Housing crisis demands urgent action

by Scott Miller

A massive public house-building programme, which can provide homes for hundreds of thousands of people in housing need, was the demand of the 2017 May Day march in Dublin.

Over 1,500 trade unionists and social activists took part in the march, which concluded with a rally outside Liberty Hall. Organised jointly by the Dublin Council of Trade Unions (DCTU) and the National Homeless and Housing Coalition, the May Day march was the largest in the city for several years. It was clear from the diversity of those involved in the march that the demand for an effective public home building scheme is one that unites and motivates a wide range of progressive trade unions and political groups.

Addressing the rally outside Liberty Hall, leading housing campaigner, Fr Peter McVerry, said the government’s housing strategy is not working as homelessness is increasing and that it is time for “more radical measures”.

“The Government introduced its strategy nine months ago. Every single month since then the number of homeless people has risen and risen and risen,” he said. He added that the only real long-term solution to the crisis was “an effective public home building programme”.

The demand for a public housing programme was reiterated by all other speakers. Community activist Rita Fagan harshly criticised plans

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100 Years of Bray Trades Council

The ‘Bray, Kingstown and District United Trades and Labour Council’ was established at a meeting at Bray Town Hall, on Sunday 1st April 1917. Exactly one hundred years later, on Saturday 1st April 2017 the Bray and District Council of Trade Unions held a special meeting in the Town Hall to commemorate its founding.

The Council President, George Sheehan, chaired the meeting and speakers included Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council Pat Fitzgerald, ICTU General Secretary, Patricia King, and General Secretary of Mandate, John Douglas.

Assistant Secretary of the Council and SIPTU Organiser Derek Cassely spoke on the events leading up to the founding meeting in 1917. He referred to the aftermath of the Easter Rebellion and the economic effects of the Great War. While wages had risen, prices had soared. Hunger, disease, and slum housing were still the lot of the poor. Against this background a group of men in the town of Bray decided that a united council of the trades was needed to organise their forces to challenge these conditions.

The current Council secretary, Kieron Connolly, gave an overview of some of the main issues that it had been involved in over the years.

Other guests at the meeting included honorary life members of the Council, John Byrne and John O’Brien from SIPTU, whose grandparents were founding members of the Council. Angela Connolly, widow of Ross, and former president, Maura Donnelly (INTO) and Stephen Donnelly (ASTI). The proceedings were interspersed with music from traditional band ‘Seoidín’ and singer William Byrne who gave a powerful rendition of ‘Joe Hill’.

The Council will be organising further events throughout the year including co-hosting a seminar with the Irish Labour History Society in Bray in November.

Vote against WRC proposals by DAA workers

SIPTU members in the Dublin Airport Authority (DAA), excluding airport police and fire service, have voted against the acceptance of Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) proposals contained in the Company/Union Framework document in relation to terms and conditions of employment.

Following the announcement of the ballot result on 28th April, SIPTU Organiser, Neil McGowan, said: “Following the vote against these proposals, union representatives will take time to consult with their workplace representatives and the wider membership to decide on the next steps in progressing their claim for improved terms and conditions employment.”

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by the Minister for Housing, Simon Coveney, to make 800 state owned sites available to private companies to build properties, including some social housing.

She said: “That means it’s going to developers. On my estate, St Michael’s Estate, that’s 428 mortgage homes. We don’t want mortgage homes: we want public homes that people will be able to rent whether they’re in a job or not. We have to build a different vision.”

Such a vision of publicly built and managed housing, which will be available to a mix of income groups, is one that is the subject of intense discussions in the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU).

At its biennial conference in early July, Congress will debate a motion which calls on the Government to “set out a national and county level plan to deliver the largest housing programme in the history of the State”. It adds that there must be “an immediate sharp increase in capital investment with the aim of reaching an annual output of 10,000 social affordable housing units per annum for the duration of the [housing] emergency”.

More details on the Congress proposals, including the major role local authorities could play in the direct provision of social housing will be contained in a major housing policy document prepared by Congress. SIPTU and the One Cork project to be released this month. The proposals envisage the creation of municipal housing task forces which can harness existing land, resources and skills within and across local authorities to commence an urgent refurbishment and house building programme in cities and communities across the country.

Elsewhere, thousands of trade unionists and activists also celebrated International Workers’ Day, including in Belfast, Derry and Cork. In Belfast, the Congress May Day March on Saturday, 29th April took the theme of ‘internationalism, solidarity and peace’. Among those who addressed the crowd in the Art College gardens were ICTU president, Brian Campfield, and chairperson Maria Morgan.

In Cork, trade unionists and activists marched on Monday 1st May with the housing crisis the main issue highlighted.
DELEGATIONS from the SIPTU Big Start campaign have been meeting with politicians across the country to inform them of the problems and growing crisis within the Early Years education sector.

On 10th April, a Big Start campaign delegation including Early Years educators, childcare managers and providers had a successful meeting with Clare County Co Councillors. Before the meeting, Claire Casey, an Early Years educator from Mountshannon also in Clare, said: “I love my job but I feel that the Government is talking the talk but not walking the walk when it comes to properly resourcing and financing the Early Years sector.”

Claire Bolton, an Early Years educator from Mountshannon also in Clare, said: “I put myself through college achieving a first class honours BA in Early Childhood Care and Education. I am still paying off the cost of loans needed to get my qualifications.

However, the level of my education goes unnoticed as my wages equate to that of someone with lesser qualifications.”

Following the meeting councillors signaled their intention to submit a motion supporting the aims of the Big Start campaign.

On Monday, 8th May, South Dublin County Council will be voting on a motion calling for increased state funding, recognition and professional pay for the Early Years sector.

A Big Start delegation will meet councillors before the debate which they will then attend.

Also, on Monday, 8th May, Big Start campaign members will meet with local TDs in St. Peter’s Parish Centre, Bray, Co Wicklow, to discuss the serious issues facing the Early Years sector and to seek their support for increased state investment as well as proper recognition and pay for workers.

On Wednesday, 17th May, a Big Start Network meeting will take place in the SIPTU Office in Arklow, County Wicklow, at 6.45 p.m. The meeting will give Early Years educators and providers from the area an overview of the Big Start campaign and provide an opportunity to discuss the challenges facing the sector.
Victory for women’s team in ‘Saipan’ moment

A dramatic press conference in Liberty Hall in early April, where the Republic of Ireland women’s football team outlined a list of grievances with the FAI, made headlines across the globe and resulted in a rapid industrial relations victory.

The team’s problems spanned from not being refunded for earnings lost while representing their country to not being allowed to keep their international tracksuits; even on occasion being forced to change in airport toilets, so the apparel could be handed on to junior teams.

The 14 members of the team who attended the press conference included captain, Emma Byrne, striker, Stephanie Roche and FAI Women’s International Player of the Year, Karen Duggan. The women were accompanied by representatives of their union, the Professional Footballers Association of Ireland (PFAI), which is an affiliate of SIPTU.

At the press conference, Byrne said: “We’re here because we want to field the best international team we possibly can. We want to compete at the highest level and in order to do this, everyone has to commit. There have been some issues, not just in the last few years, but for a very long time now.”

The press conference happened on the morning of Tuesday, 4th April, and by the early hours of Thursday morning, following intensive talks involving SIPTU, PFAI and FAI officials, a deal was secured.

Although confidential, the team players were quick to declare the agreement a victory which adequately deals with all the issues they had raised.

Leading soccer correspondent, Neil O’Riordan, tweeted his reaction to the dispute: “Agreement reached between FAI and women’s team under 48 hours after they went public. Must go down as one of most successful industrial actions.”

Central to the negotiations were SIPTU Services Division Organiser, Ethel Buckley and Sector Organiser, Denis Hynes.

Buckley told Liberty: “This is a short, sharp and successful campaign to advance the rights of women in sport. The team are a reminder that in any area of modern Irish society, women should never accept being treated as second-class citizens.

“The success of the campaign was only possible due to the decision of the players to join a trade union and fight for their right for it to be recognised as their representative body.”

The team are a reminder that in any area of Irish society, women should never accept being treated as second-class citizens.
Next steps in Community Sector drive

COMMUNITY Sector workers are attending a series of regional meetings to discuss the next steps in the SIPTU ‘Rebuilding Our Communities’ campaign.

The campaign, which was launched with a protest outside the Dáil on 22nd March, is focused on three key issues for workers across the sector. These are the funding of the vital services it delivers, problems associated with creeping privatisation and the need for movement on workers’ pay and related issues.

Several dozen local community workers attended a meeting in the Clayton Hotel in Galway on 26th April. Further meetings are scheduled for Connolly Hall in Cork, on 4th May, and Liberty Hall in Dublin on 17th May.

SIPTU Community Sector president, Donnie O’Leary, told Lib...

Private funding incentives hit job standards

A SEMINAR, titled ‘Towards a World Class Education Sys-
tem’, held in Liberty Hall in January, focused on the spread of precarious work practices in the Education Sector.

Organised by the Public Administration and Community Division, the seminar was addressed by a number of keynote speakers, including Peter Cawdill, who recently chaired the Expert Panel on the Future Funding of Education in Ireland, Nevin Economic Research Institute Director Tom Healy and ICTU Industrial Relations Officer Liam Berney.

SIPTU Public Administration and Community Division Organiser, John King, said: “The primary purpose of holding this seminar was to have a debate with key stakeholders in order to develop the SIPTU Education Sector Committee campaign to ensure the Expert Panel report is implemented in full.”

“The Expert Panel report points to four possible solutions. These are: state funding, state funded and student fees, state funded and student loans or an increase in contributions from business. Each of these options present opportunities but none are risk-

SIPTU seeks meeting with Minister Kyne over future of Tara Mines

A meeting has been requested by SIPTU representatives with Minister of State for Gaeltacht Affairs and Natural Resources, Sean Kyne, over the long-term future of the New Boliden Tara Mines in Co Meath. The proposed discussions will focus on the likely impact on the lives of workers, and the local economy, if the current plan to extend the Tailings Pond at the facility is not accepted. The planned extension was the subject of an oral hearing by An Bord Pleanála in March.

Meanwhile, Tara Mines workers returned to work on 8th April after a six-day sit-in, following the acceptance of proposals on improving the operation of a new underground ambulance system in the mine. The agreement followed a meeting between management members of the workplace safety committee and a Senior Inspector from the Health and Safety Authority (HSA).

Action at Edenderry Power suspended

SIPTU members in Edenderry Power Ltd (EPL), Edenderry, Co Offaly, have suspended all industrial action at the plant in order to facilitate engagement at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) aimed at resolving the dispute at the company. At a meeting of the Labour Court on 24th April it was agreed that engagement between the parties in this dispute should take place with the assistance of the WRC over the following eight weeks.

Ethical Trading and adapting to Brexit

The first Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) two-day workshop, on practical steps for Irish companies and suppliers exporting to the UK, took place in the Hub in Kilkenny on Thursday 20th and Friday 21st March.

The workshop focused on understanding the demands of UK supermarkets as they adapt to changes in legislation, knowing how Irish legislative changes can assist Irish businesses as well as giving practical assistance on mapping risks in supply chains and developing links between business, NGOs and trade unions.

SIPTU Sector Organiser, Orlagh Fawl, said: “If companies and workers’ representatives in Ireland are fully up to speed on the current legislation and guidelines in the UK, our agri-business sector will be in the best position to adapt to the conditions following Brexit.”

Pfizer new entrants’ pension dispute resolved

SIPTU members in Pfizer Ireland Ltd. Ringaskiddy, Co Cork, settled a dispute with the company in early April following its agreement to allow 35 new entrants access to its defined benefit pension scheme.

Over 250 SIPTU members had been engaged in industrial action for more than eight weeks, since 27th January, at the plant over the refusal by the company to allow new entrants access to the defined benefit pension scheme.
Workers in Bus Éireann were finally forced to begin a long-threatened strike action at 12.01 a.m. on Friday, 24th March. This was less than 48 hours after management had sent a letter to all staff instructing them that it intended to unilaterally impose changes to their terms and conditions of employment which would result in reductions in their earnings of up to 30%.

Workers had no doubt this was the first stage of a wider plan to impose draconian cuts throughout the company, on both staff and services, that would fatally undermine the very existence of the national public bus network.

As pickets were placed on bus depots across the country on the first day of the strike, Dermot Hession explained why he and his colleagues in Galway had been left with no alternative. “It’s an unfortunate situation, but government policy seems to be to privatise public transport that in this country. My own view is public transport is just as important as health and education, and it just isn’t funded correctly.”

He added: “This is a dispute about services to local communities and especially communities in rural Ireland, like here in Galway and Connemara, which would suffer the most if Bus Éireann is undermined.”

Over the following days, SIPTU members stood alongside their colleagues in the four other Bus Éireann unions, the NBRU, TSSA, Unite and TEEU, in their defence of decent jobs and a high quality public transport system.

Early in the dispute, SIPTU Sector Organiser, Willie Noone, had laid out what was necessary to establish a process which could find a resolution to the dispute. “SIPTU representatives want to engage in meaningful negotiations concerning far-reaching change and improvements in the public bus network. In order for these talks to be effective they must include direct input from the National Transport Authority and the Department of Transport.”

He added: “SIPTU members in Bus Éireann want a solution to the current dispute and to return to work as soon as possible.”

Such attempts to bring about a proper dialogue were rebuffed by management and ignored by an aloof Minister for Transport, Shane Ross. In response, the bus workers took their demands directly to the Dáil. A quickly arranged lunchtime march in Dublin by over 600 bus and rail workers on 29th March went from the Garden of Remembrance in Parnell Square to Leinster House.

The crowd vigorously applauded as leaders from all the unions involved in the strike made impassioned pleas for political action to resolve the dispute. SIPTU TEAC Division Organiser, Greg Ennis, said: “The State must provide a public bus service and not a for-profit bus service. It found €64 billion for the banks and global investors who lost their money through gambling and greed but it can’t find €9 million for a bus service that the rural people of Ireland depend on.”

Among the others who addressed the crowd were NBRU General Secretary, Dermot O’Leary, TSSA General Secretary Manuel...
Cortes, Unite General Secretary, Jimmy Kelly, and SIPTU Bus Éireann worker, Georgina Kerslake.

Karen North, the wife of a bus driver, summed up the sentiment of many of the workers’ supporters on the march. She said: “It is important to remember that as well as the 2,500-plus Bus Éireann workers there are also their families. In our case if we want to give our daughter a decent future then her dad needs a decent job.”

The following morning some Bus Éireann drivers ill-advisedly, but somewhat understandably, took matters into their own hands and set up unofficial pickets outside Dublin Bus depots and Irish Rail stations. The action resulted in several hours of severe disruption to members of the public. SIPTU representatives, in a meeting in Liberty Hall later that day, decided to immediately begin balloting members in Dublin Bus and Irish Rail. Bus Éireann school bus drivers also decided to ballot for action.

With these ballots in motion – but with management and the Minister still maintaining a position of total intransigence – the dispute dragged on. On 4th April, trade union and management representatives accepted an invitation from the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) to attend talks, aimed at resolving the dispute. However, the wider Government policy on providing and properly funding public transport still needs to be addressed.

“The belated offer by the Minister for Transport, Shane Ross, to set up a forum to engage on transport policy will be taken up by SIPTU. The current government policy is doomed to result in higher fares, less frequent services and declining standards and will only benefit privateers.”

The recommendation includes 200 job losses, the closure of Dunleavy maintenance garage, and the ending of several bus routes. It also proposes the consolidation of drivers’ pay in set hourly rates and the creation of a forum for all major stakeholders to discuss the future of bus transport in Ireland. Nationwide meetings of SIPTU members to discuss the Labour Court’s recommendation are currently taking place. The results of ballot of SIPTU Bus Éireann members on the recommendation will be counted on May 12th.

‘Government policy is doomed to result in higher fares, less frequent services and declining standards and will only benefit privateers’
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Huge turn out in Derry for McGuinness funeral

*By Frank Connolly*

Tens of thousands of people turned out for the wake and funeral of Martin McGuinness in Derry on 23rd March while the requiem mass in the packed St Colomba’s church looking over his native Bogside was attended by President Michael D Higgins, and former US president, Bill Clinton.

SIPTU president, Jack O’Connor was among the mourners along with trade union members from across the country, politicians, diplomats, civic and church leaders.

Clinton delivered a carefully crafted and typically concise message to a global audience appeals to politicians in the North to get back to the talks. McGuinness had resigned from the power sharing executive earlier this year bringing it down over the “cash for ash” and other political scandals and snubs he had blamed on the chair of the DUP.

Clinton also extolled what he described as the legitimate and genuine ambition of people for ‘a self-governing’ Ireland, careful to remain consistent with the life long struggle of the former IRA and Sinn Fein leader for national unity and ‘self-governing’ Ireland, careful to remain consistent with the life long struggle of the former IRA and Sinn Fein leader for national unity and care to those in the congregation reluctant to embrace the end of partition and union with Britain.

Queen Elizabeth of England sent a private note of sympathy to his wife Bernie and their children, Emmet, Fiachra, Grainne and Fionnuala, a family clearly bereft in the loss of a loving husband and father.

The extraordinary scene of tens of thousands walking to and from the church to the graveyard looking over the city from the Donegal side, with family, friends and comrades bearing the coffin by turn culminated in a moving and simple oration by his long-time friend and political soulmate, Gerry Adams.

The Sinn Fein president mixed humour and pathos in his personal tribute and recollections of a man whom he first met when they were both in their early twenties behind the barricades of Free Derry. He disputed the attempt by some to explain that the outbreak of affection for McGuinness on his death was due to some Damascene conversion.

“Reading and watching some of the media reports of his life and death in recent days one could be forgiven for believing that Martin, at some undefined point in his life, had a road to Damascus conversion; abandoned his republican principles, his former comrades in the IRA, and joined the political establishment. To suggest this is to miss the truth of his leadership and the essence of his humanity. There was not a bad Martin McGuinness or a good Martin McGuinness. There was simply a man, like every other decent man or woman, doing his best. Martin believed in freedom and equality.”

The public day of mourning commenced with Frances Black singing ‘Baglan Road’ outside his family home on Westland Street and ended some six hours later with Christy Moore giving a heartfelt rendition of the ‘Time has Come’ a moving lament for another Derry boy, Patsy O’Hara, who died during the republican hunger strike in 1981.

Low pay statistics highlight need for action

*By Loraine Mulligan*

The recent Central Statistics Office (CSO) figures underline the need for accelerated action to convert the National Minimum Wage so as to ensure all workers can enjoy a modest but decent standard living. The CSO updates reveal that 134,500 employees reported earning the National Minimum Wage (NMW) or below in the fourth quarter of 2016. This represents 8.8% of total employees. Over the three quarters between Q2 and Q4 2016, an average of 155,100 employees fell into this category, with 14.5% of them earning below the €9.15 rate that applied at the time.

It remains the case that women are most heavily affected. Over the period, 54.5% of those on or below the national minimum wage were women, representing 10.0% of all female employees.

The statistics confirm that the concentration of low pay is in the wholesale and retail trade (25.9%) and the accommodation and food services sector (24.7%).

There was also an age dimension to low pay with 37.9% of those earning on or below the NMW.

Part-time workers were more likely to be represented among those on or below the NMW, 58.7% compared to 41.3% who are working full-time.

Migrants are disproportionately represented among the low paid, accounting for 17.3% of those on or below the NMW compared to 8.7% who were Irish employees.

This is not news in so far as the profile of low paid workers has proven relatively consistent over time.

Unions to resist move to link public pensions to inflation

Unions will resist any move to link the pensions of public service workers to inflation rather than the pay rates in the grade from which they retire, it was decided at a meeting of the Public Service Committee of the ICTU on 2nd May.

The decision came as union leaders met to discuss upcoming talks with the Government on a successor to the Lansdowne Road Agreement. These talks are expected to begin later this month, following the publication of a report by the Public Service Pay Commission.

The upcoming talks will focus on pay restoration for public sector workers, following the significant cuts imposed on them during the economic crisis. Government ministers have claimed they will be utilising the talks to seek so-called ‘productivity measures’ and changes to public sector pensions.

It is believed that the Government will seek to conclude the talks process by early June so that the agreed measures can be introduced in the October 2017 Budget.
Clerys dispute

The victory has again proved the truth of Larkin’s words: ‘The great only appear great because we are on our knees. Let us rise!’

This they achieved and in doing so they have set an important example for workers throughout Ireland. The dramatic press conference in the Mansion House on 21st March last brought one phase of our struggle to a satisfactory conclusion but other battles continue, including the battle to secure legislative change to ensure that what happened at Clerys can never happen again.

The Clerys settlement also includes important clauses setting out a framework for co-operation between developers, communities and unions. We must now work to ensure that these clauses are delivered on, so we can re-establish the capital’s inner city as an area where business thrives, workers are assured fair working conditions and local communities directly benefit from its redevelopment.

This is in line with the aims of SIPTU’s Working City initiative. This campaign emerged from the Justice for the Clerys Workers campaign and that was to meet the Natrium Director Deirdre Foley and unions. We must now work to ensure that these clauses are delivered on, so we can re-establish the capital’s inner city as an area where business thrives, workers are assured fair working conditions and local communities directly benefit from its redevelopment.

The victory of the Clerys workers has once again proved the truth of the words cast in bronze that are attached to the statue of our union’s founder, Jim Larkin, which stands directly opposite the main entrance to the store: “The great only appear great because we are on our knees. Let us rise!”

Dramatic end to relentless 21-month battle

AFTER a relentless 21-month battle, the members of the Justice for the Clerys Workers Campaign declared victory following a meeting with the Natrium director, Deirdre Foley, on 21st March.

Foley was among those who controversially took ownership of the department store in June 2015, in a move which led to its closure and the loss of several hundred jobs. The deal that finally settled the long-running dispute includes a goodwill payment for those formerly directly employed by Clerys and clauses to ensure that inner-city Dublin communities benefit from the site’s redevelopment.

SIPTU Clerys shop steward and Justice for the Clerys Workers Campaign spokesman, Gerry Markey, said: “We had one key demand in our campaign and that was to meet with the department store’s new owner, Deirdre Foley. This goal was achieved when Ms Foley held a private meeting with Ethel Buckley and myself and then met other workers in the Mansion House on 21st March, before the took part in a press conference to publicly ratify the deal to bring this long-running dispute to an end.

“We met the members of the Justice for the Clerys Workers Campaign, which was organised though our union, SIPTU, have achieved a clear indication of what is possible when workers stand together and fight for what is right.

The deal to resolve the dispute which had been the subject of national media attention, came about dramatically, hours into a public hearing by An Bord Pleanála into the redevelopment of the Clerys site.

The hearing, at which SIPTU was the sole objector to the redevelopment, began at 10.00 a.m. on 20th March in the Bord Pleanála offices in central Dublin. At 3.00 p.m. SIPTU Services Division Organiser, Ethel Buckley, announced that the union was withdrawing its objection. It emerged that the objection was withdrawn because a comprehensive agreement had been secured between the union and the developer, Natrium.

Central to establishing a process to bring the two sides together was the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Brendan Carr. He said: “It will be the role of the office of Lord Mayor in the coming years to ensure that a proper balance is maintained between the interests of business and workers in the Clerys development. It is hoped that the framework agreed for this development may also become a template for others concerned with regeneration projects in our city. Such an approach is in the best in-
Hastings car workers in Mayo secure settlement

A SIX-WEEK strike action by SIPTU members in Tim Hastings Volkswagen Garage in Westport, Mayo, ended in late March with an agreement brokered by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). SIPTU Organiser, Ashling Dunne, said: “Our members are very pleased that a just and fair resolution was reached in this dispute. This outcome was achieved only due to the overwhelming support the workers received from the local community in Westport and from SIPTU members across the country. The support of local politicians from Westport and the wider county Mayo area was also crucial.”

The strike began on 3rd February due to a dispute concerning the payment of redundancy entitlements and the implementation of a Labour Court recommendation. In late March, a WRC conciliation conference was attended by SIPTU representatives and management. The proposals for the settlement of the dispute which emerged from this meeting were then accepted in a ballot of the workers.

SIPTU members travelled from across the country to attend a rally in Westport on 4th March in support of the strike action. Among those who showed their solidarity was SIPTU General President Jack O’Connor, representatives from IMPACT trade union, the Communications Workers Union and members of the local community. SIPTU Sector Organiser, Teresa Hannick, said: “The Hastings workers believe the support they received at this rally, from trade unionists and the general public, played a significant role in bringing the dispute to a close. Strike actions are always difficult experiences and our members were very pleased to be able to return to their normal lives following the resolution of this dispute.”

The terms of the settlement are confidential.

By Scott Millar

Mayo secure settlement

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Scanned with a mobile phone

By Scott Millar

Hastings car workers in
Mayo secure settlement
Taking care of the care assistants

THE SIPTU Care Sector is one of the newest in the trade union. Formally launched in March 2016, it was established to organise Healthcare Assistants (HCA), a grade of staff which the union had a crucial role in creating.

Liberty met with the members of the SIPTU Care Sector Committee in late April during one of their quarterly meetings in Liberty Hall. Helen Tierney, a HCA in Mayo General Hospital in Castlebar, outlined how the HCA role came into being.

“I came into the hospital as an orderly. However, as I was working directly with patients when the FETAC Level 5 Healthcare Assistant course was rolled out, I enrolled. “Prior to that we did have HCAs in the hospital, some had trained in the US and some in the UK but it was only with the start of the FETAC Level 5 course that we started getting qualified in Ireland.”

The FETAC Level 5 Healthcare Assistant course was created with the direct involvement of SIPTU, when in the mid 2000’s the union worked with the HSE to assist its health staff members to upskill. The course sought to train hospital support staff to fulfill hands-on patient care roles. In many cases the workers were already carrying out such duties without formal qualifications.

Justina Munitch, a Maternity HCA in Portiuncula Hospital in Ballinasloe, Co Galway, said: “I started in the hospital 10 years ago with no experience. I became a maternity HCA 13 years ago. We would not have had any education without SIPTU. We were doing the job already but the FETAC 5 course explained why we were doing it.”

Similarly, Moira Daly, a HCA in St Finbarr’s Hospital in Cork, took the FETAC course in 2005. “Until then there were no HCAs. We were known as auxiliary staff. We did the same work as a HCA does now. Direct patient care. All auxiliaries have been trained up now in St Finbarr’s so there are just HCAs and multi-task attendants.”

Committee members talk of the “Healthcare Assistant family” to cover the wide variety of roles included within the grade, from acute services, maternity, palliative care, mental health services, care of the elderly and other disability services.

The HCA position became essential throughout the health service as nursing and other roles evolved over time. As Cheryl Barrow-Hilliard, a palliative care HCA recalls, “My background is in nursing in England. A HCA does a load of what I did as a nurse. However, the role of a nurse has changed. It is now less hands-on and because of regulation, paperwork and other tasks, we have taken on much of the hands-on work for patients.”

Ann O’Connell, a HCA in the Emergency Department of Cork University Hospital, agrees. “Nurses are doing roles that doctors would have once done. Taking bloods, giving injections and other tasks.” Despite the crucial role the estimated 16,000 HCAs play in our health services, they still do not have the recognition or respect they believe their role deserves. This has led to the SIPTU Care Sector adopting a five-point agenda.

Sector Organiser, Marie Butler, summarises their agenda as having twin objectives, including the development of the grade through “registration/recognition of the role, a national job description; an appropriate workplace uniform; ongoing education training development and progression”, while the other is “to improve pay and working conditions through nationally negotiated pay agreements”.

“We have also campaigned to ensure that permanency and incremental credit is secured for those employed under the HSE intern scheme,” she added.

With a HSE national review of healthcare assistants expected to report shortly and a national HCA forum already established, the committee expects major advances on their agenda in the near future.

Pauline McDonagh, who has been a HCA in the Mayo Mental Health Sector for the past five years, believes progress on the five-point agenda will make HCAs visible. “Currently people only think of doctors and nurses but we deserve to be recognised as qualified professionals as well.”

With recognition should come a National HCA uniform throughout the health service. Although what colour it should be is yet to be decided. As Michelle Corbally, a HCA in Tallaght Hospital since 2006, points out, this is not about vanity but ensuring that the HCA is easily identifiable in the various health settings and assists in improving the patient experience within the health service.

“It’s not because we want a uniform to go with the colour of our eyes. It defines who you are”, she said.

What the SIPTU Care Sector is looking for

1. Registration and recognition.
2. National Job Description and appropriate workplace uniform.
3. Ongoing education training, development and progression.
4. Permanency and incremental credit for interns.
5. SIPTU negotiated pay and conditions.
**Largest ever discrimination award given to Barna Waste part-timer**

SIPTU member Carmel Leydon, who was represented by the unions Workers Rights Centre, has won the largest ever compensation award for discrimination against a part-time worker.

Carmel Leydon had worked as an administrator at the non-union Barna waste company for 11 years when she and three colleagues were told that their four part-time jobs were to be replaced by two full-time posts.

None of the four opted to apply for the full-time positions. Ms Leydon, the only SIPTU member of the four, objected to her dismissal for redundancy in June 2014 and brought a claim under the Protection of Employees (Part-Time Work) Act 2003, alleging that she had been treated less favourably than her full-time colleagues in other areas of the plant who had not been selected for redundancy.

After an unsuccessful hearing in front of a Rights Commissioner in 2015, the case was appealed to the Labour Court. In September 2015, the Court ordered that an evaluation of Ms Leydon’s job and those of her full-time colleagues be carried out. An independent assessor concluded that Ms Leydon’s post was of equal value to the full-time positions and reported his findings to the Court.

In February 2017, the Labour Court found that Ms Leydon has been discriminated against because of her part-time status and awarded her €26,000 compensation.

Ms Leydon was represented by Paul Hardy of SIPTU’s Workers’ Rights Centre.

Paul Hardy told Liberty: “I’m delighted that SIPTU was able to secure some measure of justice for our member. This case shows the value of union membership even in workplaces without union recognition, and is a warning to employers across the economy, unionised or not. That part-time workers can take action to fight discrimination against them.”

**Starting a fashion revolution**

AT THE end of April, SIPTU Global Solidarity gave its backing to Fashion Revolution Week – part of a growing global movement seeking a fairer, safer, cleaner fashion industry.

The week coincides with the fourth anniversary of the Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh on 24th April 2013. A total of 1,138 workers were killed and another 2,500 injured in the worst tragedy in the history of the garment industry. The victims were mostly young women.

There were five garment factories in Rana Plaza manufacturing for the western market, making the clothes that we buy every day in Ireland.

This tragedy sparked a greater momentum among campaigners and consumers to demand change. People from across the world have come together to use the power of fashion to force a change and begin a fashion revolution.

Yvonne O’Callaghan, Secretary of SIPTU Global Solidarity Committee, told Liberty: “SIPTU supported Fashion Revolution Week as it not only commemorated those lives lost, it also promoted a conversation around fast fashion and demanded greater supply chain transparency from clothing brands.

Some 75 million people work to make our clothes and 80% of them are women aged between 18 and 24.

The week not only commemorated those lives lost, it also promoted a conversation around fast fashion and demanded greater supply chain transparency from clothing brands.

“Everybody should get informed because we all have the power to change the industry that so desperately needs to be revolutionised.

“It starts simply by asking "who made my clothes?" and to question where your clothes come from and who makes them, how much they’re paid, and under what conditions are they working?”

“Our clothes have gone on a long journey before they hit our local clothing store, passing through the hands of cotton farmers, spinners, weavers, dyers, and sewers. Some 75 million people work to make our clothes and 80% of them are women aged between 18 and 24.

However, the majority of the people who make clothes for the global market live in poverty, unable to afford life’s basic necessities. Many are subject to exploitation, verbal and physical abuse, working in unsafe conditions, with very little pay. This needs to change.

As consumers, our questions, our voices, our shopping habits can have the power to help change things for the better.

“We are the driver of trends, and every time we buy something, we’re voting with our wallets. So act now and get involved in asking brands #whomademyclothes.”

For more information on Fashion Revolution Week: [https://fashionrevolution.org](https://fashionrevolution.org)
This letter to Taoiseach Enda Kenny was signed by the following:

Robert Ballagh, Artist
Ursula Barry, UCD
Pat Bolger, IMPACT
Pat Boran, Poet
Paul Brady, Singer and Songwriter
Prof Cathal Brugha, UCD
Peter Bunting, ICTU (retired)
Brian Campfield, President, ICTU
Karan Casey, Folk Singer
James Carroll, former Irish Representative to the Palestinian Authority
Seamus Cashman, Poet and Publisher
Eamonn Ceannt, former Vice-President, UCD
Shay Cody, General Secretary, IMPACT
Paul Collins, DJ Today FM
Dr Catherine Conlon, TCD
Frank Connolly, Head of Communications, SIPTU
Mary Coughlan, Singer
Catherine Anne Cullen, Poet
Prof Patrick Cunningham, TCD
Prof Fergus D'Arcy, Historian
Prof Seamus Deane, University of Notre Dame
Padraic de Blaithithe, Translator
Finn de Bri, Government Employee
Orla de Brí, Sculptor
Liam Doran, General Secretary, INMO
Theo Dorgan, Poet
John Douglas, General Secretary, Mandate
Seamus Doyle, President, Musicians Union of Ireland
Dr Vincent Durac, UCD, and visiting Professor, Bethlehem University Palestine
Felim Egan, Artist
Dr Nazih Eldin, HSE
Prof Bryan Fanning, UCD
Dr Sean Farren, University of Ulster
Dr Maggie Feeley, UCD
Dr Alice Feldman, UCD
Prof Diarmaid Ferriter, UCD
Dr Maggie Feeley, UCD
Dr Sean Farren, University of Ulster
Dr Maggie Feeley, UCD
Dr Alice Feldman, UCD
Prof Diarmaid Ferriter, UCD
Dr Maggie Feeley, UCD
Dr Sean Farren, University of Ulster
Dr Maggie Feeley, UCD
Dr Alice Feldman, UCD
Prof Diarmaid Ferriter, UCD
Dr Maggie Feeley, UCD
Dr Sean Farren, University of Ulster
Prof Bryan Fanning, UCD
Prof Diarmaid Ferriter, UCD
Jim Fitzpatrick, Artist
Steve Fitzpatrick, General President, CWU
Tom Geraghty, General Secretary, PSEU
Prof Robert Gilligan, TCD
Prof Robert Gilligan, TCD
Desmond Green, Chair, the Ireland Canada University Foundation
Noirin Greene, AMICUS Regional Officer, TCD
Pat Harris, Artist

An Taoiseach
Dáil Éireann
Dublin 2

24th April 2017

National Appeal for the Recognition of the State of Palestine

Dear Taoiseach,

We are writing to you in our capacity as concerned Irish citizens who wish to promote the cause of peace between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples.

We have all been greatly encouraged by the political and financial support which successive Irish Governments have granted to the Palestinian people; we take pride furthermore in the fact that several decades ago, Ireland was the first country in the EU to call for the creation of a Palestinian state. In this regard, we were particularly pleased that Seanad Éireann, on 22 October 2014, unanimously passed a motion calling on the Government to recognise formally the State of Palestine. Likewise, Dáil Éireann, on 10 December 2014, agreed a motion to “officially recognise the State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as the capital, as established in UN resolutions, as a further positive contribution to securing a negotiated two-State settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict”.

With the arrival of a new administration in Washington D.C., it is regrettable that statements have recently been made calling into question this internationally accepted two-State solution. It has become more important than ever therefore that Ireland should now join its name to the list of 137 countries that currently grant formal recognition to the State of Palestine.

It is our belief that the principal international legal criteria for the recognition of a Palestinian State have already been met. We hold that further official recognition of Palestine by EU member states will strengthen the case for acceptance of the two-state solution and will help in particular to provide parity of status between Palestine and Israel which is essential for any lasting peace settlement.

We accordingly call on the Irish Government to take this important step without further delay. Recognition of the State of Palestine at this opportune time will underline the strength of Ireland’s continuing commitment to a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the two-State solution.

We are firmly of the belief that such recognition would not only help to right an historical injustice but would also contribute to the wider cause of peace in the Middle East. Most importantly, we believe that it provides the best means of ensuring the long-term peace and security of both Israel and Palestine.

Niall Holohan, former Irish Representative to the Palestinian Authority
John Hume, Nobel Peace Laureate
Andy Irvine, Singer
Dr Maríya Ivancheva, UCD
Prof Alan, Johnson, Nord University, Norway
Prof John Kelly, UCD
Jimmy Kelly, Regional Secretary, UNITE
Allibhe Keoghan, Screenwriter
Freda King, Irish Equity
Patricia King, General Secretary, ICTU
Prof Michael Laffan, UCD
Fintan Lane, Author and Historian
Donal Lunney, Musician
Joseph Lynch, retired Ambassador
Fiach Mac Conghail, former Senator
Prof Dermot MacDonald, RCSi
Prof Patrick Masterson, former President, UCD
Prof Dermot McElwee, TCD
Dr Mary McAuliffe, UCD
John McColgan, Riverdance Producer
Patrick McGuckian, former Director, Masstock and Almarai
Pauline McClean, Artist
Mairead Maguire, Nobel Peace Laureate
Paula Meehan, Poet
Christy Moore, Singer
Isolde Moylan, former Irish Representative to the Palestinian Authority
Dr Anne Mulhall, UCD
Dr Bassam Naser, GP
Dr Jim O’Brien, former Director General, Irish EU Office
Jack O’Connor, General President, SIPTU
Ruairí O’Cuív, Arts Administrator
Patrick O’Flynn, Former President, IFUT
Cormac O’Gráda, Prof Emeritus, UCD
Jacquie O’Riordan, UCD
Averil Power, CEO, Asthma Society of Ireland
Dr Aideen Quilty, TCD
Stephen Rea, Actor
Michael Robinson, NIPSA
Eoin Ronayne, General Secretary, CPSU
Maggie Ronayne, NUI Galway
Ann Russell, Irish Equity
Dr Fintan Sheerin, TCD
Jean Kennedy Smith, former US Ambassador to Ireland
Niall Vallely, Musician
Globalisation for slow learners

HE IMF recently published its updated outlook for the global economy. The good news is that recovery from the crisis seems to be finally picking up some momentum after a decade of sub-par growth. The bad news, as they see it, is that this momentum could be stopped in its tracks if the sword of Damocles that is the threat of protectionism – whether emanating from Trump’s White House, May’s Westminster or elsewhere – falls.

This could throw the process of globalisation into reverse, they worry, and slow growth in the size of the economic pie. Alongside their twice-yearly economic forecasts, the IMF also publishes its latest thinking on various themes. In light of increased focus on the issue of inequality since the global financial crisis, to which the recent rise in political populism has been attributed, the IMF provides a timely chapter on “Understanding the downside trend in labour income shares”.

It explores the reasons why the share of wages in GDP has declined markedly – in advanced, emerging and developing economies alike – in recent decades. Between the mid-1970s and its 2006 low, the labour share has declined from around 55% of GDP to around 50% in advanced economies, before recovering only slightly since the financial crisis, while income inequality has increased significantly over the same period.

Essentially, the IMF identifies three main explanatory reasons for this phenomenon, while conceding that these are naturally somewhat interlinked: 1) technological progress, 2) economic integration (or globalisation), and 3) policies, institutions, and regulations.

Notable examples in the latter category include declining corporate tax rates, falling trade union membership and weakening employment protection legislation.

In fact, the IMF finds that technological change accounts for about two-thirds of the declining labour income share in advanced economies, with most of the remainder ascribed to globalisation (roughly split half and half between financial integration and trade through global value chains).

But, there is a need to go much further. Where workers’ bargaining power has been undermined in favour of corporate interests, it needs to be rebalanced.

Interestingly, relatively little of the decline is attributed to policies, institutions or regulations. Technological progress is therefore a double-edge sword: it raises living standards, on average, but puts labour at a disadvantage relative to capital. Nearly everyone has a mobile phone these days, for example, but many manufacturing jobs have become obsolete due to the rise of the robots.

Likewise, trade and free-moving capital can boost growth, but at the cost of undermining the bargaining power of labour. As off-shoring becomes a threat, it allows management to drive a harder bargain with workers.

If we look at the Irish data, we see that the decline in labour’s share in national income was three times the average in advanced economies, given that it fell from a high of 69% in 1975 to new low of 44% in 2015.

Of course, this has coincided with the Celtic Tiger and subsequent crash, with a significant increase in participation in global value chains as production processes become increasingly fractured across borders, and with a decline in both the average corporate tax rate and the unionisation rate. If anything, Ireland appears to be a microcosm for a globalising economy: magnifying in a small, open, economy trends seen elsewhere (although not universally).

So, on the one hand, the IMF is saying that a slowdown or a reversal in the process of globalisation is one of the biggest threats to global economic health. On the other hand, however it acknowledges that ever-greater global economic integration has been coupled with both rising inequality and workers’ declining share in economic activity in the form of wages.

At least, such cognitive dissonance is an improvement on the market fundamentalism – the so-called Washington Consensus – that prevailed in the 1990s. In light of the Tequila crisis (Mexico, 1994-1995), the East Asian crisis (1997), the global financial crisis (2008-2009), the Eurozone crisis (2009) and now the rise of populist demagogues, a less charitable moniker might be ‘globalisation for slow learners’.

Even this tentative progress of the global elites towards an accurate diagnosis should be welcomed as a step in the right direction. Unfortunately, their prescribed treatment still leaves a lot to be desired.

Certainly, all reasonable people agree on the pivotal importance of education and training. This is the path of least resistance, relatively uncontroversial. To be fair, the IMF acknowledges that this is unlikely to be enough on its own, and that more redistribution might also be in order.

But there is a need to go much further. Where workers’ bargaining power has been undermined in favour of corporate interests, it needs to be rebalanced. In Ireland, for example, we need to make the minimum wage a living wage. We need mandatory trade union recognition, an end to low hours contracts and better protections for those who find themselves in the so-called ‘gig economy’.

Overall, globalisation has been good for Ireland in terms of improving average living standards since the 1980s. But, the last decade has shown us how it leaves us more exposed to the vagaries of the global economy.

Moreover, when we scratch below the surface, we see that the ‘average’ improvement hides a polarisation between high-fliers at the top and those on low-to-modest incomes who are struggling to make ends meet.
Addressing the Challenges of Tomorrow

Later this month, delegates representing our members throughout Ireland will assemble for a Special Delegate Conference. We will be there to discuss proposals for a plan for the development of the Union, so that we are best placed to meet the challenges of tomorrow. In this context, we will also be deciding on the future of the Union’s political fund.

The paradox of these new times is presented by the threat of Brexit, Trump and the rise of the political right on the one hand. On the other, here in Ireland, if we can manage to navigate a course through Brexit and Trump’s protectionism, we are on the threshold of making more progress on building our public service than has ever been the case before.

In our analysis, Brexit is not uniquely British, but a manifestation of a wider process of alienation among working people which threatens the very existence of the EU itself. This, of course, is the outcome of the vicious one-sided austerity strategy pursued by those at the top of the European system, (including the Tory Party in the UK), in response to the global economic collapse of 2008. However, the problem is still more profound. The tension at the heart of Europe pre-dates the economic collapse and originates in the period of the dreadful Barroso presidency of the European Commission which extended from 2004 to 2014. During those years, policy makers in Europe embarked on a nacked free market globalisation strategy abandoning the essential core compromise between capital and labour that underpinned the post-war European project.

Unfortunately, the lessons have not been learned. While it appears that the present EU Commission president, Jean Paul Juncker, understands the true nature of the contradiction, he is not succeeding in bringing about any significant shift in policy. The net result is the ongoing alienation of tens of millions of working people who, for the moment at least, are embracing the agendas of their deadliest enemies on the political right in several countries. Far from the protection the advocates of resurgent xenophobic nationalism are offering, the outcome, if they succeed, will be the direct opposite. This is already evident in the core ingredient that is common in all their political programmes from Le Pen to the neo-fascists coming to the fore in Eastern Europe. Ironically, the one common demand among all of them is the commitment to slash corporate tax rates. This would enable the global companies to play one country off against the other. So much for opposing globalisation! No! The collapse of the EU will serve only to exacerbate competitive tensions and the race to the bottom in the workplace.

One way or the other and unless the Left can set aside its differences to win a sufficient degree of power to bring about a dramatic shift among policy makers at the top of the European system in the direction of the core values which underpinned the establishment of the EU itself, the assault on the gains made by the working people of Europe in the post-War years will continue and indeed intensify. For an ever increasing portion of our people, the notion of a decent job, with a secure contact of employment upon which one could establish a family and aspire to a sustainable future will become ever more remote. It behoves all of us who are committed to economic equality and social justice and the cause of those who must sell their labour in order to live, to step up to the mark.

Tragically, thus far, we have been unable to convince enough of those in leadership of the trade union movement in Ireland to set about the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission on the Irish Trade Union Movement which were aimed at equipping organised workers to face the challenges of the future. This despite the fact that they were adopted virtually unanimously at the biennial delegate conferences of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in July 2011 in Killarney and July 2013 in Belfast. Simultaneously, those who articulate the interests of the great majority of citizens in the political arena, the Labour Party, the Social Democrats, the left Republicans and those who see themselves as being on the Revolutionary Left remain irretrievably divided and totally antagonistic to each other, thus leaving the field to the centre right. In these circumstances, we must do our very best to build the most effective organisation possible so as to influence the agenda in the workplace and in the wider political arena. Simultaneously we must ensure that we work with others to build a stronger, more powerful trade union movement. Later this month this will be the focus of our Special Conference which follows a period of consultation throughout the Union extending back to September last year.

The next edition of Liberty will include a full report on the outcome.

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ON THE announcement of a much-anticipated package on the European Pillar of Social Rights by the European Commission last week, the European Trade Union Confederation has pledged to "mobilise against those who want to strangle this at birth". This is not to say that the plan can be endorsed wholesale but rather to acknowledge that it offers the potential for gradual, if not revolutionary progress. The plan has been launched following a lengthy period of consultation with the public and other stakeholders and with member states last year. The aim is described in terms of setting out "20 key principles to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems. The Pillar has been conceived as a reference framework to screen the employment and social performance of participating member states, to drive reforms at national level and, more specifically to serve as a compass for the renewed process of convergence towards better working and living conditions in Europe, primarily for the euro area but also for all EU member states wishing to be part of it". The challenge now is to ensure the objectives are achieved in a meaningful way.

In order to make this principle more concrete, the Commission has initiated a consultation of the social partners to assess whether existing EU legislation can be revised to broaden the scope of information that must be provided to all workers and to establish a minimum floor of rights across all types of contract. This is a welcome step in the campaign against precarious work.

The first step will involve discussions to secure endorsement from the European Parliament and the Council for the Commission’s recommendation. The recommendation reinforces existing rights across a range of areas while also pointing to further legislative action that may be required to improve effectiveness. For instance, there is a commitment to fair and equal working conditions "regardless of the type and duration of the employment relationship", including access to social protection and to training. This is more comprehensive than what is covered in the current EU treaties and regulations. The Commission’s package also includes a proposal for a directive on work-life balance for parents and carers. This would include a new right for fathers to take at least 10 days of paid parental leave upon the birth of a child, the guarantee of four months of paid parental leave per parent (non-transferable) up to the child reaching 12 years of age, the right to 5 days of paid carers' leave for all workers and an enhanced right to request flexible working arrangements for all working parents. Action in this area is much needed and will require determined campaigning to overcome the resistance of employers.

The final element of the Commission’s initial suite is a document seeking to clarify case law on the Working Time Directive. This will require detailed analysis but already the ETUC has expressed reservations. The European Pillar of Social Rights provides welcome ambition about the principles that should guide policy-making in Europe. It will not have a big-bang effect but instead sets the ground to campaign for legislative and other action to restore the confidence of workers and citizens in the European project. SIPTU will review and follow developments in relation to the proposals over the coming period in order to provide workers with an understanding of the opportunities and risks they present.

THE resolute campaign for justice of the former Clerys workers was celebrated at the 69th annual Labour Party conference in Wexford on Saturday, 22nd April, as they received the Jim Larkin Thirst for Justice award from the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Brendan Carr.

SIPTU General President Jack O'Connor was to the forefront of the debate on the future of work. He told delegates that as the party leadership to reject any electoral strategy that includes coalition with Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil. O'Connor was elected as the new chairperson of the Labour Party replacing SIPTU researcher, Loraine Mulligan.

"Our speakers examined how fixing the housing crisis will need policies rooted in the values of collectivism and social solidarity and emphasised that these must be the values that underpin Labour policy development for housing and homelessness" said Yvonne O’Callaghan of SIPTU.

During the weekend, SIPTU General President, Jack O’Connor was selected as the new chairperson of the Labour Party replacing SIPTU researcher, Loraine Mulligan.

O’Connor was to the forefront of the debate on the future of work. He told delegates that as the party of James Connolly, Labour members must effectively challenge the spread of precarious work practices.

O’Connor is joined on the Labour Party executive by SIPTU officials and organisers, Adrian Kane, Paddy Cole and Catherine Walsh.

THE Clerys workers certainly know the difference that the Labour Party made to our campaign for justice and for workers’ rights

Over the three days of the conference motions were passed calling for campaigns to strengthen collective bargaining laws, to repeal the Eighth Amendment and for the party leadership to reject any electoral strategy that includes coalition with Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil. Delegates also mandated the Labour leadership to work with other social democratic parties to build a progressive alliance.

Labour trade unionists also organised a fringe event for delegates to discuss the housing crisis. The event featured contributions from NERI Director, Tom Healy and SIPTU National Campaigns and Equality Organiser, Kieran O’Loughlin.

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Northern Ireland

Unions demand Brexit action

The Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC-ICTU) has called on representative groups in civic society to come together to articulate and protect the interests of Northern Ireland society in the forthcoming Brexit talks.

The call came during the Brexit-themed NIC-ICTU policy conference held in late March.

The conference brought together worker representatives of the 24 affiliated trade unions representing more than 200,000 workers across Northern Ireland.

Representatives from other civil society groups and local politicians also attended the event.

As well as looking at what Brexit may mean for employment rights, the impact on trade and jobs and the Good Friday Agreement, political representatives from most of the Assembly parties outlined their party’s plans after the triggering of Article 50.

Speaking at the close of the conference, ICTU Assistant General Secretary Owen Reidy said: “The issue of Brexit is too important to be left only to professional politicians – be they from Brussels, Westminster, Dublin or Stormont, especially the certain impact of a ‘hard Brexit’ as being pursued by Theresa May’s government.

“The ongoing political crisis has created a vacuum whereby what Northern Ireland needs from any negotiations has not been articulated in a coherent manner.

“The Scottish and Welsh governments have developed a policy position and they did so having engaged with social partners including the trade union movement. It is bad enough that the May government is currently not listening to their concerns, the Scots and Welsh are essentially at the back of the Brexit bus. Meanwhile, we in Northern Ireland have yet to get on the bus!”

He warned that the point had been reached where it was “essential” for the trade union movement, the community and voluntary sector and business to come together to forge “an agreed policy platform that puts the interests of workers, communities and business centre stage.”

Reidy continued: “We must use our collective influence in relation to Brexit negotiations as they affect Northern Ireland.

“The people of Northern Ireland voted to remain, as did the people of Scotland.

“Whilst accepting that the UK-wide vote for leave, none can credibly argue that the people voted for this hard Brexit which has been outlined in recent weeks.”

NI workers must not pay price of ‘hard Brexit’
Tory and Brexit threat to Good Friday Agreement

By Declan Kearney MLA

THIS TIME 20 years ago the fledgling Irish peace process was in deep trouble and on the verge of complete collapse.

Two decades later the political process, which became the architecture of the peace process is now in serious trouble and in a deepening crisis. It is not coincidental that a Tory government is back in power. The collapse of the power-sharing Executive and failure of the talks since the Assembly election on 2nd March constitute the most serious political crisis in the peace process since before the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) was signed. The origins of this crisis go back to the election of the Tory-led coalition in 2010.

Since it returned to power this Tory government has adopted an explicitly pro-unionist and partisan policy towards the North. It has politically aligned itself with both the DUP and UUP in joint support for austerity policies; Brexit: a single unionist narrative of the political conflict; and in blocking any progress on dealing with the past as well as core equality issues. When the Tory party came into government in 2010 those on the extremes of political unionism seized the opportunity to push back against the progress of the peace process by attempting to systematically hollow out the GFA.

That backlash has defined the direction of the political process in the North over the last seven years. A significant and influential section of the DUP have always opposed the GFA. That has found expression in their opposition to sharing power with Sinn Féin, and hostility to equality for republicans, the Irish identity, ethnic minorities, women, and the LGB&T community. These are the people who forced Ian Paisley out of the DUP leadership after he led that party into coalition with Sinn Féin in 2007.

They haven’t gone away. Their regressive mind-set still dominates within the DUP. It is most sharply pronounced within the party’s Westminster parliamentary group. Since the Renewable Heat Initiative scandal tipping point last year and in particular from Martin McGuinness’ resignation and the 2nd March Assembly election, the DUP’s ‘Westminster Command’ has been in control of the party’s political agenda. However, a Rubicon was crossed with the result of the Assembly election. The clear message delivered by the electorate was that there should be no return to the status quo.

But the DUP and British government are in denial that the political landscape has changed. They both refuse to ‘get it.’

The decision by Theresa May to call the Westminster general election is the clearest indication that the Tory government has now formally disengaged from the political process in Ireland.

The last two phases of talks showed no evidence they are serious about resolving the issues at the heart of the political crisis. They both want the political institutions back up again but they don’t want to have to tackle institutionalised bigotry, sectarianism or intolerance within the North.

In recent weeks they and others have been maliciously saying public and privately, that in the absence of Martin McGuinness, Sinn Féin does not want a deal which respects the political institutions it has received from civic society and progressive parties, including Sinn Féin?

The role of progressives and democrats must be to stand together on the common ground of supporting the GFA, rights, equality and opposition to Brexit.

Declan Kearney is an MLA and Chairperson of Sinn Féin.

A new SIPTU Services Division Safety is Union Business sticker campaign was launched at a successful Health and Safety seminar in the Oak Room of the Mansion House in Dublin on Workers Memorial Day, Friday 28th April. The seminar brought together over 60 Services Division activists from across the country. Pictured are (back row, L to R) SIPTU Services Division Vice-President, Gary Smith, SIPTU Health and Safety Adviser, Sylvester Cronin, and SIPTU Sector Organiser, Ed Kenny, (front row, L to R) SIPTU Services Division President, Margaret Coffey, Senior Inspector Health and Safety Authority, Marie McCarthy, ICTU nominee to the Board of the Health and Safety Authority, Chris Rowland, and Services Division Organiser, Ethel Buckley.
A DELEGATION of SIPTU Health members took part in a meeting on ‘Improving Employment and Working Conditions in Health Services’ at the International Labor Organisation (ILO) headquarters in Geneva from 24th-28th April.

SIPTU Health Division Organiser, Paul Bell, said taking part in such tripartite meetings with unions, employers and Government representatives is vital if healthcare employers and Government representatives are willing to take strike action shows their commitment and determination to achieve justice.”

In March, members of the St Patrick’s Mental Health Services staff defined benefit pension scheme were advised that the employer would be ceasing contributions and would transfer its funds to a defined contribution scheme. There was no discussion with the workers’ unions concerning this closure.

Courses during May at SIPTU College

- TUS – Trade Union Studies Certificate Programme
- ETo – Educate to Organise
- Jump Start – a pilot return-to-learn programme for health workers
- 1-day introductory – suitable for newly elected reps and/or newly-organised activists
- Introductory Night – a 3 or a 4 night version of our 1-Day Introductory (Basic + Advanced + Health & Safety)

Health members make voices heard on international stage

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SIPTU delegation at ’Improving Employment and Working Conditions in Health Services’ tripartite meeting at the ILO headquarters in Geneva.

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A just transition to a greener world

By Adrian Kane

THE ICTU Energy and Natural Resources Sector is to hold a one day conference on Wednesday, 10th May in the CWU offices, North Circular Road, Dublin on ‘Climate Change and the implications for the Energy Sector’. The trade union movement has been late in the day in seriously engaging with the subject of climate change. The International Trade Union Congress (ITUC) 2015 pamphlet, There are No Jobs on a Dead Planet, was an important contribution to the debate on climate change and emphasised the need for a ‘just transition’ to a low carbon economy.

The ITUC, along with the NGO sector, was successful in ensuring that the principle of a ‘just transition’ was included in the preamble to the Paris Climate Agreement in 2015. The Paris agreement was the culmination of 21 years of tense negotiations between 195 countries under the United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The treaty seeks to limit the dangers of climate change and equitably share the burden of reducing global emissions. It commits the signatories to phasing out fossil fuels and limit global warming to below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

All signatories are legally bound to commit their emission reduction contributions (INDCs) to a transparent, independent review process that ratchets up targets every five years.

A just transition to a carbon-free economy would ensure that unions and workers are the key drivers in the decisions made about them. Ireland, as part of the EU, must reduce its greenhouse emissions by 40% of its 1990 levels by 2030. The Energy White Paper, published in December 2015, committed Ireland to essentially phasing out the use of fossil fuels in the energy sector. It aspires to an energy sector which will be 80% to 95% carbon free by 2050.

So, what does it mean by the term ‘just transition’? Our concern, as trade unionists, is that if you de-carbonise the economy without any regard for the workers and the communities who are highly dependent on fossil fuels, you will condemn these workers and communities to the same fate that has befallen the working-class communities that live in the rust-belts of the North of England and the North Eastern USA.

A just transition to a carbon-free economy would ensure that unions and workers would be the key drivers in the decisions made about them. It would involve the up-skilling and re-training of workers, social protection for workers and communities as well as social justice as work and recognition for communities impacted by the transition away from fossil fuels.

In an Irish context, we are particularly concerned about the future of Bord na Móna and communities in the Midlands that have been dependent on it and the ESB to generate decent jobs over a long number of decades.

The ICTU Energy Committee has a number of key demands:

- The setting up of a tripartite body comprising trade unions, employers and government to ensure there is a just transition to a low carbon economy;
- The establishment of a just transition fund, both at European and national level, to assist communities and workers in the transition to a low carbon economy;
- A study of the impact meeting our goals under the Paris agreement will have on fossil fuel-dependent communities in Ireland; and
- Legislation ensuring that ‘just transition’ principles are enshrined in Irish law.

The May conference will be chaired by ICTU Vice-President Sheila Nunn and will be addressed by an interesting mix of speakers, including ICTU General Secretary Patricia King, Denis Naughten, who is Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment; Friends of the Earth Director Oisin Coghlan, Brian Kohler from Industriall Global Union, and Maeve McElwee, Director of Employer Relations with IBEC.

For more information in relation to this event you can contact Adrian Kane via email at Adrian.Kane@iccu.ie.

Census highlights need for action on state pensions

By Loraine Mulligan

NEWLY-released Census 2016 figures show that Ireland’s population is ageing with the number of men aged 65 and over up by 22% to 296,837 and females aged 65 and over up by 16.7% to 340,730 since April 2011.

This shift should again put the spotlight on pension provision and the situation faced by many older people in retirement who rely on the state pension.

The abolition of the state pension (transition) took effect in 2014, thereby effectively raising the pension age from 65 to 66. It has also been signalled that entitlement to the state pension will rise to 67 by 2021 and to 68 by 2028.

Further changes were introduced to the state pension in 2012, increasing the number of PRSI (Pay Related Social Insurance) contributory bands from two to four which involved new payment levels for those with fewer contributions. For example, this resulted in a loss of as much as €30 per week for new claimants in the new 20-29 band. At the time SĪPTU produced a policy document, titled Making Caring Count, and campaigned over the pension reform measures.

Age Action Ireland was also active on the issue and recently published a report which highlighted that 35,930 people, 62% of whom are female, received lower state pension payments since 2012 due to changes to the PRSI bands.

The measures came in at a time of budgetary constraint but are also underpinned by a policy perspective within the Department of Social Protection to align contributions and benefits to a greater extent.

Minister for Social Welfare, Leo Varadkar, has proposed the development of a universal retirement savings scheme. The Irish Congress of Trade Union also favours the development of a mandatory second tier pension system to support the basic state provision. This would involve a new Superannuation Fund with contributions from employers, workers and the state on a mandatory basis (other than for those workers and employers who are already in a work pension scheme). The design of any new system has yet to be fleshed out.

Given Ireland’s demographics it is essential to take positive action sooner rather than later to ensure people have adequate pension provision in their old age.

For both the state pension and at occupational level, the rules should be gender sensitive and support a decent standard of living for all.
SECTORAL Employment Orders (SEOs) were part of a package in the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act. 2015 brought in by the last Government which also included Collective Bargaining legislation and revamped procedures for Registered Employment Agreements (REAs).

An SEO is distinct from an REA in that it is an order that covers a defined economic sector and can be applied for unilaterally by a trade union whereas an REA is a registered agreement usually between a single employer and a trade union.

Though the legislation has been around since late 2015 the SEO has yet to be fully appreciated or utilised in the battle to organise and improve the terms and conditions of workers in some fallow economic sectors. The following FAQ format will hopefully shine some light into this dark corner:

What is a Sectoral Employment Order?
It is an order by the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation acting on the recommendation of the Labour Court, fixing rates of pay, sick pay and pension entitlements of a class, type or group of workers in an economic sector. An example might well be the domestic refuse industry.

What is an “economic sector”?
It is defined in section 13a as “a sector of the economy concerned with specific economic activity requiring specific qualifications, skills or knowledge.”

Who can apply for the Order?
An application may be made unilaterally or jointly, by a trade union of workers, a trade union of employers, or an organisation of employers, to examine the conditions relating to pay, sick pay and pensions of workers in an economic sector.

What conditions must be in existence before an application for an SEO can be made?
The trade union must be “substantially representative” of the workers to whom the order will apply and likewise, the organisation of employers must be “substantially representative” of employers to whom the order will apply.

What is the meaning of “substantially representative”?
There is no clear quantitative measure of what “substantially representative” means but it has been judicially held that the word “substantial” is equivalent to considerable, solid or big. It can also mean something more than the ‘normal’ or ‘average’.

What are the principles and policies to which the Court must have regard when making an order?
- Potential impact on employment in the sector.
- Any national agreement relating to pay and conditions of employment.
- Impact on competitiveness.
- Level of remuneration in other economic sectors in which workers of the same class, type or group are employed.
- That the SEO will be binding on all workers and employers in the sector.
- That the order will promote harmonious relations and assist in avoiding disputes.

What may be included in a Labour Court recommendation?
A recommendation may provide for all or any of the following:
- Minimum rates of pay more than the National Minimum Wage.
- Not more than two higher rates based on:
  I. Length of service;
  II. Recognised skills or standards.
- Lower rates may be provided for in circumstances like those set out in sections 15 and 16 of the National Minimum Wage Act 2000.

A minimum rate for apprentices.
- Rates for shift work, piece work, overtime, unsocial hours worked. Sunday working, travelling time (when working away from base).
- Requirements as to pension schemes, including daily rates of contribution.
- Requirements as to sick pay.
- The recommendation must contain dispute resolution procedures.

What are the powers of the Minister?
Within six weeks of having received a recommendation from the Court, the Minister shall make an order confirming the recommendation provided he or she is satisfied that conditions specified in the Act have been complied with. The Minister can refuse to make an SEO if he or she is not satisfied that the conditions within the Act are met.

What can a worker do if s/he believes there is a contravention of an SEO?
Individual contracts of employment must be adapted to reflect at least the bottom line requirements of the SEO. If a worker feels that there has been a contravention of an SEO s/he can make a complaint to an Adjudication Officer and on appeal to the Labour Court.

Penalisation of a worker for taking a claim is prohibited under section 19 of the Act.

Can an employer seek an exemption from the terms of an SEO?
Yes, but the Court must be satisfied:
- The majority of workers or their representatives have consented to the application.
- The employer is in severe financial difficulty.

The above is just a brief outline of the legislation but the Legal Rights Unit of SIPTU will gladly advise members further in this area, if required.
ICA descendants in City Hall tribute

MORE than a century after Irish Citizens’ Army (ICA) volunteers occupied Dublin City Hall, a group of their descendants assembled on Monday, 24th April at the same spot their forebears stood 101 years earlier to lay a wreath in their memory.

On the same day in 1916, an ICA unit of 44 men and women led by Captain Sean Connolly, garrisoned the building during the Easter Rising.

The descendants, led by a piper and an ICA colour party, assembled at Dublin Castle’s Upper Castle at 11.45 a.m. before proceeding to City Hall in an event organised by the ICA City Hall Garrison Relatives Group.

The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Brendan Carr, and Eanna Connolly – a grandson of Sean Connolly – were part of the group.

Speaking at the event, Carr said: “It is fitting that we commemorate this group of Irish Citizen Army members who took part in the Rising of 1916 here in City Hall. I want to welcome all the descendants of the original garrison who are here with us today to mark this special occasion. I especially want to welcome the descendants of Capt Sean Connolly who was in command of the garrison at the time and who gave his life for the cause.”

SIPTU’s Head of Organisational Development Brian McGann said his union was delighted to be part of the commemoration “given that the ITGWU founded the Irish Citizens’ Army and in view of its pivotal role in the 1916 Rising”.

He pointed out that the City Hall garrison contained a high proportion of women, including Helena Molony, general secretary of the Irish Women Workers’ Union, and Dr Kathleen Lynn, who took over command when Capt Connolly was killed.

McGann continued: “The participation of women in the ICA was a commitment to an Irish Republic that would cherish all forms of equality as one of its central values. Larkin and Connolly were committed to the principles of social solidarity and the right of working people to organise in order to advance the cause of labour and opposition exploitation.”

Book and new tapestry remembers Thomas Ashe

THE centenary of Thomas Ashe, a founding member of the Irish Volunteers, was celebrated at Liberty Hall recently when a newly republished book about his life was presented to historians Padraig Yeates and Brendan Byrne.

The book, Tomás Ághas by Michael Ó Moirín, was presented by Mary Enright, who was a key contributor to the SIPTU’s 1913 Lockout tapestry and the Easter Rising tapestry.

First published in 1985, the book had been out of print for many years. It outlines his personal and political life, and his death by forced feeding in Mountjoy Prison in September 1917.

The book is available from Alan Hanna’s, Rathmines, Dublin for €12.95. All profits go to the fundraising campaign to erect a bust of Ashe in his home village of Kinard. A full-size statue will be erected later this year in Lusk, Co Dublin, where Ashe was principal of Corduff National School.

Mary Enright displayed her newly embroidered portrait of Ashe. Brendan Byrne said he was delighted that a participant in both tapestries had been inspired to do further work based on the SIPTU project.

Mary Enright said: “I had the Robert Ballagh design at home and it was begging me to give it a go again. Just when I was set up with all the threads, I fell, and I dislocated my shoulder.

“It was marvellous that I was still able to sew, even though I could not hold a newspaper properly or turn the pages of a book. For three months.

“This piece took 35 completed skeins of thread. The figure stitch is cross-stitch, on 12-count Aida. The background stitch is alternating whipped running.

“There are 10 grey tones achieved by mixing four shades. It took five months or 600 hours to complete: a lovely way to get through the winter.”
Free Ibrahim Halawa

Ibrahim Halawa was 17 years old when he was arrested on 17th August 2013. He is being detained solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. He has now spent almost three and a half years living in truly horrific conditions in an Egyptian prison cell and endured the denial to a fair trial which has been postponed for the twenty-second time in 44 months.

On the 26th April, there was yet another adjournment in his trial as Egypt continues to ignore its obligations under both Egyptian and international human rights law. Ibrahim has now spent 1,348 days in prison. There is grave concern for Ibrahim’s physical and mental well-being and an application for his release on medical grounds was lodged at the last hearing in this case.

He has spent more than 1346 nights unjustly incarcerated. He faces a mass trial alongside 493 other defendants, which cannot meet the standards required for a fair trial as defined under international human rights law.

Siptu Global Solidarity is supporting Amnesty International’s campaign in calling on the Egyptian authorities to drop all charges against him and for his immediate and unconditional release.

Ibrahim’s trial has been rescheduled for 9th May 2017.

Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike

On 16th April, more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners began a hunger strike. Their primary demands include more frequent and lengthy family visits, better prison conditions such as improved medical care, and an end to solitary confinement and administrative detention – detention without charge or trial.

As Palestinian prisoners entered day 16 of their mass hunger strike, Israeli authorities are said to be obstructing negotiations and severely impeding communications from the strikers to the outside world. As many as 1,000 Palestinians are now refusing food in protest of ill treatment by Israeli prison authorities, including medical neglect and reductions of family visits.

Israel has attempted to prevent information on the striking prisoners from reaching the public outside by transferring protesting Palestinian leaders into solitary confinement and blocking visits by families and lawyers.

Throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israeli forces have attacked gatherings and demonstrations in solidarity with hunger striking prisoners. The Israeli military used violent force against a coordinated “day of rage” across the West Bank on the 29th April. Protesters were injured by tear gas, rubber-coated steel bullets and live ammunition. Of the more than 6,000 Palestinian detainees, Israel holds nearly 500 in administrative detention, many for prolonged periods. While international humanitarian law permits administrative detention as a temporary and exceptional measure, Israel’s expansive use of this form of internment in year 50 of the occupation raises important due process concerns.

Insurance options from JTL Ireland

JLT Ireland, the approved provider of home insurance for SIPTU members, has enhanced its current offering to SIPTU members.

Option 1 gives you annual home insurance with €25 cashback as a gift to you on all new policies taken out.

Option 2 is the new MultiYear Home Insurance whereby members can enjoy the certainty of a guaranteed price for two or three years.

MultiYear Home Insurance gives you even more certainty and security. Not only will you have the reassurance of our outstanding cover, you’ll also know exactly how much your home insurance will cost for the next two or three years.

You simply choose how long you want your cover to last – either two or three years – and we’ll give you a guaranteed price over the term of the policy.

Plus you don’t have to pay the whole premium up front as we offer easy payment options with a low deposit and APR.

Our straightforward repayment options make it easy to pay your MultiYear Home Insurance premium. Simply pay a 5% deposit and we’ll collect the remaining premium in instalments with a low APR.

MultiYear is underwritten by Zurich Insurance plc. Zurich Insurance plc is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. Terms, conditions and standard underwriting criteria apply.

MultiYear Home Insurance is available for owner-occupied homes only and those that are claims-free for the last three years.

If you would like to learn more about this offer, please call our team on 1890 300745 or visit www.siptu.jltonline.ie
Celebrating the Kurdish struggle

ON 2nd APRIL SIPTU joined members of the Kurdish community in Ireland to celebrate the Newroz (New Year) festival and to discuss their struggle for liberation and peace and the erosion of their human rights.

The Kurdish struggle for freedom is greater than ever. The conflict in Syria has been the trigger for an onslaught against the Kurdish people, who are defending their autonomy and their rights.

On the one hand, Kurds are engaged in a fearless fight against Daesh – otherwise known as ISIS – and other reactionary forces in the Middle East and on the other hand subjected to oppression by the Turkish government.

This oppression is set to intensify following Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s narrow victory in the April referendum which grants him sweeping new powers.

It was reported that election observers from the OSCE found significant shortcomings in the voting process and claimed the referendum took place on “an unlevel playing field”.

At present, 10 Kurdish MPs of the HDP party, including co-chairs Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yuksek dag, are imprisoned in Turkey and threatened with prison sentences of 225 years.

Some 5,000 mayors, politicians, journalists, academics teachers and other public servants are imprisoned for opposing the government and for representing the Kurds and democracy.

A recent UN Human Rights report detailed massive destruction of property, killings and numerous other human rights violations committed between July 2015 and December 2016 in south-east Turkey, which is mainly populated by the Kurdish community.

In that period, Turkish government security operations affected more than 30 towns and neighbourhoods, displacing between 335,000 and half a million people, mostly of Kurdish origin.

Measures taken under the state of emergency following the attempted coup in July 2016, including the dismissal of more than 100,000 people from public or private sector jobs, have also deeply affected the human rights situation.

Some 10,000 teachers were reportedly dismissed without due process on suspicion of having links with the Kurdistan Workers Party. The removal of democratically elected officials of Kurdish origin, the severe harassment of independent journalists, the closure of independent and Kurdish language media as well as the mass suspension of judges and prosecutors have also severely weakened checks and balances and human rights protections.

As Liberty goes to press, 186 prisoners are on hunger strike. The protest was launched by 13 Kurdish prisoners in Izmir’s Sakran prison on 15th February to demand an end to human rights violations, including the arbitrary use of solitary confinement for punitive control and the isolation of Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

The original 13 hunger strikers were later joined by many dozens of other inmates in prisons across Turkey.

The state has imprisoned Ocalan since 1999 and for over a decade he has been the sole prisoner at the infamous Imrali Island prison. His face and name is a symbol for the Kurdish movement.

Growing solidarity action has spread around Europe for the Kurdish people including calls for any negotiated settlement of the Syrian conflict to include peace and justice for the Kurds, including in Turkey.

Trade unions are also joining these actions and are calling for the Turkish government as a matter of urgency to restart the peace process with the Kurds and respect the rights of all its people.

Coca-Cola slammed over Spanish action but hopes rise for EWC agreement

Coca-Cola has been condemned for its “aggressive attack” on jobs and workers’ rights in Europe in a resolution passed at a recent meeting in Berlin of the Coca-Cola European Partners (EP).

At the 8th and 9th March meeting, EP also expressed solidarity with dismissed workers at the Fuenlabrada plant in Spain – who have been at the centre of a long-running dispute with the soft drinks manufacturer.

However, the principal reason for the meeting was to make progress on the wording of a new European Works Council agreement that should come into effect later this year.

Involving workers from across the EU, the meeting was facilitated by EFFAT, the federation coordinating European trade unions in the food, drink and tourism sectors, of which SIPTU is a member.

Frank Jones, the coordinator of the European works councils in the manufacturing division and who attended the event, described it as a “fantastic opportunity” for SIPTU to participate in the setting up of an EWC agreement “in such a high-profile employment”.

He told Liberty: “Much of our involvement in EWCs is almost as passengers with a few notable exceptions. As we become more involved in EWCs, the real benefits of these councils should become apparent to the membership and in turn we can build on this and develop the councils into another support and tool to assist trade unionists in Ireland with our daily work.”

Jones added: “To date we have identified close to 30 SIPTU reps currently sitting on EWCs. We are looking to develop our database and our intention is to run a training course this June.”
Looking for new wheels?
Car Finance - Preferential Rate for SIPTU members

If you are thinking about upgrading your car and need to get finance, then we have some good news from you. Post Insurance, a wholly owned subsidiary of An Post, can now offer SIPTU members a special low rate of just 7.5% APR* on their car finance.

So those hoping to change their car in 2017 can take the first step by contacting Post Insurance on 1890 22 22 22 or logging on to postinsurance.ie. Post Insurance will process your application quickly and efficiently and you can expect a decision on your application typically within 4 business hours.

Don’t forget to mention you are a SIPTU member and quote your SIPTU Group Scheme number [10055] to avail of the preferential rate of 7.5% APR*.

This Car Finance product is available to SIPTU members once they satisfy some qualifying criteria. Applicants must be:
• Aged 18 or over and a resident of the Republic of Ireland.
• Employed or retired and hold a bank account suitable for direct debit payments.
• Looking to purchase a car that is 5 years old or younger from an approved SIMI/Franchised Motor Dealer.
• Looking to finance €4,000 or more over a period of 1 to 5 years.
• Have a suitable credit rating as determined by Post Insurance Car Finance.

This finance is provided by way of a Hire Purchase agreement which is arranged and administered by First Citizen Finance DAC, trading as Post Insurance Car Finance.

Warning – You will not own these goods until the final payment is made.

For more information contact Post Insurance on 1890 22 22 22 or log on to postinsurance.ie.

Remember to quote your SIPTU Group Scheme number [10055] to avail of the preferential rate of 7.5% APR*.

*APR stands for Annual Percentage Rate and is inclusive of a Completion fee of €1. Example: The payments on a €15,000 hire purchase agreement over 48 months are €360.96 per month and the total cost of credit is €2,327.08. Finance example is based on a fixed rate. Typical APR of 7.5%. Rate is correct at time of print (April 2017) and may change.

Odran Mulholland, with the shop stewards and workplace committee in Glen Electric, Newry, Co. Down on the occasion of his retirement after 43 years of employment and of being a union member. We wish you well in your retirement.

Home Care workers in Castleisland, Co. Kerry with SIPTU Industrial Organiser, Ted Kenny, displaying their new uniforms and launching their campaign for recognition and respect.
Think know your US civil rights history? Think again...

I Am Not Your Negro
Directed by Raoul Peck
and featuring Samuel L. Jackson

IT’S the smoking you first notice, then the white shirts and the fact that it’s mostly men in less-than-grainy TV footage. It’s the 1960s. But it’s the sheer intelligence of American writer James Baldwin (1924-87) that really gets your attention.

This hour-and-a-half documentary directed by Haitian Raoul Peck inspired, impelled even, by an unfinished manuscript of Baldwin’s, intended to be his own tale of the lives and impact of three friends and civil rights activists: Medgar Evers, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.

Evers and King were assassinated by white racists in 1963 and 1968 respectively, while Malcolm X was murdered by members of the “Black Muslim” Nation of Islam.

Contemporary black and white footage of the civil rights struggle, including TV studio discussion, is skilfully threaded with the words of Baldwin and leaves the viewer questioning many of the more “comfortable” assumptions around progress for African-Americans since the 1960s.

As the film opens, the legendary (and, no doubt liberal) 1960s TV chat show host, Dick Cavett, questions Baldwin: “But it’s getting so much better. There are Negro (sic) mayors; there are Negroes in sports and in television commercials.” Cavett says.

Even for its day, it was insufferably cringe-worthy and Baldwin should have received the Congressional Medal of Honor for his restraint. Equally risible was the condescending but nevertheless accurate prediction by Bobby Kennedy that in 40 years time there might be a Negro president. Baldwin relates how they were falling about the place in Harlem at that one, similarly noting that from where they stood, Kennedy had only just arrived in America, while they as a people had been there four hundred years.

As a documentary, with voice-over by Samuel L. Jackson, this is a work of art and easily worth its five star recommendation. For those who know little of the period it’s a magic one hour 95 minutes.

For those who believe they know something about the period and its legacy – watch and think again. To understand a place (the US), founded on slavery, where the “crime” of “black while driving” is still no joke and where Black Lives have to matter, this is a must.

Michael Halpenny

Notes from a small island

Nothing is Written in Stone – the Notebook of Justin Keating
Edited by Barbara Hussey and Anna Keally
Published by Lilliput Press, 2017

A JOKE used to be told about the late Justin Keating when he was a Minister in the Fine Gael/Labour Coalition of the 1970s. “What is the difference between God and Justin Keating? – God is everywhere. Justin Keating is everywhere else.”

The irony of course is that any comparison with a Supreme Deity was no doubt odious to this self-proclaimed atheist and humanist. But he was much more in his life than that.

Though little spoken of nowadays he was a vet, farmer, scientist, influential journalist in both print and television, Labour TD, Senator and Minister for Industry and Commerce.

At a broader level he was also an internationalist and, long before it was popular (whatever about profitable), a champion of the green movement. He was that busy.

His early life was hardly “mainstream”. His father, the painter, Sean Keating, was a “sceptic” and his mother, May, an avowed socialist and later active supporter of the Republican cause in Spain.

With such a start, he was destined for a collision with “Mother Church” and the stifling world of counter-revolutionary Ireland.

After early years spent in the natural freedom of the Dublin Mountains he was brought down, literally and metaphorically, to the reality of schooling, firstly with the Loreto nuns in Rathfarnham and later, in the rarefied and decidedly less Catholic environment of Sandford Park School in Ranelagh, where he boarded with boys from Protestant, Jewish or, like him, “non-believing” backgrounds.

Though the Keatings had republican connections, from an early age he developed a lifelong abhorrence of physical force republicanism, spurred particularly by witnessing the killing by the IRA of neighbour and friend, Special Branch Detective Sergeant Denis “Dinne” O’Brien in 1942.

As well as being caught up into the “revolutionary aristocracy”, such as the MacWineys, his family also had more exotic personal and political friends than most.

It could have been no surprise then when he joined the local branch of the Irish Labour Party in the 1940s followed by a considerable spell in the communist cause in Ireland and Britain where he was also associated with Desmond Greaves’ Connolly Association.

However, it was not until 1969 that he came to political and public prominence. The election of that year, which also witnessed the arrival in Leinster House of other Labour “talents” such as former diplomat, Conor Cruise O’Brien and journalist, David Thornley, was meant to usher in a decade when the “70s would be socialist”.

It wasn’t, and the wags were soon opining that, instead, “the socialists would be 70”.

This book, compiled posthumously from his notes, is remarkably frank in his regarding the decision to enter politics as a mistake. However, this did not deter him from accepting a post as minister in the coalition of 1973-77 where one of the major issues of the day was the North and here his approach appears to have been not untypically simplistic.

He recognised only unionists and nationalists, with little understanding of the more than nuanced divisions between republicans and SDLP or Ulster Unionists and the DUP to say nothing of Alliance.

There is scant mention of the Civil Rights movement of the late 1960s but there is little doubt concerning his anti-republicanism.

To be fair, he is critical of both British state terrorism in Ireland and the Republic’s own state terrorism at the hands of the Garda “Heavy Gang” while he was in government – a period of which he is “deeply ashamed”.

Though he maintained a lengthy public silence on the Dublin and Monaghan Bombings of 1974 in which 34 civilians died, he broke that silence in his book to support the findings of the Barron Report and believed the British security forces were involved with Loyalist bombers.

For his own government’s egregious inaction on the issue he gives a heartfelt apology.

There is little mention here of trade unions or the political issues facing workers today. 40 years on – housing, unemployment, health provision and education. Yet Keating’s take, for example, on the future of the planet and the role of women in society, a “battle hardly begun” is refreshing and instructive.

Above all he speaks from the grave with a voice which, though sometimes tinged with regret, is both direct and entertaining. And his message and epitaph? “Nothing is written in stone.”

Michael Halpenny
Worms’ tale shows kids how to fight for rights

A NEW children’s book is set to refocus attention on a battle over access to a landmark site on the Wild Atlantic Way. Written by Kevin Doyle and illustrated by artist Spark Deeley, The Worms That Saved The World offers an alternative ending of sorts to the saga over the scenic Old Head of Kinsale.

Access to Old Head has been reinstated since 2003 when the Supreme Court ruled in favour of a golf course which had applied for exclusive rights to control who could walk on the headland.

In The Worms That Saved The World a group of earthworms living on an imaginary headland begin to suffer when a golf course takes up residence around their home. The worms attempt to tell the new owners about their concerns but they are dismissed. In response they organise and join with the other birds and animals on the headland and eventually reclaim the headland for everyone.

This is a book for children and grown-ups – one such grown-up is poet and publisher Theo Dorgan, who gave it this endorsement: “The mighty, the arrogant and the swaggering brought low by the humble worm – what’s not to like in this charming tale of working together for what’s right and good? Up the worms!”

The book’s author Kevin Doyle said: “The book was inspired by the Free The Old Head campaign, but it is about a lot more than just that. It is also about the environment and the need to stand up for your rights while celebrating community and solidarity in our lives. It’s a feel-good book that kids and parents together can enjoy and learn from.”

Illustrator Spark Deeley said: “The expressions on the faces of the worms change throughout the book, showing confusion, surprise, fear, outrage, concentration, questioning, determination, compassion and pure joy. That is what this story is all about. The Worms That Saved The World is published by Chispa Publishing. Cork and will retail at €10. It will be available from selected bookstores from 5th May or by emailing Kevin Doyle at kfdoyle1@gmail.com.

Remembering the ‘Mollies’

IT IS remembered as “The Day of the Rope”, when, on 21st June 1877, 10 Irishmen were hanged in Pennsylvania. Between that date and over the next two years, 20 Irish immigrants were executed for their alleged role in the deaths of mine owners, foremen and police in the Pennsylvania coalfields.

For the first time, their story will be told on an Irish stage. As part of MayFest 2017 at Dublin’s Liberty Hall Theatre, Sons of Molly Maguire by John Kearns will receive its Irish premiere on 10th and 11th May.

In the mid to late 1800s, thousands of Irish immigrants arrived in America. They left their homeland to escape famine, land seizures, and religious and political oppression. The Pennsylvania coalfields were booming as Irish immigrants arrived. Conditions were appalling, with the companies using immigrant labour to force down wages. The mining bosses often owned the housing where the workers lived, and food and other essentials were sourced from the overpriced company store.

The Irish also faced racism and religious discrimination. Being rural, Catholic and Gaelic speaking they stood out among other immigrant communities.

The coalfield Irish had come mainly from north-western counties associated with agrarian secret societies and land war violence. The tactics of groups such as the Ribbonmen and the Whiteboys were once more adopted – intimidation, threats, assaults and assassinations that had targeted landlords, land agents and balliffs were just as effective against mine owners, foremen and the police.

The origin of the name Molly Maguires is uncertain. Legend says Molly Maguire was a victim of eviction in Ireland who had sought revenge. The expression ‘That’s from a Son of Molly’ was supposedly shouted before a killing in a revenge attack.

The mine owners employed a Pinkerton detective. James McParland, who utilised his Co Armagh birthplace to integrate himself into the Irish community. His investigation and testimony led directly to the trial and execution of 20 alleged “Mollies”. Information provided by McParland was also used by vigilantes to identify targets for murder. Many of those executed proclaimed their innocence until the end.

Impossible idea? Maybe not?

Utopia for Realists: And How We Can Get There
By Rutger Bregman
Published by Bloomsbury

CAN poverty be resolved by a free basic income for everyone?
Rutger Bergman, an historian, believes it is and his book Utopia for Realists And How We Can Get There, puts a strong argument forward for the concept as the most efficient and civilised way to combat poverty.

Bergman uses history to give the reader some perspective with the objective of making one little more optimistic about where we are right now in history.

This new young thinker believes that rather than economists talking about the future, history itself can show us the lessons learned and the mistakes that should not be repeated in forging a future for society, the world of work and – indeed – tackling the welfare mess.

The book starts with the premise that right now we are living in the utopia that was dreamed of in the Middle Ages. It looks at levels of poverty, hunger, wealth, homelessness and unemployment and uses history to evaluate how far we’ve come.

He goes further and shakes us into the reality that it is not so much that we don’t have it good, but that we have no vision of where we want to go next and that we need to embrace some collective ambition to avoid a dystopian future.

Bergman examines the basic income, sometimes referred to as the citizen dividend – or, in his words, “free money for everyone” – as an idea that can unite politicians from the left to the right and one that will give dignity to millions while also accomplishing the eradication of poverty.

Indeed, in reflecting on history the book shows that it is an idea that has been around for more than two centuries, one which has been flirted with by opposing ideologies, including Martin Luther King and Milton Friedman.

This revolutionary idea is often met with doubts but the various trials of the distribution of a free basic income examined in this book present the evidence that when people were given ‘free money’, their stress levels were reduced, inequality diminished, crime levels abated, disease and illness levels dropped significantly – which, in turn, saved money in the health sector – and money was pumped back into the economy and society enjoyed greater social outcomes.

And if you don’t think this utopia will come true, Bergman looks at the forgotten moment in US history when conservative Republican US president Richard Nixon almost implemented a basic income to solve increasing poverty in America.

The free basic income may seem like a utopian fantasy but this book reminds us that utopias have a tendency to come true. It reminds us that impossible ideas have a moment in history but they are often realised through progress, however slow and erratic it may be.

And that is the whole point of utopia – it is to dream what is possible and that it’s worth fighting for to make a reality.

Yvonne O’Callaghan
Yvonne O’Callaghan is an advocate at the Workers Rights Centre. Liberty Hall, Dublin
OBITUARY Jack Dempsey

A man of courage who improved lives of many

Funeral oration by SIPTU General Secretary Joe O’Flynn in SS Peter and Paul’s Church, Portlaoise, on Wednesday 15th March, 2017

IT IS my privilege to reflect on the life and contribution of our comrade Jack Dempsey, a lifelong trade unionist and member of the republican movement, who passed away on 12th March after a long illness.

Jack hailed from Portlaoise and was very proud of his home town. Though he lived in Dublin for many years, he still regarded himself as a Laois man and I believe many of the locals thought so too as he spent so much time here.

His lifelong involvement with the trade union movement developed from a young age when he started work as a storeman in Roadstone in 1971. He soon became involved with AGEMOU, a union of which he was enormously proud and whose rich heritage and tradition he carried forward. He went on to develop a lasting friendship with then General Secretary Larry Doyle. Jack was profoundly and positively influenced by Larry from the time he became a shop steward in 1975. Jack took a lot of pride in his achievements as a shop steward, helping to secure pay increases, improved conditions such as sick pay schemes and decent pension entitlements for his members.

Unlike many, Jack realised that pensions were a highly important condition of employment and he had the vision to see that for most a decent income in retirement was as important as a decent income while at work. In that regard, he served as a Trustee of the Roadstone Pension Scheme for over 20 years and was also a National Executive representative on the SIPTU Pension Scheme where he played a constructive and positive role.

In more recent times, it pains him to see so many decent pension schemes being destroyed by greed and he knew only too well the ultimate consequences for the workers affected and their families. It is ironic and very sad that Jack’s illness has stolen that prize of a decent pension he fought so hard to secure for many years.

He became a Branch member of the AGEMOU in 1977 and joined the NEC in 1979. In 1990, Jack was elected President of AGEMOU, an honour so richly deserved and so proudly carried. He was President until 1997 when AGEMOU merged with SIPTU and he continued to through SIPTU College. He successfully completed his trade union exams in the National College of Ireland.

It was another great moment for Jack when he was elected to the SIPTU National Executive Council in 2010 and late last year he was unanimously re-elected for a second term. He was highly respected for his forthright contributions and while he didn’t always agree, he held the collective line. He remained loyal and true and never engaged in populism. Jack had a great presence and was a wonderful colleague to spend time with, both at official level and on social occasions. His endearing gait and accent – along with his propensity to wear his political leanings on his T-shirts – were always a source of joy and he was highly popular with the wide circle of friends he built up over many years.

Jack’s courage and convictions all his life were finally reflected in the manner in which he so valiantly fought his illness. For six years he battled, never giving up hope and bearing the struggle with great dignity.

His overarching consideration was for his beloved partner, Una, and family and it was with great humility he managed his illness and treatment. The family have asked that we acknowledge the kindness and care of the doctors, nurses and support staff of St Vincent’s Hospital in Dublin. We have lost a great trade union and political activist, a man of determination, passion and courage who helped improve the lives of so many whom he felt he had the privilege to serve.

In truth, it was all of us who had the privilege of having Jack as a colleague, a comrade and a friend – one of us. We were lucky to have shared in Jack’s wonderful life and his outstanding contribution to improving and protecting the lives of so many. He loved the trade union movement because he knew it was the best vehicle for workers to secure their rights at work and a decent living in a fair and just society. The passing of such a decent and committed man has left a void which will not be easily filled.

On behalf of my colleague officers, Jack O’Connor and Gene Mealy, members of the NEC, activists, members and staff of SIPTU and his wide circle of friends in the trade union and political movements, I want to offer our deepest sympathy to Jack’s partner, Una, sisters Ann and Mary, brothers Ger, nieces, relatives and friends.

Ar ais Dé go raibh a ainm.
One of the measures of the poverty of a sports club in Ireland is that they get “togged out in ditches.” Apparently, the Irish women’s soccer team are a step slightly above that. They get togged out in toilets and share their tracksuits with underage teams. All of that led recently to a face-down that almost initiated a strike by the women. With the intervention of SIPTU and the PFAI representing the players, a settlement was agreed involving match payments and the provision of playing gear.

It was all pretty humiliating for the FAI which some have accused of operating a system where a small number prosper while the majority involved in the sport, including its own premier league teams, struggle. There has also long been criticism of the organisation for paying its chief executive a salary which is a multiple of the prize for winning the country’s highest domestic trophy.

However, the women stoically did not involve themselves in any of these wider issues stating clearly that it was merely for the good of their game, now and into the future, that they took action.

What did the rest of the Irish international set up make of it? Well there was a Facebook post from James McClean in which he declared the women’s demands were “not outrageous” adding “it’s standard and bare minimum of what should be included anyway at international level.”

From the man at the centre of the last great showdown between the FAI suits and a player, current national team assistant manager, Roy Keane, there was nothing public. However, in the wake of the dispute being settled and the women winning their friendly international against Slovakia 1-0, captain Emma Byrne, tweeted: “After a really tough week it was a sweet ending with a lovely phone call from Roy Keane himself!”

What he said will probably have to await one their future autobiographies.

Meanwhile, on the playing fields of Banba, Dublin’s remarkable undefeated run was brought to an end by their old nemesis from the Kingdom in the league final. Only the width of a goal post prevented Dean Rock from levelling the game and bringing it to extra time which would most likely have suited Dublin more as they were finishing strongly.

It was not to be. Kerry’s pride was somewhat replenished and some would argue that being beaten lifted a burden of Dublin’s shoulders that will benefit them in the championship. Dublin also won the under 21 All Ireland final, beating Galway, which establishes another record of a county winning either senior or under 21s for eight years in succession. But, interestingly, never in the same year which has caused some of the more superstitious of the Dublin Fancy to brood.

Dublin is unlikely to be beaten in Leinster. Actually, lets face it, there is not a chance of them being beaten by any Leinster team. Cork seem as bad they ever have been and Kerry won’t be caught on the hop by Tipp. Connacht will be interesting as Galway is improving, beat Mayo last year and Mayo have clearly been upset by all the internal wrangling. Even so, you would fancy them to negotiate their way to at least another semi-final whatever the route.

Ulster remains the imponderable. There are stories that Mickey Harte used not to have Tyrone fully in gear for Ulster as they were confident enough in their pomp to come through the qualifiers. I’m not certain that this Tyrone team would survive being beaten by Donegal or Monaghan so Ulster could be a right battle. The winner is more than likely going to face Dublin in a semi-final and there may also a battle between an Ulster team and the champions in the quarter final.

It will not be easy as they say.
**Liberty Crossword**

**ACROSS**
1. Detroit sounds (6)
2. Mideast capital (6)
3. Rope material (4)
4. Laid out (8)
5. Ski resort and state (7)
6. Winter Palace residents (5)
7. Freshwater fish (5)
8. Famous boxing champion, Jack (7)
9. Restaurant worker (8)
10. Not unusual (8)
11. Football team uniform (7)
12. German empire (5)
13. What comes to mind (4)
14. 19th Century empire (5)
15. Study of fundamental knowledge (13)
16. Easy-going (8)
17. Employees (5)
18. Asking for information (7)
19. Restaurant worker (8)
20. Laid out (8)
21. Not unusual (8)
22. Winter Palace residents (5)
23. Freshwater fish (5)
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101. Employees (5)
102. Asking for information (7)
103. Restaurant worker (8)
104. Laid out (8)
105. Ski resort and state (7)
106. Winter Palace residents (5)
107. Freshwater fish (5)
108. Famous boxing champion, Jack (7)
109. Restaurant worker (8)
110. Not unusual (8)
111. Football team uniform (7)
112. German empire (5)

**DOWN**
1. Distinctive quality (4)
2. Achieving little (13)
3. Asking for information (7)
4. Employees (5)
5. Study of fundamental knowledge (13)
6. Easy-going (8)
7. Not unusual (8)
8. Football team uniform (7)
9. German empire (5)
10. Study of fundamental knowledge (13)
11. Easy-going (8)
12. Not unusual (8)
13. Football team uniform (7)
14. German empire (5)
15. Study of fundamental knowledge (13)
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111. Football team uniform (7)
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*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 or post to Communications Dept., Liberty Hall, Dublin 1 along with your name and address and you will be entered into a prize draw to win a €200 Arnotts voucher courtesy of JLT Insurance (see back cover).

The winner of the crossword competition in the February/March edition was Margaret Bourke, Galway.

**Answer:** Settlement
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