Centre

Liberty Hall Theatre,  
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All workers welcome





**By JACK O'CONNOR**  
SIPTU General President

## Liberty View

# A new and more brutal phase of capitalism

**As we go to press two major disputes which go to the very core of the reason we must organise the unorganised are about to commence. They arise in two different sectors of the economy but they are both entirely attributable to the fact that the trade union movement, hamstrung by its nineteenth century structures has not been able to organise new entrants to the relevant markets.**

The Tesco dispute is about the imposition of grossly inferior terms of employment on a minority of its workforce who have the longest service. The retail grocery sector is now increasingly populated by non-union players who do not

**The dumping down of conditions won over several years of trade union work is the common characteristic of the new and more brutal form of capitalism now in the ascendency in the aftermath of the great global economic collapse of 2008.**

apply the decent trade union negotiated terms enjoyed by the longer serving Tesco workers. Low pay and zero-hour contracts have increasingly become the order of the day.

In some respects the Bus Éireann dispute is different – but the core problem is not. Again, this fully unionised company in which workers enjoy reasonable trade union negotiated terms and conditions of employment has been undermined by the presence of non-union competitors who do not recognise trade unions for the purpose of collective bar-

**There is no easy way. We must win the forthcoming battles in Tesco and in Bus Éireann. But we must go on to address the organising challenge and secure the benefits of collective bargaining for tens and thousands of workers across the economy.**

gaining and who do not apply anything remotely approaching equivalent terms to their workers.

The dumping down of conditions won over several years of trade union work is the common characteristic of the new and more brutal form of capitalism now in the ascendency in the aftermath of the great global economic collapse of 2008. It was already well embedded before the collapse as the influence of trade union organisation and collective

bargaining was gradually eroded. However, there weren't too many instances of full frontal assaults on well-established and agreed terms of employment. Regrettably, these have now become the order of the day as even the 'good employers' join in the relentless 'race to the bottom' on the quality of jobs. In the primal 'survival of the fittest' brutal and turbulent world of modern, post crisis capitalism there is no place for luxuries like decent jobs anymore.

Collective bargaining and the level of trade union organisation required to enable it to take place is the key determinant of the quality of life for the great majority of workers. It is so because it is in this process and only in it, that workers get to have some say in how the benefits of output are distributed. Even global institutions like the IMF now concede that the exponential growth of inequality which is destroying the very fabric of the economic and social system itself can be directly attributable to the demise of trade union organisation and the erosion of collective bargaining ultimately resulting in the immiseration of working people.

It is not just enough to 'look after our own members'. It is foolhardy to fail to realise that if we do not organise the competition and bring their employment standards up to the level we have estab-

lished through years of work in the unionised sectors, they will take our members' market share through cheaper pricing. Some still think that they will be able to insulate public service jobs from this insidious process. They won't because the 'race to the bottom' affects whole economies – not just parts of them.

There is no easy way. We must win the forthcoming battles in Tesco and in Bus Éireann. But we must go on to address the organising challenge and secure the benefits of collective bargaining for tens and thousands of workers across the economy. It is a battle to win decent

**All that is required is to persuade enough of the workers in the relevant industry or occupational category to join a trade union so that it can demonstrate to the Labour Court that it is "substantially representative"**

terms of employment for those who do not have them, many of whom are increasingly working in conditions not far removed from slavery. But it is also a battle to shore up decent levels of pay and conditions and job security. The key



to it all is trade union organisation and collective bargaining.

The great irony is that the legal environment for winning collective bargaining rights in the Republic of Ireland is now better than it has ever been before. Thanks to the painstaking work of the Labour Party in the last Government a number of significant improvements have been achieved. The key instruments which protect the pay and conditions of tens of thousands of lower paid workers in industries such as security and contract cleaning as well as others, the Employment Regulations Orders (EROs) and the Registered Employment Agreements (REAs), were reinstated after they had been struck out by the courts. On top of this a completely new instrument was put in place - the Sectoral Employment Order (SEO). This enables

**Working people, not least those in Tesco and Bus Éireann, are faced with having to fight battles they shouldn't have to fight and many, many others are facing worse. Its way past time to wake up and smell the roses!**

workers to win improvements in pay and conditions of employment and make them legally binding on all the employers across a whole industry, sector or occupational category, without ever having to fight an industrial dispute for recognition. All that is required is to persuade enough of the workers in the relevant industry or occupational category to join a trade union so that it can demonstrate to the Labour Court that it is "substantially representative". In addition to that the new Act, which was passed in July 2015, also provides a way in which the workers in an individual employment can achieve improvements in pay and conditions that are legally binding on the employer, without having to run the gauntlet of an industrial dispute to achieve recognition. That piece of legislation also includes extensive protection against victimisation for seeking to persuade fellow workers to join a union.

(Actually, Ireland was the only country in the world to enact legislation increasing collective bargaining rights for workers against the background of the economic collapse of 2008. Indeed, these rights have been under sustained attack in all the so-called programme countries and many others).

However, if the trade union movement is to fully avail of these new legal provisions and assist those who are not yet organised to do so on a sufficient scale to really begin a fight back for 'decent work' it will have to change itself. We cannot hope to win the battles of the 21st century with the infrastructure of the 19th. That is why we must take our courage in our hands and press ahead with the implementation of the recommendations of the report of the Commission on trade union organisation which was adopted in two parts, virtually unanimously, at the ICTU BDC in July 2011 and July 2013. This envisages a new united movement entailing all unions cooperating together to link collective bargaining and organising and deploying resources on an unprecedented scale in a battle to win for workers. The report also envisaged this unprecedented co-operation on the industrial and organising fronts being supported by a greatly more resourced Nevin Institute to challenge the other side in the development of ideas, a new workers college to reinforce the principle that equality is not only morally, but economically superior so as well, a trade union media platform to challenge the hegemony of the other side in the dissemination of information and the establishment of joint trade union centres in every county which are open and available to provide advice, information and assistance to workers.

Regrettably, unions have been pre-occupied with their day-to-day work and insufficient progress has been made on the project. Meanwhile, those driving the race to the bottom, dismantling decent jobs, have been relentlessly active in filling the vacuum. Working people, not least those in Tesco and Bus Éireann, are faced with having to fight battles they shouldn't have to fight and many, many others are facing worse. Its way past time to wake up and smell the roses!

# A level playing field for workers

SIPTU's policy researcher **Loraine Mulligan** gives a cautious welcome to EU plans to revise the 1996 Posted Workers Directive



By  
Loraine  
Mulligan

**THE European Parliament hosted a stakeholder consultation on 2nd February over a new proposal from the EU Commission to revise the 1996 Posted Workers Directive.**

A 'posted' worker is an employee who is sent by his employer to carry out a service in another

This is a shift from the narrow range of entitlements currently guaranteed under the Directive. This is a positive development for workers in Europe but its tangible effect in Ireland is less encouraging.

The reality is that, since the system to conclude Registered Employment Agreements (REAs) was struck down by the courts in 2013, Ireland lacks strong mechanisms to render collective bargaining outcomes universally applicable.

Whereas there was previously an REA for construction, the only



Member State for a temporary period. Fine Gael MEP for Ireland, Deirdre Clune, chaired the event.

Recognition of the need for a fundamental review comes after years of lobbying by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC).

The issue raised its head in a landmark case involving Sweden at the end of 2007 (known as the Laval case) which put limitations on strike action by the Swedish building workers' trade union in defence of locally bargained pay rates and gave rise to concerns about social dumping.

The new proposal seeks to provide a level playing field for workers in the provision of cross-border services by allowing posted workers to benefit from the elements of remuneration that are set down by law or in collective agreements that are universally applicable.

REAs that operate now apply at company level, e.g. Bus Éireann. This does not fall under the scope of the proposed Directive. The proposed Directive should be amended to include generally applicable agreements at workplace level - in line with the recommendation of the European Economic and Social Committee.

The proposed Directive provides the possibility for Member States to apply to workers in a sub-contracting chain the same conditions as are applied by the main contractor. This could be strengthened to a requirement for the most favourable conditions rather than an option under the Directive.

Finally, under the proposal, the duration of postings would be capped at 24 months. This is an excessive length of time and should be limited to six months.



# Future proofing the economy



By Tom  
McDonnell

**THE WORLD is changing. Brexit and Trumpism will no doubt be followed by further shifts and shocks, many of which we can't anticipate. Ireland's industrial and enterprise strategies will have to evolve to adjust to changing political, economic and technological realities.**

One constructive step that the Irish government can take to future proof its economy is to renew its focus on innovation policy with a view to building a world class innovation system. Technological change and innovation have long been of fundamental interest to economists because of the belief that sustainable long-run economic growth depends on the ability of the economy to produce and diffuse new innovations.

It is unwise to conflate innovation with R&D or to treat innovation as a linear process. Yet it is notable that Ireland invests significantly less in innovation inputs than do other similar small open economies. While Ireland is mak-

ing progress in building up its innovative capacity, its capacity remains weaker than in other small advanced economies.

Ireland's fixed-line broadband penetration rate (a useful proxy for broadband diffusion) has remained in the bottom half of OECD countries since the broadband diffusion process began in the first years of the 21st century (see **Chart 1**). Ireland also does poorly in terms of access to high-speed fibre broadband and access to broadband in rural areas. Broadband is important for innovation because it reduces the barriers and costs associated

with accessing, using and diffusing new knowledge. Regions without access to high-speed broadband are at a disadvantage relative to the rest of Europe in terms of their ability to generate and diffuse new innovations

Perhaps the most fundamental area of concern is the need to improve in relation to innovation investments. This includes public supports for R&D and education as well as innovation investments by enterprises. Economic studies tend to find that higher levels of R&D spending in the economy leads to a short-term average increase in

GDP growth.

However, Ireland's total R&D intensity was just 1.49% of GDP in 2014 compared to 2.38% in the OECD (see **Chart 2**). Publicly-financed R&D was 0.40% of GDP compared to 0.61% in the OECD while business expenditure on R&D (BERD) was 1.09% of GDP and 1.77% in the OECD. Ireland also underperforms if we use GNP as the denominator.

Ireland spent €182 per capita on public sector R&D in 2014 (see **Chart 3**). This compares to expenditure of €219 in the UK, €462 in Sweden, €538 in Denmark and almost €600 in Switzerland and in Norway. While an economy's innovative capacity depends on far more than just the public spend on R&D, it is evident that Ireland has significant scope to increase the R&D budget.

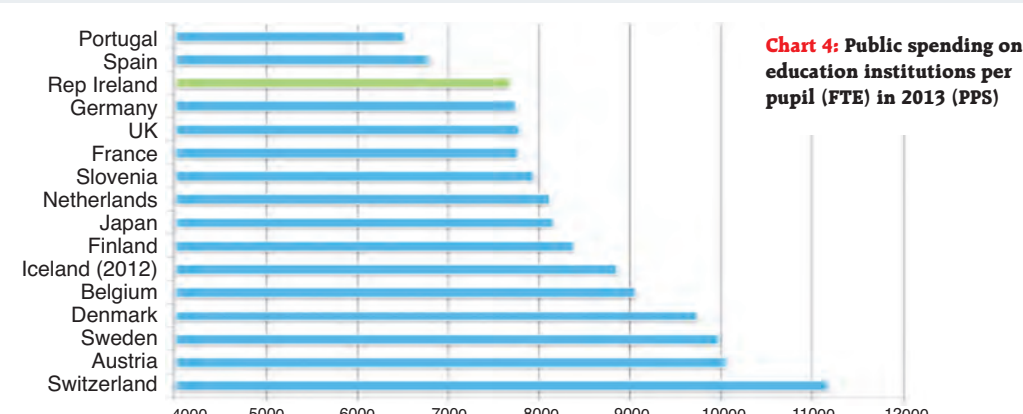
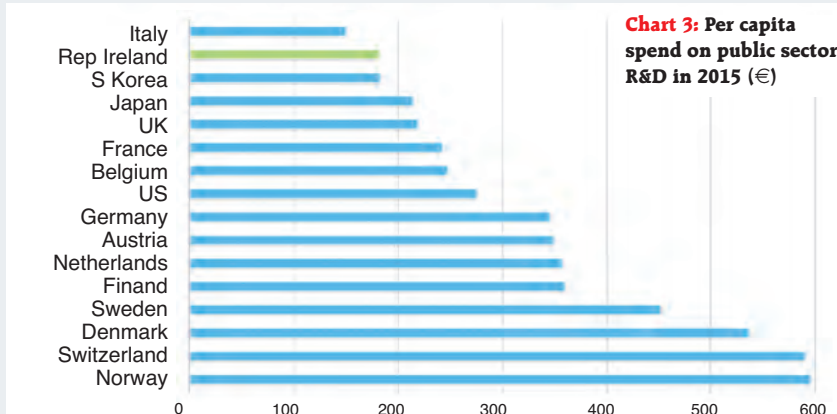
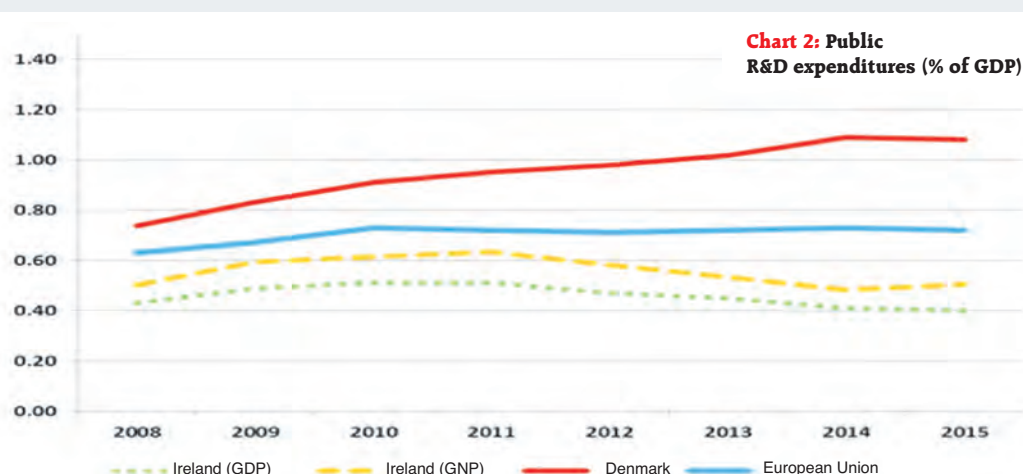
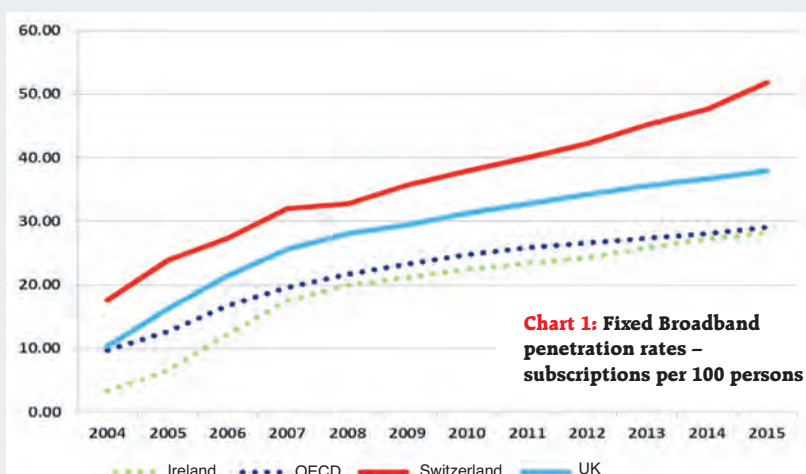
Ireland also significantly lags the leading countries on a 'per pupil' basis in terms of spending on primary and tertiary education (see **Chart 4**). Increasing the per capita spend on education to Nordic country levels would increase Ireland's long-run growth potential by enhancing labour force and economy-wide innovative and productive capacity.

It goes without saying that inno-

Increasing the per capita spend on education to Nordic country levels would increase Ireland's long-run growth potential by enhancing labour force and economy-wide innovative and productive capacity

vative and productive capacities depend on much more than the volume of innovation inputs. Knowledge flows and linkages, as well as compatible institutions and the quality of capital markets are also important. Even so, the volume of inputs is important for innovative competence and ultimately for productivity-led growth. In this context, Ireland's systemic underinvestment is a concern.

*Tom McDonnell is Senior Economist at the Nevin Economic Research Institute*





# A basic income for all – an idea whose time has come?



By  
Vic Duggan

**A**S FAR back as 1516, Thomas More first suggested a guaranteed income as a way to reduce theft. In 1797, Enlightenment thinker Thomas Paine proposed a set of radical reforms in his seminal pamphlet on Agrarian Justice. Among these proposals was the idea of a universal basic income that would be paid to everyone, unconditionally.

In the intervening 220 years, polemicists and policymakers have toyed with the idea, without it ever really catching on.

What has changed?

Firstly, it is increasingly clear that our economic model is leaving more and more people behind. The polarisation in income and opportunities between those with advanced education and skills and those without grows ever greater.

Over the longer term, increased automation could render defunct a whole new set of jobs – from factory workers and bus drivers to accountants and bank tellers. But our tax and welfare system has not been updated or rethought for the 21st century. It is riddled with poverty traps and perverse incentives.

Secondly, there is increasing political momentum behind the idea. Most recently, Benoît Hamon, newly-selected Presidential candidate for France's Parti Socialiste, has made it a key plank of his election platform.

The idea has been gaining traction in Ireland too. Fianna Fáil pledged ahead of the 2016 general election to introduce a basic income equivalent to the basic social welfare rate. The Green Party was on board even earlier, including proposals for a move towards a basic income in its pre-budget submission back in 2013.

As a matter of practical public policy, the basic income idea is still very much at the laboratory stage. The right approach is to pilot the idea in a limited geographic area, or with a particular cohort of the population, as is now being done



Pictures: Gunnar Wrobel (CC BY-SA 2.0); Ulysses Bellier (CC BY 2.0); Public Domain



French presidential hopeful Benoît Hamon has resurrected the idea of a basic income for all, first suggested by thinkers as diverse as St Thomas More and Thomas Paine, right



Anyone who has seen the Ken Loach's *I, Daniel Blake*, winner of the 2016 Palm d'Or at the Cannes festival and a BAFTA award, will certainly see the appeal of such a shift in how we think about welfare. A universal and unconditional basic income can help restore dignity, integrity and equality to both the welfare system and the workplace

est income earners would get a top up. All earners would see their effective tax rate fall. Even higher earners would face a lower marginal tax rate of 40%, rather than over 50% at present. The authors argue that this model of universal basic income would be easier to administer than the current system, end poverty traps and eliminate welfare fraud, among other benefits.

Anyone who has seen the Ken Loach's *I, Daniel Blake*, winner of the 2016 Palm d'Or at the Cannes festival, will certainly see the appeal of such a shift in how we think about welfare. A universal and unconditional basic income can help restore dignity, integrity and equality to both the welfare system and the workplace. It may not be a silver bullet for our creaking economic model or our outmoded welfare system, but it is certainly an idea worthy of careful consideration.

Why not make Kilkenny, Ireland's first city, with a citizens' income or road-test the idea with everyone born in Ireland in January 2000?

in Utrecht, in the Netherlands, and with 10,000 randomly selected people in Finland. That way, you can see if and how it works, and how best to design the system to ensure it improves the lives of the greatest number of people possible. It also helps identify the main challenges for transitioning to the new system before it is rolled out across the country.

So, how would it work?

Building on the organisation's earlier 2013 work, Eamon Murphy

and Sean Ward published a paper with Social Justice Ireland in December 2016 exploring how it might work, and how much it might cost:

- Payment rates ranged from €31.05 pocket money for under 18s to €240.30 for the over-80s.

- Residency requirements would be the same as for existing welfare payments, but there would be no means-test or work requirement.

- The payment would be tax

free, with all other income taxed at a flat rate of 40%.

- All tax reliefs and credits, as well as most other welfare payments would be abolished.

- All other income tax, including the USC and employee PRSI, would be abolished while employers' PRSI would increase from 10.75% to 13.5%.

Under this proposal, the basic income would pay for itself, while most low to middle income households would be better off. The low-





By  
Ger Gibbons

**THE European Pillar of Social Rights has been top of the agenda for anyone working on EU social policy and labour matters for the past 18 months but aside from coverage in *Liberty* it has received scant commentary in Ireland.**

The Pillar was first announced in September 2015 as European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's flagship initiative in the social field. In March 2016, the Commission presented a preliminary outline of the Pillar and a compilation of EU social rights that currently apply in all member states. The Commission said that the Pillar was intended to set out a "framework of principles" and offer a "policy compass for fair and dynamic labour markets... and for well-functioning and sustainable labour markets."

It is clear that this initiative should be primarily seen against the backdrop of the debate about the future of the euro. A 2015 report by Juncker and the heads of the other main European institutions (the 'Five Presidents Report') said that employment and social issues had to feature significantly higher in European economic policy coordination if the single currency is not just to prosper but survive.

Such a limited 'economic' rationale for the Pillar would be insufficient to meet the social challenges now facing Europe after years of austerity and would as a result only give rise to further disillusionment with Europe.

However, two major milestones in the campaign to promote a more 'social' Pillar were reached in January, in the European Parliament (EP) and in the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC).

First, centre-left political groups in the EP, led by the Socialists and Democrat rapporteur, Maria João Rodrigues, worked closely with trade unions and civil society organisations to draw up and win cross-party support for a progressive response to the Commission's 2016 preliminary outline.

This report was adopted on 19th January last by 396 votes to 180 with 66 abstentions, with the support of the Socialists & Democrats, the European United Left, the Greens and many European People's Party and Liberals MEPs. The only groups to vote against were the Conservatives and the 'Europe of Nations and Freedom' (i.e. the group based around the French National Front).

Last minute attempts by some centre-right MEPs to delete or dilute a number of recommenda-

European Pillar of Social Rights...

# Europe's last chance?

EC President Jean-Claude Juncker: 'We won't be able to make a success of Europe if we can't make a success of the Pillar...'

Picture: European Parliament (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)



January 19th vote at the European Parliament marks a milestone in the bid to promote a more 'social' Europe

Picture: European Parliament (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)



The opinion stated that the Pillar should apply in all countries, that collective bargaining should be promoted, and that the 'sharing economy' and other new forms of employment should not be used to avoid decent wages

tions were in the main defeated. While the centre-left did have to compromise in some areas, the final report is a good roadmap towards a more social Europe. Key recommendations include:

- A Framework Directive on decent working conditions that ensures a core set of enforceable rights, including collective bargaining rights for every worker regardless of their employment relationship and that specifically guarantees decent working conditions for internships, traineeships and apprenticeships as well as bans zero-hour contracts.

- That anyone who is engaged through online platforms (either employed directly or as a genuinely self-employed worker) has "analogous rights as in the rest of the economy"; the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) hailed this as a "significant breakthrough".

- The Commission to "actively support" the "wider coverage" of collective agreements and wage floors in the form of a national minimum wage in all countries. (The centre-right groups did manage to delete a recommendation that national minimum wages should "gradually attain if possible" at least 60% of national median wages and should not be

below the living wage; this was despite the fact most centre-right MEPs voted for a similar call last September).

- A Social Protocol to be included in the next revision of the treaties so as to strengthen fundamental social rights vis-à-vis the 'four freedoms' currently guaranteed by the treaties (i.e. free movement of workers, goods, capital, the right to establish and freedom to provide services). This particular call, a core aim of unions, was only just adopted - 317 in favour, 315 against, and 33 abstentions.

- A Child Guarantee giving every child living at risk of poverty access to free healthcare, childcare and education, decent housing and proper nutrition, and an appropriate level of social investments, particularly in childcare and education.

- New legislation on maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, carers' leave, access to quality care services and flexible working time arrangements to better reconcile work-life balance.



The EP's report concludes that the Pillar should be adopted as an agreement between the main EU institutions, with the involvement of unions, employers and civil society at the highest level, and should contain "a clear roadmap for implementation".

Many of the recommendations were also contained in the opinion of the EESC adopted on 25th January. For example, the opinion stated that the Pillar should apply in all countries, that collective bar-

unemployed people, and fails to tackle not just popular disillusionment but popular resentment towards the EU, the whole European project itself is at risk of disintegrating. As the General-Secretary of the ETUC, Luca Visentini, said at a 23rd January conference on the Pillar: "The EU is in the last chance saloon to tackle working people's anger towards the EU."

It does seem to be the case that some EU leaders, including Jean-Claude Juncker, do understand the



The EP's report concludes that the Pillar should be adopted as an agreement between the main EU institutions, with the involvement of unions, employers and civil society at the highest level, and should contain "a clear roadmap for implementation".

gaining should be promoted at all levels, and that the 'sharing economy' and other new forms of employment should not be used to avoid decent wages.

The Commission is now expected to come forward with its proposals for the Pillar in March, at the same time as it issues a White Paper on the future of Europe, including the euro.

The EP's and the EESC's reports aren't binding but they do send a clear political signal that if Europe doesn't reconnect with the public, particularly working people and

dangers. At the close of the 23rd January conference he said: "We won't be able to make a success of Europe if we can't make a success of the Pillar – this is our last chance."

But it is equally the case that many others do not or, more ominously, are quite willing to risk a break-up. How the Commission and national governments take the European Pillar of Social Rights forward will play a large part in determining the future (or not) of Europe over the coming years.

## SIPTU and European Works Councils



"The training, while classroom based, focused heavily on guest speakers and 'peer to peer' learning."

Pic: dreamstime.com

By Frank Jones

**Over the past eighteen months SIPTU and the Ideas Institute have been engaged with other union partners across the EU in getting a better understanding and knowledge of how European Works Councils (EWC's) can work best for those that we represent in organised employments.**

Our partners were from Catalonia, Bulgaria and Italy and together we trained over 200 people, each over 2.5 days to become more knowledgeable about how these Councils can work better for organised workers in multi-national or trans-national employments.

In each participant country three groups were trained. In late 2015, a group of union organisers and staff trained in SIPTU college, followed some months later by training for some Shop Stewards and Sector/Division Committee members. Finally, in April 2016 there was training for a group of our EWC reps.

The training, while classroom based, focused heavily on guest speakers and 'peer to peer' learning. It was positively received by all who attended and it was agreed that we have not been using the EWC reserve to its full potential within SIPTU.

In addition to the training element, the project was responsible for producing a booklet to

be used as a guide for all involved in EWC's. This has now been completed and is available to any interested member to download from the SIPTU website [www.siptu.ie](http://www.siptu.ie) or the

We expect that some from this Network will meet shortly in an effort to design and develop a training course that we can be rolled out to all EWC reps in the near future.

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Ideas Institute website [www.ideasinstitute.ie](http://www.ideasinstitute.ie) or by hard copy from the college.

The Manufacturing Division supported by the Services Division have been building a database of EWC representatives over the past 18 months so that a Network can be formed.

Any EWC rep that is not currently on this database should identify themselves so that they may be invited onto the Network and included in any available training.

Any member interested in the subject matter or considering establishing a EWC in their employment should email Frank Jones at [fjones@siptu.ie](mailto:fjones@siptu.ie) for advice and support.





# THE ATTACK ON BUS ÉIREANN

**Workers in Bus Éireann first heard of the alleged scale of the financial crisis in their company through the media. Information from a report on the company by private consultants Grant Thornton was drip fed into the newspapers in early January.**

The leaks first highlighted the report's findings that Bus Éireann's Expressway intercity service was recording large losses and could not be allowed to operate as it was. It ruled out the viability of restructuring this commercial arm of the company and also stated that it could not currently be closed as Bus Éireann did not have the monies to fund the resultingre-

dundancy packages.

In recent months, a new management team at Bus Éireann headed by acting CEO Ray Hernan had replaced a longer serving group of managers who left the company, with undisclosed severance packages believed to value hundreds of thousands of euros each, over recent months.

**It was through the media that many employees learned that changes to their terms and conditions had been brought**



By the middle of January, the media was carrying the meat of the Grant Thornton report - a 'revision of business plan' - which outlined severe cutbacks throughout the company to generate the funds to exit Expressway at a later date or maintain its operation as on a "low cost model" with existing workers removed.

Again it was through the media that many employees learned that changes to their terms and conditions had been brought in overnight without agreement on the 16th January. One of the most brutal of these changes was a curtailment of flexi-time arrangements for clerical staff which has severely impacted on working mothers.

Within days the acting CEO had issued two more letters outlining further massive cuts he intends to implement including compulsory redundancies, redeployment according to management orders, the end of shift pay, reductions in premium and overtime payments among many stringent measures. The cumulative effect for most workers of these cuts would be a 30% pay reduction. The letters also included a derisory pay offer of a 1%, 2% or 3% rise on the new reduced incomes when cash flow allows.

In his correspondence, Hernan also delivered an ultimatum that these cuts would be unilaterally implemented on 20th February with or without the agreement of workers. In response workers across the five unions in Bus Éireann have conducted strike ballots or in the case of SIPTU members activated an existing mandate for

**In his correspondence, Hernan also delivered an ultimatum that these cuts would be unilaterally implemented on 20th February with or without the agreement of workers.**

strike action.

On 2nd February the Bus Éireann group of unions announced that if the company would not enter talks without preconditions and carried out its threat to push through cuts on 20th February, trade union members "response to this appalling and unprecedented attack" will be all-out strike action.

SIPTU representatives have also highlighted the real problems at Bus Éireann, the dwindling state

subvention and competition rules that preclude the company from providing extra funding to it connections which are not defined as Public Service Obligation (PSO) routes. SIPTU Transport, Energy, Aviation and Construction (TEAC) Divisional Organiser, Greg Ennis, told the media that there was an attempt to "sacrifice" the terms and conditions of employment of SIPTU members in Bus Éireann "so as to subsidise the abysmal failure of the State to provide the requisite investment for an essential national public bus service."

He also highlighted the clear thrust of the proposals from Bus Éireann, and in particular the ending of its intercity service as one that was constructed "for the benefit of others" i.e. private bus operators.

The pay of private bus workers was starkly revealed during a radio debate between Ennis and Kevin Traynor, the National Director of Coach Tourism, at the private sector lobby group the Transport

Council of Ireland. During the debate Traynor stated private bus workers were earning "between €100 to €120 a day" working cross

**SIPTU representatives have also highlighted the real problems at Bus Éireann, the dwindling state subvention and competition rules**

country routes. This compares to a long service Bus Éireann driver's basic pay of €624 for a 39-hour week.

The closing of Expressway, taken alongside the recent move to open at least 10% of Bus Éireann routes to tender, according to SIPTU Organiser, Willie Noone, is a case of "private bus operators being set up

## Ballot for industrial action in Dublin Bus pensions row

**SIPTU members in Dublin Bus began a ballot for industrial action on 13th February, in a dispute concerning a breach by the company of the terms of a settlement agreed at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) in September 2016.**

The management of Dublin Bus has refused to honour the terms of the WRC settlement which included a stipulation that any increase in basic pay must be recognised for pension purposes from 1st February last.

"This is a fundamental issue as our members are facing a drastic cut to their pension entitlements and it is particularly unacceptable that this is being imposed by a semi-state body which is ignoring the State's dispute resolution mechanisms," said SIPTU Organiser, John Murphy.



**Michael Kavanagh, Bus Driver Dublin (Broadstone Garage)**

"They are proposing to cut our wages by up to 30%, that's nearly €200 a week. They are looking to take down the Sunday allowance, which has been in place for 44 years I am with the company, from 100%, down to just 20%. Shift allowances, that are paid to reflect the fact that we can be in work at as early as 5.00 a.m. and finish as late as 12.00 p.m., are being taken away from us. It is just not acceptable."



**Dermot Hession, Clerical worker Galway**

"The company has taken away flexi-time for clerical staff, the majority of whom are female, a lot are working mothers, they just can't make alternative arrangements so they will be driven out of the workforce. People shouldn't have to feel ashamed of getting a decent wage, we can't just have everyone involved in a race to the bottom."



**Willie O'Donoghue, Bus Driver Limerick**

"If they do away with Expressway there won't be any connectivity to Limerick from the main towns. The private operators only work on the motorways, Expressway goes through every town. They are trying to destroy a service which many people completely rely on."



**Sean Enright, Bus Driver Tralee**

"Our garage is a very small garage and if they take the Expressway service out of it finished. If management get to do what they want to do it will be the death of all the small depots around the country. Another issue is the senior management people that have left in recent weeks, undoubtedly getting massive packages, they won't tell us what they were and they are forcing cuts on us to fund them."



**Sean Healy, Engineering Operative Dublin (Broadstone Garage)**

"We are getting hardest hit on the shift pay and Sunday rate changes. I represent some of the lowest pay workers in Bus Éireann and we just can't take these cuts. You are talking about dropping around €180 a week it would just be devastating."



**Peter O'Toole, Bus Driver Waterford**

"For an example of the difference between the private operators and Bus Éireann, take the Waterford to Dublin route which has three services which go at the same time, two private and one Bus Éireann Expressway. The Expressway stops in eight towns before it gets to Dublin the others just start in Waterford and go to Dublin. So you see people in many towns just won't have any service."



## Irish Rail pay dispute goes to Labour Court

**A dispute concerning a pay claim by SIPTU members in Irish Rail has been referred to a full hearing of the Labour Court following a meeting at the Workplace Relations Commission on 6th February.**

SIPTU Organiser, Paul Cullen, said: "Our members in Irish Rail have not received a pay increase since 2008 despite having contributed to a significant reduction in overall payroll costs through agreeing to implement a series of cost-containment measures.

"Our members have already obtained two Labour Court recommendations on productivity which have yet to be addressed by management. In light of this they have requested that the company make an offer of a flat rate increase without any further strings attached."

privatisation will be all bus workers - public and private, the rural communities which Bus Éireann currently services and finally the whole country as it loses a key piece of economic and social infrastructure."

He added: "This has been the case in other countries such as the UK where the privatisation agenda won out. The good news is we still have a chance to stop this disaster occurring here."

**The agenda here is clear; the destruction of our public bus services which are vital to life in rural Ireland.**





By  
Karan  
O'Loughlin

**T**HE proportion of women now in the workforce is almost mirrored by the proportion of women members in SIPTU. Women make up just over half the working population now and our female membership currently stands at 49%.

In actively promoting the organising of women workers and endeavoring to increase women's participation in the union we are working to the 33% rule whereby all structural committees must be at least 33% male or female.

This is currently serving us well as we have seen the National Executive Council (NEC) female participation levels grow from 33% to 36% at the elections in late 2016. All of the Divisional committees are also currently meeting or exceeding this 33% rule.

While there is still work to be done at the level of the sector committees the majority of these are either at or exceeding the 33% threshold. In assisting the sectors not quite there yet the Campaigns and Equality unit will be working with them to identify and overcome any barriers to participation for women in these areas.

The proportion of women now in the workforce is almost mirrored by the proportion of women members in SIPTU

The Campaigns and Equality unit is also developing and rolling out training specifically designed for women activists. This training started with a three-day course in SIPTU College in early February and is currently focusing on women at NEC and Divisional level but it will be rolled out to women and sector committees over 2017.

The objective of the training is to ensure that women activists in the union have the opportunity to achieve equality of outcome in the workplace and within the union and that a network of trained and experienced women activists will be set up throughout the country to increase the pool of female ac-



Picture: RollingNews.ie

Training initiative to boost women's profile in the union

# SIPTU women on the move!

Organising and playing an active role in the union is the most effective way for women to break low pay cycle in the long term

tivists, to mentor women activists and to increase the number of women workers in SIPTU.

Campaigns and Equality Organiser Karan O'Loughlin told *Liberty*: "Now that women make up nearly half of the membership of the union, it is important that we ensure that the participation of women at all levels of the workplace and of the union reflects this.

"Currently, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions notes that over 70% of workers on the National Minimum Wage (NMW) are women."

The three most common reasons put forward for this are:

**1. Cost of childcare** – the lack of affordable childcare in Ireland is seen as a key reason for the disproportionate number of women on the NMW with childcare costs in Ireland among the highest in the OECD. This is pushing many women into low paid, flexible

work where their skills and qualifications are not properly utilised and from which they have limited prospects of advancement.

"Currently, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions notes that over 70% of workers on the National Minimum Wage (NMW) are women."

**2. Sector of employment** – sectors of employment in which women predominate is an important factor. Women workers in Ireland are disproportionately concentrated in low paid sectors of the economy such as accommodation, food and wholesale as well as the retail trade (these two sectors account for 48.6% of all NMW workers). This is where precarious work practices are a matter for serious concern. A critical issue for the trade union movement in 2017 will be the role we can play in strengthening regulation and legislation on precarious work, including limits to the use of non-fixed hour contracts. A good starting point would be the implementation of the recommendations contained in the University of Limerick publication, *A Study on the Prevalence of Zero Hours Contracts among Irish Employers and their Impact on Employees 2015*.

**3. Part-time work** – women are more likely to work part-time than men. Studies have shown that employees working part-time or on temporary contracts face a greater risk of being on the NMW than their full-time counterparts.

The 2016 Low Pay Commission Report acknowledges that these factors can all be seen to be interlinked – the high cost of child care leads to many women taking up part-time or temporary work and this type of work is most readily available in low pay sectors such as retail and accommodation where women are found in disproportionate numbers.

Organising and playing an active role in the union is the most effective way for women to break this low pay cycle in the long term and our union is very much to the forefront in supporting women workers to do this.



# Unions call for Repeal of the 8th

By Therese Caherty

Workers organise in trade unions primarily to protect pay and conditions. But we also recognise that issues outside the workplace affect our working lives. So unions have a history of fighting for wider social justice: the right not to be discriminated against on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, disability, age or religion. The Dunnes Stores workers who, in 1984 began a protest against apartheid in South Africa which lasted almost three years, acted in this spirit of solidarity.

In 1983 however, the 8th Amendment, which makes a woman's life equal to the foetus she carries, was voted in by referendum. Opponents of the Amendment said it would compromise health care for pregnant women and that women could die. Unfortunately, that has turned out to be true. In effect, pregnant women are denied treatments to protect them in a way that no other group in society is.

At the time, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions unequivocally opposed the Amendment, saying that "the rigidity and inflexibility of constitutional directives on social and moral issues is inappropriate in a democracy". That position is unchanged. The Dublin Council of Trade Unions was equally opposed.

Under current legislation, framed by the 8th Amendment, abortion is illegal in Ireland unless a doctor believes a woman's life, not her health, is in danger. This irrational distinction was introduced via the Supreme Court's ruling on the X Case in 1992. Ms X, 14 years old, pregnant by a family friend and suicidal at not being able to terminate the pregnancy, was considered eligible for an abortion here on the basis that her life was under threat.

Abortion is a reality in Irish life: between 1980 and 2014, at least 163,514 women registered for terminations abroad. It is likely that many were workers and union members. As trade unionists, we think the movement should support female workers by fighting to ensure women can get any medical treatment they need and end the stress and expense of going abroad to terminate a crisis preg-

**"The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right."**

Article 40.3.3 (8th Amendment), Bunreacht na hEireann (Irish Constitution)



Up to 20,000 pro-choice demonstrators marched in Dublin seeking the repeal of the 8th Amendment of the Constitution on Saturday, 24th September.  
pic: RollingNews

nancy, caused by the 8th Amendment's ban on abortion, by campaigning to repeal it.

With a membership of 800,000, over half of which are women, the trade union movement is the Republic's largest civil society grouping. Most women members are in their childbearing years. Continuing in the tradition set out by Congress and the DCTU, the Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th believes that if women are not allowed to make choices around their own bodies, they are denied equality. So we believe Article 40.3.3 should be removed in its entirety. This is the only way to safeguard the health, lives and rights of women and girls in Ireland and because the restrictions the Amendment puts on health workers compromises their ability to ensure women do not suffer or die.

Our campaign works to bring the trade union viewpoint to

public debate on Ireland's abortion ban. And we support individual activists within unions which aren't yet on board in whatever way we can. Our model motion has been adapted and passed at branch and conference levels

We are supported by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Unite, Mandate, the Communications Workers Union (CWU), the Technical Electrical Engineering Union (TEEU), the youth committees of ICTU, Unite and the CWU, the Dublin and the Bray & District and Waterford trades councils. In Britain, we are supported by the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and train drivers' union ASLEF. We are affiliated to the Coalition to Repeal the 8th Amendment – which has over 66 affiliates including Amnesty International, the National Women's Council and the Irish Council of Civil Liberties.

## How can you support the campaign?

If you would like more information, to invite speakers or get a copy of our model motion, or add your union to the list of supporters, contact [info@tradeunions4repeal.ie](mailto:info@tradeunions4repeal.ie). You can also find the campaign on Facebook (TURepealthe8th).

The Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th is urging all our supporters to join us on the March for Repeal this International Women's Day.

Meet outside the Mandate offices on Parnell Square at  
**5pm on Wednesday 8th March**

Bring your union banners and placards. Bring your colleagues, family, friends. Like and share the march Facebook page here <https://www.facebook.com/events/284333118649491/>

Let's make sure that union support for repeal of Article 40.3.3 is visible, vocal and HUGE!



# New workers rights centres opened – and there's more to come



By Tom O'Driscoll

**2016 turned out to be a very fruitful year for the setting up of Workers' Rights Welcome Centres by the union.**

These centres give a localised contact point for SIPTU members as well as catering for potential members who may be experiencing difficulties at work.

Advice is given in a friendly, empathetic environment and, if needed, SIPTU's expert advocates can refer cases on to the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court, if necessary.

2016 – the centenary of the 1916 Rising – was an important year in our history, and the first centre was opened in Liberty Hall, Dublin, on the date of the 100th anniversary of James Connolly's execution.

The centre in Navan opened its doors on 15th November while the centre in Tralee went into operation on 9th December 2016.

The Cork centre will formally launch on 24th February, 2017.

And the trend of opening Workers' Rights Welcome Centres is set to continue when suitable SIPTU offices are identified.

Each centre has been launched in conjunction with the SIPTU District Councils, with the chair of each Council giving the opening address.

The centres, along with the District Councils, have the shared mission of prioritising the relationships between local communities and the union.

Centres are staffed by advocates, organisers and information assistants. Each centre has had the local telephone number re-instated – which has proved extremely popular among members – as well as having access to the central 1890 number.

Full contact details on all centres can be found on the link [www.workersrightscentre.ie](http://www.workersrightscentre.ie)

Since opening in late 2016 the combined total footfall of all centres is approximately 514, with a combined total of new members of 253.

Project leader, Rachael Ryan, told *Liberty*: "We hope to grow this fig-



Photo from left to right: Rachael Ryan, SIPTU General Secretary Joe O'Flynn, Marie Moloney and Tom O'Driscoll



Joe O'Flynn cuts the ribbon to open the Tralee Centre.

ure substantially in 2017. There is a demand out there for union advice and union representation in the workplace. Representation through legal firms can be exorbitantly expensive and we hope to see a situation develop where the local SIPTU office becomes the one stop shop for workers in trouble."

Ryan continued: "While the SIPTU Workers' Rights Centre is ordinarily accessed by telephone, through the relevant official and

online for members, we are now getting back on the High Street where our empathetic, expert and confidential advice and representational service for members and potential members will be properly showcased."

She added: "The plan is to see this service go nationwide."



## Earth View

for Tom Redmond

Though haggard -  
the cancer drawing the life out of him -  
he gathered comrades and friends  
in the Party bookshop to bid farewells,  
issue instructions, make sure that  
the necessary would still be done.

When he stared across to me,  
His eyes were as beautiful as ever they were,  
Honest, ocean deep, beyond horizon.  
While waiting for his breath,  
he compelled me to reflect,  
ignored my political inadequacies,  
addressed me as friend,  
garlanding me with scarlet ribbons  
as Walter Crane bordering his intricacies:  
elaborately simple,  
intriguing and inexplicable,  
with maybe a wee un-resisted touch  
of computer aided design there too.

It was mixture of mischief and majesty,  
clarion call and matter-of-fact,  
an itemised list would oblige our class,  
nothing personal wanted except for a parting embrace.  
Wrapping around his wiry husk,  
my finger tips touching Valparaíso and Vladivostok,  
I connected with an undiminished strength of spirit and purpose,  
a full life well lived,  
a standard high set yet not impossible if I can hold  
that earth-wrap clinch forever in my mind.



From *Outside Left*, a collection of poems by Francis Devine  
Note: new publication-January 2017

## Derrygreenagh Bord Na Mona



SIPTU, TEEU and Unite Shop Stewards and front line management on a 3 day course on Team Working and Disputes Resolution procedures. The course is a QQI level 4 qualification presented by our colleagues in IDEAS Institute with agreement with the Group of Unions and Senior Management in BNM.



# Fishing Industry faces renewed scrutiny as further abuses uncovered



By Padraig Yeates

**The Irish Government is back in the firing line over the exploitation of illegal workers by the fishing industry. Hundreds of millions in EU subventions could also be at risk for blatant disregard of employment legislation at national and European level.**

At a meeting in Liberty Hall on Monday, 6th February, over 70 mainly Egyptian and Filipino fishers, organised by Ken Fleming of the ITF and SIPTU, workers spoke of earning €350 on boats where they often worked over 100 hours a week in dirty, dangerous conditions under a permit scheme introduced by the Government last May.

The scheme was introduced after a major exposé by the Guardian in November 2015. Now Ken Fleming says, "The situation is even worse than before. All the new scheme is doing is legitimising slavery."

On Monday 13th February, Flem-



ing met with the Social Dialogue Committee of the EU Commission to give them his findings from inspections of Irish fishing vessels that contrast starkly with those by Irish state agencies. These agencies claim that 75 per cent of vessels inspected comply with the permit scheme, itself an admission of failure, but at a meetings of fishers organised by the ITF in Drogheda only four of the forty men present had permits and at the Liberty Hall meeting, only one had a permit.

Two-thirds of fishing vessel

owners do not even bother to return logbooks to the Department of Marine, as required by law and many of those that do, do not bother entering crew details, which is another legal requirement.

The ITF is currently dealing with over 100 cases of fishers with grievances ranging from non-payment of wages, to unfair dismissal and compensation for serious industrial injuries.

Senator Ged Nash, the former Labour Party Minister who helped

introduce the scheme last year in the hope it would end the abuse was shocked by what he heard when he attended the fishers meeting in Drogheda. He said "I am absolutely astonished at what I am hearing this evening". On February 8th, he told the Seanad the scheme was not working and needed to be replaced urgently.

Mohamed Abbassy, who lost his job in Union Hall last September after demanding he be paid at least the National Minimum Wage, said, "This permit system is for

slaves, not humans. When you work 150 hours a week and are paid for just 39 hours." Hatem El Sisi of the Egyptian embassy, who attended the Dublin meeting said that fishers "need a system that protects them and respects their rights. These are skilled workers who left their homes in the expectation of good employment".



Ken Fleming, International Transport Workers' Federation co-ordinator.

Pic: PRT

Ken Fleming will be presenting his case this week to the EU Commission with the support of the ITF and SIPTU. Ireland receives €140 million a year in subventions.

The ITF is also looking at legal remedies through the Irish courts, the European Courts and the International Labour Organisation.



Cuban ambassador to Ireland, Hermes Herrera Hernandez speaking on the 58th anniversary of the revolution led by the late Fidel Castro, at the Mansion House, Dublin on Friday 13th January and hosted by Lord Mayor, Brendan Carr (left)



ITF officials (L to R) Paul Keenan, Katie Higginbottom, Ken Fleming and Liam Wilson stand behind a selection of clothing and toiletries contributed by SIPTU members for distribution to migrant workers in the fishing industry, Liberty Hall, February 2017  
Pic: Paddy Cole





Wishing you all a very Happy  
St. Patrick's Day!

PLEASE CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THE  
WORKERS BEHIND THE BRANDS AND  
PROTECT QUALITY JOBS IN IRELAND!



**SUPPORTING  
QUALITY**

Protecting Quality Jobs in Ireland  
Promoting Quality Irish Products



a joint  
initiative



[www.supportingquality.ie](http://www.supportingquality.ie)





## Advertisement

Proudly made in Cabra



Chef is a brand that has been at the heart of Irish kitchens since 1921 providing Irish consumers with tasty condiments to make mealtimes taste better. Chef's unique blend of spices combined with the very best of tomatoes gives Chef Ketchup its distinctive taste. Chef's product range includes an array of side of plate products such as Brown Sauce, BBQ Sauce, Beetroot, Salad Cream, Malt Vinegar & Pickles. Chef is the leading brand in both the Brown Sauce & Beetroot categories and like Chef Ketchup, these products bring food to life with their unique recipe.

In 2002, the Chef brand was licenced to Fruitfield Foods, which now forms part of Valeo Foods, the largest ambient food supplier in Ireland with other market leading brands such as Batchelors, Erin, Roma, Jacobs, Kelkin, Odlums and Shamrock.

In 2015, Valeo Foods committed a multi-million euro investment into its production facility in Cabra to upgrade facilities to bring back the production of Chef range of table sauces to its hometown of Dublin. This investment in the Cabra, Dublin, facility helps to support over 120 jobs on the site and over 600 jobs with Valeo Foods throughout Ireland. The investment has increased capacity at the facility and opened up new business opportunities and innovation possibilities for the Chef range.

When the production of the Chef range was moved back to Cabra, the range was revamped with new

packaging designs and a new bespoke top down bottle for the

full sauces range. In summer 2016, Chef celebrated its return to Ireland and it's new look with a large scale advertising campaign spanning nationwide radio, outdoor, online and targeted points of purchase as well as a very exciting sampling and engagement activation at Ireland's largest summer event, Bloom in Dublin's Phoenix Park.

One of the newest additions to the Chef range in 2016, Chef 50% Less Sugar and 25% Less Salt Ketchup has been a big hit with Irish consumers given the current trend for reduced sugar products. "To follow up on the success of our Chef Less Sugar and Salt Ketchup, we are excited to launch our new Chef Less Sugar and Salt Brown Sauce in 2017. "Unlike other reduced sugar and salt products, this new range from Chef does not compromise on taste or consistency so you can enjoy the great taste of Chef" said Donna Coffey, Senior Brand Manager in Valeo Foods.

"Chef sauces have been enjoyed by Irish families for generations. Irish consumers love Chef because of the distinctive taste, which they have grown up with and which is easily recognisable and available nationwide. Today it's this well-loved taste for Chef's sauce range that remains key for consumers, with Chef being the ultimate symbol of quality and tradition proudly made from its new home in Cabra."

 Chef-Ireland

# "IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE"

by SINCLAIR LEWIS (Reprint 2014) SIGNET CLASSICS

"I know the Press only too well... plotting how they can put over their lies..."

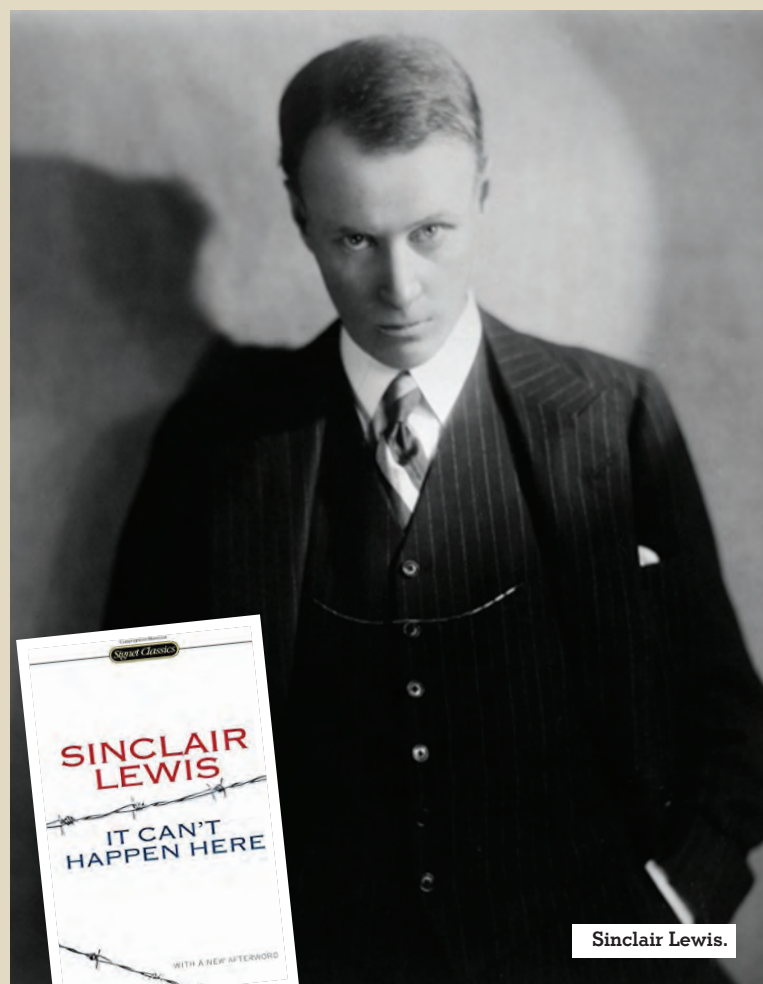
**Sound familiar? Then how about this as well? A populist politician who has a major problem with Mexico? More clues? He's supported by the religious right, is anti-union and hates the left. Nevertheless he believes one day his country will have vast business dealings with Russia?**

No, it's not Donald Trump, but Senator Buzz (Berzilius) Windrip, the villain of this pre-war classic written by Sinclair Lewis, the first US author to win the Nobel prize for literature.

First published in 1935 it was an overnight success with 320,000 copies sold as well as a hit stage adaptation which opened simultaneously in eighteen different US cities on October 27th 1937, in English, Spanish and Yiddish versions.

It was written at a time of general disappointment at the pace of President Roosevelt's "New Deal" to tackle the Great Depression in America and also when there was fear of the spread of fascism, not only in Europe but in the US itself. And there were powerful figures in America at the time who were prepared to justify fascism. The newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst famously declared in a line of reasoning all too familiar today- "Whenever you hear a prominent American called a Fascist you can usually make up your mind that the man is simply a loyal citizen who stands up for Americanism."

Lewis's story was grounded in characters and events already on the stage of American politics at the time. The villain of the piece, Buzz Windrip was modelled on the populist Louisiana Senator Huey Long who (thankfully unsuccessfully) challenged Roosevelt for the presidency. His rallies are not in Nuremberg or Berlin but



Sinclair Lewis.

in New York's "All American" Madison Square Gardens. His "Stormtroopers" are the "Minutemen", a distorted mutation of the volunteers of the American War of Independence and ideological cover in the form of a radio evangelist, Bishop Prang, is modelled on the religious "shock jock" of the day, Fr Coughlan.

The unlikely hero is a 60 year old New England small town editor, with the equally clunky name of Doremus Jessup. He is an old style liberal who comes from a passive and pacifistic tradition. As Windrip comes to power, seizing control of the press and universities to consolidate his power, the penny begins to slowly drop with Jessup. However, its only when trouble comes to his door that the full import of what has happened hits him. By that time there are concentration camps and refugees are heading over the border- no, not that one,

the other one - to Canada.

Jessup believes that its people just like him who have let the demagogues wriggle in without fierce enough protest. However, while he points the finger at the individual, his weakness is he doesn't believe in collective action because he views that as the road to absolutism.

Nevertheless, he eventually joins the resistance against Windrip's Stormtroopers the "Minutemen".

Sinclair's work raises questions of liberty and justice which are as relevant today as they were eighty odd years ago. It did happen in Europe, nearly happened in America and, if the Jessups of this world don't protest and, unlike him, organize, it could happen again - very easily.

Michael Halpenny



# Portuguese Left government makes gains for workers

When Antonio Costa was sworn in as Portugal's new prime minister in late 2015, as head of a minority Socialist Party government, the outgoing centre-right leader said he hoped he wouldn't be 'summoned back to a house in flames'.



By  
Ger Gibbons

Perhaps it's not hard to understand his pique. Despite seeing its vote fall from 50% to 38%, the election was initially seen as a victory for the centre-right, which retained its position as the largest bloc in parliament. The general expectation was that a minority centre-right government would be formed, dependent on Socialist Party support.

Contrary to expectations however the Socialist Party, whose vote had risen from 28% to 32%, and the Left Bloc, whose vote had doubled to 10%, managed to agree an anti-austerity pact thereby allowing the



Portuguese Prime Minister  
Antonio Costa.  
Pic: Media India Group

election of a new government. This government has also been supported from the opposition benches by the Communist Party,

which held its 8% support.

Steady implementation of the pact since then has seen the reversal of many of measures introduced during the 2010-14 Troika programme. The government has raised the minimum wage, begun restoring public sector wages and state pensions, reinstated public holidays that had been abolished and removed increases in working hours for (most) civil servants.

The 2017 budget commits to increasing state pensions, child benefit and social transfers for low-income families, and to reducing income tax. To off-set higher spending, it introduces higher taxes on more expensive properties and on apartments sub-lets to tourists, a new sugar tax as well as improved tax collection

procedures.

The new government argues that the agreed programme is delivering both economic growth and improved public finances. This seems to be the case. Portugal's economy grew by 1.6% in the year to the third quarter of 2016 – the fastest in five years – while employment rose by 2.2% over the same period. In January, the Government announced that the 2016 budget deficit would be below the 2.3% limit it had agreed with the European Commission.

The prime minister has said that the success of the pact has depended on each party 'setting aside the issues on which they differed and focusing only on policies on which they could agree'.

Despite the progress being

made, Portugal does face major challenges and its room for manoeuvre is limited. Government debt remains high at nearly 130% of GDP. Economic growth is projected to remain subdued at around 1.5% this year and next and unemployment is projected to still be above 9% in both years.

Nevertheless the Portuguese people are increasingly confident about their future. A November poll indicated that 38% felt Portugal was now heading in the right direction, up from just 18% a year previously, while those saying that it was going in the wrong direction had fallen from 50% to 36%. Eighteen months after the election, it's not looking likely that the centre-right will be summoned back any time soon.

## Restoring collective bargaining central to Greek recovery – ILO

**Before the crisis, collective bargaining in Greece took place under a framework adopted in 1990 that covered between 70-80% of private sector workers.**

National trade union and employer organisations firstly agreed a national framework agreement that set minimum working conditions and the minimum wage for the private sector.

Building on this, national (or regional) agreements could set better conditions and wages for particular sectors or occupations, while company-level agreements could go beyond these again. The Ministry of Labour could declare sectoral or occupational agreements binding if they covered a majority of workers in that sector or occupation. A binding arbitration system also existed, with enhanced rights for unions.

This framework has been completely dismantled under the 2010 and 2012 Troika programmes. Company-level agree-

ments can now deviate downwards from sectoral or occupational agreements to the national minimum wage, which is now fixed by decree and which in any event has been cut by one fifth (and by one third for younger workers). Sectoral and occupational agreements now only apply to companies that are members of the employers' organisation that negotiate them. And non-trade union representatives can conclude company-level agreements if they represent at least three-fifths of workers. The recourse of unions to arbitration has also been limited.

All these 'reforms' have resulted in the wholesale erosion of collective bargaining in Greece; the number of new sectoral or occupational agreements concluded each year has fallen from 250 pre-crisis to less than 20 over recent years.

Restoring the previous framework has been one of the Syriza-led government's main goals since its election in early 2015.



Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras.  
Pic: ?dreamstime.com

The bailout programme it negotiated in mid-2015 included an independent review of the current system, to be followed by consultations with international organisations, including the ILO. The current system would then 'in agreement' with the creditor institutions, be aligned with Euro-

pean 'best practice' (which wasn't defined) and any changes 'should not involve a return to past policy settings which are not compatible with the goals of promoting sustainable and inclusive growth'.

The reality is that the present system is not compatible with sustainable and inclusive growth.

Last July, the trade unions and employers jointly called for the Ministry of Labour to be once again able to extend agreements, and for the national minimum wage to be agreed under the national framework agreement.

The independent review reported last September. It made majority and minority recommendations but broadly supported the restoration of the previous arrangement whereby sectoral, occupational and company agreements build upwards not downwards on national agreements and of the right of the Ministry of Labour to extend agreements.

In December, the ILO issued its evaluation of the post-2010

changes. It concluded that these have reduced collective bargaining coverage to 10%, possibly putting Greece in breach of its commitments under the European Social Charter, that the present system lacks 'regulatory stability and certainty' for both employers and employees, adversely affecting investment and working and living conditions, and that decentralisation has encouraged the black economy.

Its overall conclusion was that the 'reinvigoration of collective bargaining... will be central to ensuring an equitable, job-rich and sustainable recovery in Greece'.

The issue of collective bargaining in Greece is being discussed at the second review of the 2015 programme. The key question facing Greece's creditors is whether an essential element of Europe's social model – free collective bargaining – is to continue to be effectively denied to Greek workers. This is a question for all of Europe.



# LOVING

## A tale of courage, challenge and slavery



By  
Michael  
Halpenny

In 1705 the 5th great grandmother of Queen Elizabeth II, Princess Caroline of Ansbach, gave her hand in marriage to King George II of England. Twenty odd years later she then gave her name to Caroline County in the British slave colony of Virginia which, incidentally, returned annual tobacco profits of £100,000 to the crown.

By 1763, African slaves would comprise half the population of the colony, and slave labour became the engine of Virginia's economy. American historian, Edward E. Baptist has even argued in his book *The Half That Has Never Been Told*, that slavery's later expansion drove the evolution and modernisation of the United States. It obviously also contributed handsomely to the British royalty.

Two hundred years on, in 1959,



Mildred Jeter and Richard Loving.

the U.S. sent a Discoverer I rocket into space in the push for the "New Frontier" of the 20th century. In the same year Caroline County Circuit Court sent Richard Loving and his new bride, Mildred Jeter, into exile because they were married and vowed to jail them both if they returned.

Their "crime" was that by marrying each other they broke the law of Virginia. The State's Racial Integrity Statute of 1924 prohibited

marriage between a "white" person and a "colored" person, a law which echoed a Virginia slave code of 1691.

Richard was a "white" man and his wife was of African-American and Native-American descent and they had travelled to Washington DC to get married and had then returned home to Caroline County.

So, they were banished by court order and were forced to drive the 87 miles north back to Washington

to live out the future that they had originally planned for themselves among their own people in the place of their birth.

However, with the assistance of Bobby Kennedy and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) they appealed the judgement of the Caroline County Circuit Court all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court before the great Chief Justice Earl Warren. There, eight years after their forced exile, in 1967, the Supreme Court struck down the decision of the Caroline County Court, declaring it a hang-over from the old slave laws. Their landmark ruling not only helped change America's race laws but was one of a number of key decisions under Chief Justice Warren which advanced the cause of civil liberties in the United States.

Writer-director Jeff Nichols' new release, simply called *Loving*, tells this chilling tale of love and hate



Ruth Negga and Joel Edgerton.

with a restraint and emotional tension which is all the more effective.

Nominated Irish actor, Ruth Negga, gives an outstandingly graceful portrayal of one of the two central characters, Mildred, while Joel Edgerton gives us a Richard who is an ordinary working class man who is proud of his marriage and simply wants to live out that pride.

This is a film which needs to be seen if only to remind us that seemingly ordinary people faced with overwhelming odds can, nevertheless, achieve extraordinary change.

**A United Ireland – Why unification is inevitable and how it will come about**  
By Kevin Meagher  
Biteback Publications Ltd, 2016

**THE recent Brexit vote in the UK has given new impetus to questions of democracy, the EU, Scottish independence and a possible united Ireland. In fact, in the resulting public debate most – if not all of these – intertwine in the case of Ireland.**

As in Scotland, the majority of voters in Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU. Insofar as calls have been raised for a second referendum on Scottish independence, so also has there been – albeit grudging acceptance even in the strangest quarters – of the need for a discussion on the future on this island.

Sinn Féin's document *Towards a United Ireland* was the backdrop to a recent conference in the Mansion House, Dublin, which was ad-

## We need to talk about Ireland of the future

dressed by a wide range of speakers – of whom it could certainly be said that they weren't the "usual suspects". A session, chaired by journalist and author Susan McKay, included (Belfast) Irish News columnist and historian, Brian Feeney, as well as Alex Kane, former Unionist Party communications head.

A second session saw barrister and political commentator, Noel Whelan, and Cat Boyd from RISE – Scottish Left Alliance, a prominent figure during the Independence campaign, who emphasised the necessity of a strong left-wing core to any debate on independence either here or in Scotland.

To flag this up she instanced the

success of the left in Scotland in forcing the SNP to change their position on reducing corporation tax.

One of the more interesting speakers was political consultant Kevin Meagher, an associate editor of the Labour Uncut blog and a former adviser to then Northern Ireland Secretary, Shaun Woodward.

In 2016, he published *A United Ireland – Why Unification is inevitable and how it will come*

*about*, a classic example of a title accurately describing the contents between its covers.

In it he analyses what is termed the "94-year-old sticking-plaster solution" (the 1922 settlement) which "has endured for, seemingly, no other reason than political inertia".

Far from being a successful initiative, "the creation of Northern Ireland is one of the worst decisions taken by any British government during the whole of the twentieth century".

His book argues that through the principle of consent "hardwired" into the Good Friday Agreement, the state of Northern Ireland is in an ante-chamber "subject to shifting demographic trends which are eroding the once-dominant Unionist majority". He sees this point alone rendering a future referendum on the status of Northern Ireland inevitable – a "racing certainty".



On the economic front, he argues that economic integration makes a single Ireland inevitable, pointing to what he terms the "quiet revolution" taking place in the North West of England where, under the "Northern Powerhouse" initiative, Greater Manchester is wresting control of much of its policy making.

He underscores the 2015 study by Dr Kurt Hubner, of the University of British Columbia, which makes the case "that Irish unity brings with it massive economic wins for both parts of the island".

And it is this point that raised a critical question in the second session of the conference – where do the interests of working people and their families fit into all this?

If labour (i.e. working class interests) had to "wait" in the struggle for independence in 1918-21, it certainly cannot afford to do so now in any current debate on a united Ireland – North or South.

Michael Halpenny



# How Irish-Soviet links were quietly forged despite the scaremongers

**Irish Soviet Diplomatic and Friendship Relations 1917-1991**

By Michael Quinn  
Umiskin Press Dublin  
(November 2016).

**H**AVING successfully completed his doctoral thesis for Maynooth University in 2014, Michael Quinn set out with the ambition to publish a detailed account of the relationships between the states and citizens of the Soviet Union and Ireland.

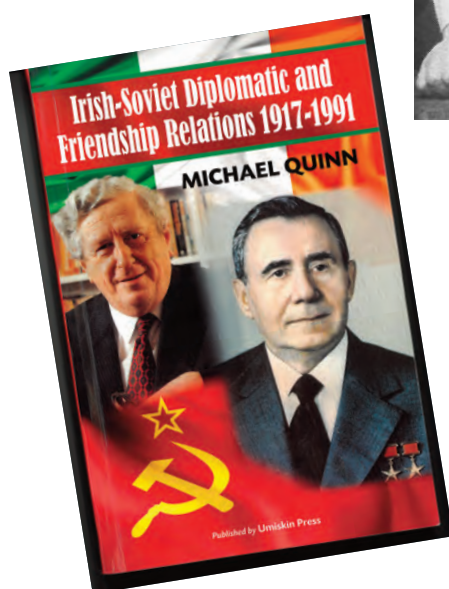
The resulting book is a fascinating read, providing a comprehensive and scholarly narrative of the 75-year period from the Russian Revolution in October 1917 to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

While, understandably, the book concentrates primarily on the post-1970s period when embassies were opened in Dublin and Moscow and on the courageous activists who formed and maintained Irish/Soviet friendship societies over a prolonged period, nevertheless there are some very interesting accounts of the ear-

The resulting book is a fascinating read, providing a comprehensive and scholarly narrative of the 75-year period from the Russian Revolution in October 1917 to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

liest contacts.

Revolutionary Ireland forged important connections to the new Russian state seeking arms and political support. On 4th February, 1918, a 10,000-strong Russian Republic Reception, chaired by William O'Brien of the ITGWU, was convened in and around the Dublin Mansion House with a declaration of support. The first Dáil under Arthur Griffith decided to dispatch a diplomatic mission to the Soviet Republic with a view to establishing diplomatic relations.



However, the subsequent failure of the communist government to ratify an Irish/Soviet treaty in 1920, due to concerns about its developing trade relationship with Britain, ended the early attempts at diplomacy. The Irish Free State maintained some diplomatic relationship with the Soviet Union, particularly through involvement in the League of Nations, but the Irish Republic operated in the Cold War context of the 1950s and the Government, influenced by a Catholic hierarchy dominated by a virulently anti-communist Archbishop McQuaid, was extremely hostile to the USSR.

Quinn deservedly devotes a significant section of the book to the work of the three main Soviet friendship societies, north and south. This is a unique survey and highlights the challenges presented to determined activists and the commitment and courage displayed by individuals, often motivated by ideals of peace and friendship. The personalities involved and the nature of the activities undertaken in Ireland and the solidarity visits to the Soviet Union are recorded.

The political environment within which the different societies emerged is sketched out. The extremely hostile period facing the earlier society formed in December 1945 clashing with the Catholic Church inspired the 'Red Scare'. In contrast, the society established in 1966 was set up in the context of the



Civil Rights movement, the success of the Cuban Revolution, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and opposition to the Vietnam War.

A very important aspect of the book is the exploration of the formal diplomatic relationships between the Irish and Soviet governments through the work of their respective embassies and professional diplomats. By utilising the political reports of the Irish ambassadors, now available in the National Archives, the reader is able to gain a real insight to the formal State relationships but also descriptions of the relevant issues and activities taking place in the USSR and the interests, attitudes and responses of the Russian government to events in Ireland, especially during the conflict in Northern Ireland.

The determination and effective role of Fine Gael Foreign Minister Garret Fitzgerald in securing the opening of both embassies in 1974 following a meeting with Andrei Gromyko at the UN is a history worth recording.

A centrepiece of the book is the reference to these reports from the first Irish ambassador, Edward Brennan, to the Department of Foreign Affairs from 1974 to 1980. Ambassador Brennan monitored and analysed reports in the mainstream Soviet media particularly in relation to Northern Ireland and especially the depiction of the Provisional IRA during this crucial period.

...the Government, influenced by a Catholic hierarchy dominated by a virulently anti-communist Archbishop McQuaid, was extremely hostile to the USSR

Brennan's reports also showed an abiding interest in Eurocommunism. A little-known aspect of Irish 'diplomacy' highlighted in this book was participation on the EEC committee called the Eastern European Working Group which presented a challenge to neutral Ireland as the only non-NATO member and raises fundamental questions about the role of Irish diplomats in this overly secretive structure.

While the level of primary source material and research detail contained in this book may appear daunting to the general reader, in fact it is very well written, scholarly and accessible.

Producing a book from an academic doctorate is not an easy undertaking, so Michael Quinn must be congratulated on his excellent work. Jack McGinley, editor of Umiskin Press, must also be commended for ensuring that this important history has been made available.

**David Connolly**

## Friendship societies

**The Irish- USSR Society, 1945-1966. (first meeting 6 December 1945)**

Founders included; Officers: Helena Early ( president), Hilda Verlin (née Allberry), Margaret McMackin, Anne Peache. Committee members included two stalwart communists, Sean Nolan and Robert Tweedy.

**The Soviet Friendship Societies of Northern Ireland, 1953-1991.**

Initial committee members included William Burton, Annie Burton, Sam Justice, John Warren, Alan Gorman, Lance Noakes ( mainly trade unionists and members of CPNI)

**The Ireland-USSR Society, 1966-1992. ( first meeting 14 October 1966)**

Founders included: John Swift (chairman), Barbara Miller, Frank Edwards, Nora Harkin, Brendan Scott and three others (mixture of members of communist and Labour Party and non- aligned)



# Poignant Liberty Hall performance for Connolly play Curtains up for the Rising

**Under Which Flag?**  
By James Connolly,  
Directed by Kevin McGee,  
Presented and  
Produced by Bryan Murray,  
Production Manager:  
Pádraig Murray,  
Liberty Hall Theatre, 15th  
October 2016.

ON Saturday 15th October, a very special event took place at Liberty Hall. This was a rehearsed reading of James Connolly's short play *Under Which Flag?* This is only the second time that this play was performed in Liberty Hall.

It was made particularly memorable by the presence of the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins and by the performance in the play of his wife Sabina Coyne-Higgins.

The play was originally staged at Liberty Hall on 26th March 1916 just one month before the Easter Rising. It is astonishing to think that James Connolly took the time to write and produce a play at this

time but it does highlight the importance he attached to theatre.

The play, under the skilled direction of Kevin McGee, is set in 1867 but it is impossible to separate it from the events of 1916. As Bryan Murray stated in his introduction, the cast would have been soldiers and the audience too included comrades who would have been well aware that "some of them would never see another play or gather with their friends for a drink and a song".

In fact, the actor Seán Connolly became the first republican casualty of the rising. He was shot on Easter Monday 24th April at City Hall.

The play tells the story of the O'Donnell family. Mother Ellen (Sabina Coyne-Higgins), Father Pat (Brendan Conroy), their two sons, John and Frank, played by Steve Cash and Steve Gunn respectively. Frank O'Sullivan played their old friend and former fighter, Dan, and Donna Anita Nikolaisen played Mary O'Neill, an orphan who lives with the O'Donnell family and who is in love with Frank. John is



Stages theory: James Connolly was revolutionary and playwright

planning to emigrate to America and Frank to enlist in the British Army.

The simple family story of the first half of the play takes a dramatic shift when Mary witnesses men secretly drilling like soldiers and in excitement is going to spread the news. However, when she tells this to blind Dan, he points out the fate meted out to in-



Introduced play: actor Bryan Murray

Picture: RollingNews.ie

formers who are "scorned, spat upon, loathed and despised".

Here Connolly shows the passionate disgust reserved for those who would betray their countrymen. The play ends with the young men slipping away to fight for freedom and with Mary persuading Frank that for love of her and his country, he must do the same.

The closing words are from the old blind freedom fighter Dan, who kneels and blesses the young men going to fight and "the brave girls who sent them out to battle". This rousing speech has to be viewed in the context of the period in which it was written and performed, although to a modern audience, it might seem somewhat nationalistic and simplistic.

The play was followed by music and song from the company, led by Francy Devine. Great young musicians providing support were harpist Teresa O'Donnell, fiddler Ciaran Mac Aodhagáin and Pádraig Og Mac Aodhagáin on the pipes.

There was a beautiful reading by Donna Anita Nikolaisen of an extract from James Connolly's daughter's memoirs. The evening finished with Francy's poignant rendition of *Where O Where is our James Connolly?*

Sabina Coyne-Higgins was awarded life membership of Equity for her unwavering support for the union and particularly for her support for young actors throughout her life.

## Inspired by Count who tried to kill Hitler

IRISH artist and SIPTU member, Eve Parnell who teaches at the National College of Art and Design (NCAD) in Dublin has opened an exhibition at Humboldt University in Berlin inspired by Count Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg, the Wehrmacht officer who led the July 1944 plot to kill Hitler.

The title of the new show, which runs through February, is 'Verneht und lasst mich traum so wahrheit singen', which translates as 'Let me sing dreams as words of truth'.

It is taken from a poem written in 1923 by von Stauffenberg, who was executed after the failed attempt, known as 'Operation Valkyrie'.

Parnell, who studied at NCAD in Dublin, works in the extremely delicate and demanding medium of pencil on tissue paper.

The talented artist has already had her work exhibited at Parlia-



Eve Parnell

ment Buildings, Stormont, at the Irish embassy in Berlin, in Finland, and at the Pontifical Irish College in Rome.

Peter Hoffmann, Professor of History at McGill University in Montreal, Canada, and one of the



Eve Parnell with Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness at Stormont in 2016

leading authorities on the German resistance against Nazism, has written an introduction to the exhibition.

In his introduction, he writes: "Eve Parnell in her delicate drawings of birds, plants, sculptures,

even of dead pigeons expresses dream-like compassion and confidence in life, 'dream as truth'.

"The phrase drew Eve Parnell to Stauffenberg's life, in which she saw reflected her themes of compassion, freedom and equality.



Eve Parnell, pencil on tissue paper

Stauffenberg, who attempted to assassinate Hitler and gave his life for it, aimed to remove the evil of Hitler from the world. He became a beacon of ideals in a world in turmoil."

Last year, to mark the 1916 centenary, Parnell was invited to Stormont to exhibit a series of drawings inspired by the poets of World War One and the Easter Rising.



# My great-grandfather – trade unionist and rebel

■ By John McCamley

**T**HE crucial role our union and its members played in the 1916 Rising has been rightly emphasised during this centenary year. While much of the focus has been on celebrating the role of the Irish Citizen Army – the armed wing of the trade union movement – we should not lose sight of the fact that many Irish Volunteers were also good trade unionists.

One of those was my great-grandfather, Thomas Maguire, whose role in the fight for Irish freedom I have researched.

From Nugent's Lane near Broadstone in Dublin 7, Thomas was born into a Catholic loyalist family. Despite this, he became involved in nationalist political and cultural activities.

He joined the Celtic Literary Society in 1898 and was closely associated with William Rooney and Arthur Griffith. Maguire assisted the former in forming the first junior hurling team in Dublin, Fianna Éireann.

In 1904 Thomas joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and was one of the first to enlist in the Irish Volunteers in 1913. At the same time Thomas was an active trade unionist in his employment on the MGW Railways and by 1915 he was the Dublin Branch Secretary of train drivers' union ASLEF.

As soon as the Easter Rising broke out he reported to his post at the North Circular Road, to act as a guide for the explosives party ordered to the tunnel over the Link Railway, near Liffey Junction.

Having done that he reported to the 1st Battalion HQ in Church Street. Cmdt Edward Daly got him to build defensive positions in their command area.

After the surrender, Thomas was transferred to Britain and put in Knutsford Prison. He was later moved to Frongoch Prison camp in Wales, until his release at Christmas 1916.

Thomas lost his job on the railways because of his participation in the Rising (as did other volunteers in loyalist employments such as *The Irish Times* and Guinness).

Thomas Maguire: lost his job on the railways because of his participation in the Rising.

During the War of Independence contact between the various IRA commands became difficult. However, Thomas' old railway friends and comrades helped the IRA by using his home as a 'letter drop'. It was as a 'link man' that Maguire came into regular contact with Michael Collins

Thomas was unemployed for the next 10 months until he got employment with Dublin Corporation at the pumping station at East Wall. He remained a member of the re-named Irish Republican Army and its secretive inner circle, the IRB.

It was the latter which appointed Maguire to the so-called Labour Board, an intelligence unit under the command of Michael Collins. Thomas and other unit members' role was to influence the trade unions to assist the IRA's fight.

Thomas, who was on the management committee of the Stationery Engine Drivers' Society, was tasked with others, by the IRB, to create a consolidated Irish craft union and so, the Irish Engineering, Shipbuilding and Foundry Workers Union came into being in 1920, thanks to the Republican movement. Thomas was on the executive of this trade union and appears to have been appointed by the IRB to the Dáil's Labour Arbitration Tribunal panels (the precursor to the current Workplace Relations Commission and Labour Court).

On the purely military side, he was involved in making and hiding homemade hand grenades at the foundry in Inchicore. During the War of Independence contact between the various IRA commands became difficult.

However, Thomas' old railway friends and comrades helped the IRA by using his home as a 'letter drop'. It was as a 'link man' that Maguire came into regular contact with Michael Collins who used Vaughan's Hotel in Parnell Square for intelligence gathering.

When the truce came Thomas hung up his gun and was affiliated to the so-called "Independent IRA" which refused to take sides in the Civil War. He continued his trade union activities until his death in 1938.

Jim Larkin and Máire Comerford were among the many trade unionists and republicans who attended his military funeral in Glasnevin Cemetery.

*John McCamley is a SIPTU Organiser*



## ORATION

A celebration of the life of our father, Nealie McCarthy 1930-2017

# 'The Union Man' – strong, principled, dearly loved

**THOSE of us gathered here today who knew Nealie, will have our own unique of memories and stories of him. We hope that we can all celebrate what we consider to be his remarkable life, through this ceremony and afterwards.**

Dad was born in 1930 into a small rural community of Collatrum, Lisheen, where he lived with mother and brother, Haullie, after his father died at an early age, until they moved into the town of Skibbereen in the 1950s.

He lived in an era when life was harder than now in some respects. He has told us stories of himself and friends walking across the fields with no shoes to get to Lisheen National School, where he was a student. It was a tightly-knit community made up of a small number of houses, a shop and a pub. Dad has told us lots of entertaining stories of his childhood experiences and of friends and neighbours and their positive community spirit.

Work was hard to find. Eventu-



Nealie McCarthy: loved connecting with people

ally, he got work in Skibbereen with Cork County Council, initially breaking stones and working on building the roads. Later he became a mechanic in the council yard, fixing the steam stone crushers. It was here, in 1950, he joined

the Irish Transport and General Workers Union and started his life-time involvement with the union and the labour movement.

He soon became a shop steward and worked with the union on a voluntary basis. In 1965, he made a major decision and applied successfully for the job of full-time union official for the West Cork region, servicing a wide area from Skibbereen to Bantry and Clonakilty and also doing a stint in Mallow.

Our memories are of lots of people referring to our dad as "The Union Man". He sometimes worked very late into the early hours of the morning during negotiations connected with disputes and strikes.

He educated himself by doing a Social Studies Diploma with UCC, which he thought was life changing and opened him up to new ideas, and read widely on politics, history and society. As children we played with his many books, especially James Connolly's *Labour and Irish History*!

He has told us that he found his new job hugely rewarding, working with and representing diverse groups of workers from the staff on the ferry boat to Cape Island, to workers in the Fastnet food factory in Skibb' and the Gulf Oil workers in the Whiddy Island refinery.

We are told that he was a strong negotiator, fighting hard to improve workers' pay and conditions. He spoke at national union conferences and as a labour activist organised and spoke at many local rallies and marches. He was a very strong principled man, always willing to stand firm and fight for his ideals and for social justice.

His close family and extended family were really important to him. We have very fond memories of Dad, especially on our epic caravan holidays. He was always there for us. We loved him a lot.

He was a heavily involved in the community in Skibbereen, which included being a founding member of Skibbereen Credit Union, in setting up Friends of the Day Care Centre and took part in delivering

meals on wheels and serving as a minister of the Eucharist.

He really loved the time he spent at the day care centre, listening to music, playing cards and talking to people. He developed a new skill in art, especially in the making of the Famine commemorative cloak.

He had a lifelong love of the GAA which included roles of secretary and president of his O'Donovan Rossa club. He told us his proudest moment was stepping on to the field at Croke Park with the Rossa colours, to present the referee with the list of the O'Donovan Rossa team that won the All Ireland Championship in 1992. The celebrations were unforgettable.

He had an outgoing social character and loved connecting with people. We will miss him terribly and he will leave a huge gap in our lives. We learnt a huge amount from him and we believe his amazing spirit will live on.

*Nealie is survived by daughter Kay and son Denis McCarthy, who composed this eulogy. It was delivered at Nealie's funeral.*

## OBITUARY

Bridget Taylor

# Lockout martyr's niece passes away peacefully

**BRIDGET Taylor, the niece of Lockout martyr Alicia Brady, has died after a brief illness.**

Bridget fully supported the efforts of SIPTU and the 1913 Lockout Committee to commemorate that epic struggle for workers' rights a hundred years ago.

Her aunt Alicia was a member of the Irish Women Workers' Union and died as a result of injuries sustained when a strike breaker opened fire on a group of women in Mark Street, Dublin, on 18th December 1913, as they tried to prevent coal deliveries to commercial customers in the area. Alicia died of complications two weeks later.

The gunman, Patrick Traynor, was initially charged with murder, but this was later reduced to manslaughter. He was subsequently acquitted and returned to England.

Bridget spoke at the commemoration held by SIPTU to mark the centenary of Alicia's funeral on 4th January 2013 in Glasnevin cemetery. At the event she said: "We remember Alicia and the man who



Bridget Taylor, left, beside a wreath laid in honour of her aunt, Lockout martyr Alicia Brady at St. Mark's Church, Pearse Street on 18th December 2015.

Photo: Dan O'Neill

shot her and all who suffered during and after the Lockout. They were set against each other by people who should have known better and who had so much. May Alicia and all who suffered Rest in Peace."

In his funeral oration at Alicia's funeral, Jim Larkin said: "It pleased the all-wise Providence that our sister would be sacrificed on the altar of sweating misery and degradation."

"Though she was only a young girl she had shown great strength of character, and if she had been spared, she would, I believe, have been a great woman."

Bridget continued to take part in commemorative events and laid wreaths at the scene where her aunt was fatally injured in 2014 and 2015. Unfortunately, Bridget was too unwell to do so again last December. She passed away peacefully on 15th January 2017.

**A Month's Mind Mass for Bridget Taylor will take place on Sunday, 19th February in McKee Barracks Church at 11.00 a.m.**





Catch us if you can: Dublin's Colm Basquel sidesteps Eoin Doyle of Kildare in the O'Byrne Cup semi-final PICTURE:INPHO/Donall Farmer

# Catching the Dubs this season? Tyrone may have Harte to do it



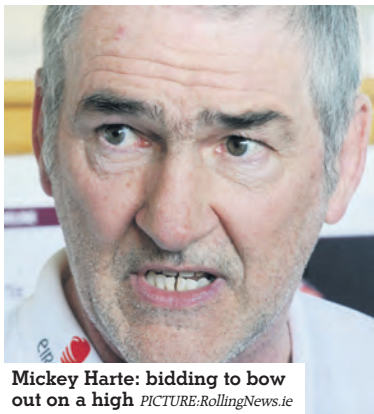
By  
Matt Treacy

**ACCORDING to one of my sources, Kildare people were close to despair following Dublin's victory in the O'Byrne Cup semi-final in Newbridge last month.**

Whatever chance they might have of beating the Dubs in the summer, they surely had a shot at home in January, with more or less a full team against a Dublin side that had not one player who had ever lined out in senior, the inter-county league or championship.

Not to be. They blew a lead and decided not to score for the last 15 minutes or so. Dublin did more or less the same to Louth in the final. So the question is: can anyone stop them this year?

What they are chasing is unique. A fifth consecutive league and a third All-Ireland which would make



Mickey Harte: bidding to bow out on a high PICTURE:RollingNews.ie

it five out of the last seven. They are also aiming to create a Leinster record of seven in a row which would surpass the great 1970s team's six. Dublin have won 10 out of the last 11 Leinster's.

A pretty depressing picture for non-Dubs.

What will be interesting to see in the league is who Jim Gavin plays. The O'Byrne Cup win threw some interesting names into the shake-up. Conor McHugh is a former All-Ireland under-21 winner and his

O'Byrne campaign confirmed his right to be considered.

Paul Hudson of Thomas Davis did well but perhaps is on the wrong side age-wise. His main strength too is free kicks and Dublin are not wanting for free takers. Ciaran Reddin, Niall Scully, young Hazley, Colm Basquel, Eoghan O'Gara's brother Killian. All names for the future. We shall see. The real issue is whether Dublin put out their best available team and try to win the league or rest some big names with an eye on the summer and autumn.

I suspect we will see a pretty experimental squad until April. The real work will be done behind closed doors in their famously competitive and no-holds-barred training games. The bad news for everyone else is Gavin's mastery of putting out teams with a fair quotient of chaps eager to make their name. Not unlike his hurling equivalent from the Village.

Dublin will have to reduce 60 or so current contenders down to under 30 by the time the championship

Dublin have won 10 out of the last 11 Leinster's. A pretty depressing picture for non-Dubs...

starts. Faint hearts will not be wearing a blue jersey by then no matter what they have done in the past. I suspect that the level of competitiveness will ensure another league title. After that, the reins will drop.

So, who might beat them?

It would be a foolish chap who would write off Kerry, and they are almost certain to meet Dublin at some stage in the championship. It would seem the most likely final. However, some indications with retirements and the McGrath Cup would suggest that Kerry are looking a bit further down the road. They have an outstanding crop of under-age players coming on line but that will take another year or two. They

are a good bet to win the under-21s.

The most interesting thing about Mayo will be to see what impact the internal leaks will have. Dumping managers seldom works, and when the dumped come back with the inside spiel about what certain chaps think of other chaps then the consequences can be devastating. I suspect that a team that is already labouring under multiple monkeys will falter under the pressure. I don't think Mayo will be there come August or September.

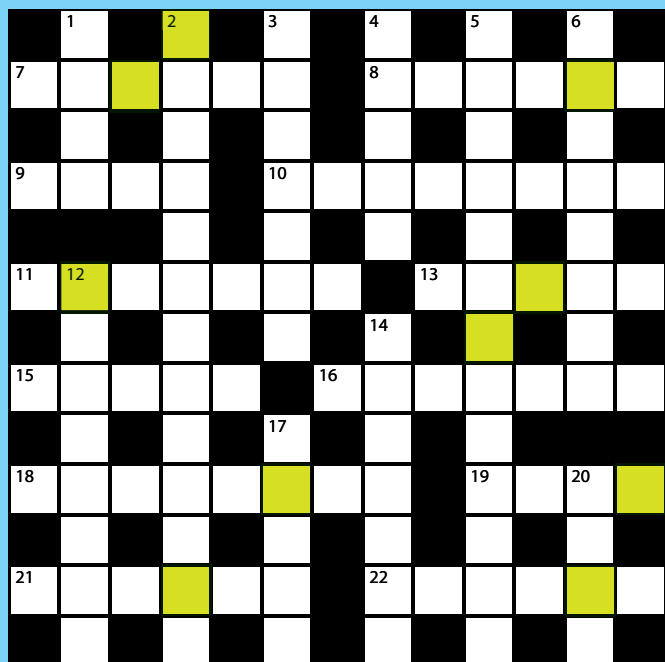
Donegal are getting old and just don't have the replacements for the ageing.

That leaves one team in my humble opinion that might take Dublin out. Tyrone. It is Mickey Harte's final year. He has been ruthless in clearing the decks and he has the pick of an All-Ireland 21s champion team and good minors.

If any team can beat Dublin it might be the Red Hands. The hard fought draw (Dublin 0-10 - Tyrone 1-7) between the two teams on Sunday (12th February) is a sure sign of better days to come.



# Liberty Crossword



\*Correctly fill in the crossword to reveal the hidden word, contained by reading the letters in the shaded squares from top to bottom.

Email the hidden word to [communications@siptu.ie](mailto:communications@siptu.ie) or post to Communications Dept., Liberty Hall, Dublin 1 along with your

## ACROSS

- 7 To stand in line (6)
- 8 Circles the larger object (6)
- 9 Lock openers (4)
- 10 On the payroll (8)
- 11 Bright red (7)
- 13 A celtic people (5)
- 15 Journeys (5)
- 16 European nationality (7)
- 18 In charge of a committee meeting (8)
- 19 All's opposite (4)
- 21 Disentangle (6)
- 22 Where the law is delivered (6)

## DOWN

- 1 In the raw (4)
- 2 Payment for membership of an organisation (13)
- 3 Amazing adventure (7)
- 4 Bodies of water (5)
- 5 Scottish cattle breed (8,5)
- 6 Do not believe in the deity (8)
- 12 Setting alight (8)
- 14 Popeye food (7)
- 17 Common surname (5)
- 20 Cold war relic (4)

name and address and you will to be entered into a **prize draw to win a €200 Arnotts voucher**. The winner of the crossword quiz will be published in the next edition of Liberty.

\*Terms and conditions apply.

The winner of the crossword competition in the November/December edition was Sam Cooke, Tubbercurry

**Answer: Poinsettia**



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