

Liberty

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Womens FIFA World Cup

page 4



Palestine visit

page 7



Neutrality debate

page 18-19



Anger and shock in RTÉ

by Frank Connolly

SIPTU members working for RTÉ remain in a state of anger and shock from the stream of revelations emerging about the governance of the station, according to SIPTU Services Division Organiser, Teresa Hannick.

"The claim at an Oireachtas committee hearing that the former Chief Financial Officer of RTE received a voluntary redundancy package in March 2020 that had not been approved by the executive board is the latest bombshell in the payment scandal.

"This was at a time when many SIPTU members were turned down for the redundancy package as RTE management said it could not afford to replace them. Yet it was able to bring in a new CFO almost overnight.

"Three weeks into the ongoing crisis at RTÉ and SIPTU members working for the national broadcaster remain in a state of anger and shock from the daily revelations emerging about the governance of the station to which they are dedicated."

SIPTU represents workers in RTÉ covering numerous grades including broadcast co-ordinators, camera people, production assistants, researchers and producers.

"Many SIPTU members are low paid, earning less than €40,000 per annum, and in recent years have been under extreme financial

Continued on page 2



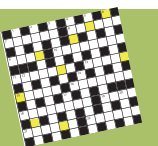
SIPTU members and other staff at RTÉ protest on Wednesday 12th July. Photo: Rollingnews.ie

Book reviews

Page 28-29

Crossword

Page 31



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RTÉ
Page 3



*Welcoming
migrants through
English classes*
Page 6



*EX-Rehab workers
win enhanced
redundancy*
Page 12



*President Michael
D Higgins speech
at ICTU BDC*
Page 13



Liberty View
Page 17

**Liberty
View**

*Supporting
Quality*
Page 25



Sport
Page 30



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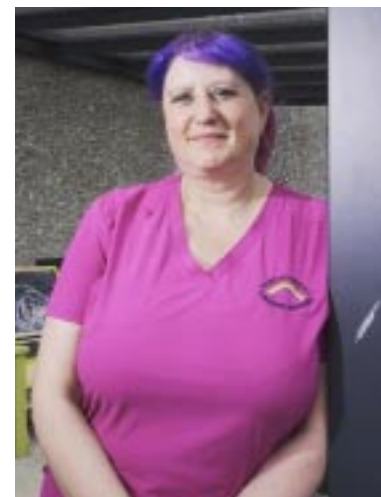
Early Years - It's Time to Do the Deal

SIPTU members who are Early Years educators and managers, have launched a petition calling employers to 'do the deal' at the ongoing pay talks. Following last year's historic first pay deal, SIPTU representatives have been in discussions at the Early Years Joint Labour Committee (JLC) for the last number of months and are currently in deadlock with the employers.

Speaking to Liberty, SIPTU Head of Strategic Organising, Darragh O'Connor, said union negotiators delivered a simple message at the talks - low pay has caused a staffing crisis that is leaving managers and educators stressed out, burnt out and struggling to make ends meet.

"We could not have been clearer. What we are asking for now is that all Early Years Educators and Managers add their voice to our campaign by signing our petition calling on the employers to get the pay deal done."

The pay talks are happening as the Early Years sector is in the grip of a recruitment and retention crisis that is affecting workers, employers and families. Amy Dowd, SIPTU activist and Early Years JLC member told Liberty that working in Early Years needs to be a financially viable career. "We are qualified, dedicated, and passionate about our work, but passion doesn't pay the bills. Employers need to recognise that creches can't open if there are no staff."



National Committee Chairperson, Avril Green, highlights the issue of low pay in the early year's sector. Time for employers to #DoADeal

The petition can be signed at: www.bigstartireland.com

SIPTU calls for early introduction of increased pay related job seekers benefit

SIPTU Divisional Organiser, Adrian Kane, has welcomed a commitment by the Minister for Social Protection, Heather Humphreys, to provide increased payments to workers who lose their jobs and to link them to previous earnings.

Under the proposed new system of pay-related benefits, workers who lose their jobs will receive 60% of their income from the State, up to a maximum of €450 each week. The Minister said she

will have the new system of staggered rates of payment in place next year.

Adrian Kane said: "SIPTU representatives have been engaging with the Minister's office in recent weeks, seeking practical ways by which workers in Tara Mines could be assisted by the Department of Social Protection. While this commitment on increased and pay-related benefits is welcome, the timeframe will need to be brought forward."

SIPTU Construction Sector Organiser, John Regan said: "The Government was able to bring in pandemic unemployment and other payments almost overnight during Covid-19 and there is no reason why a temporary scheme could not now be put into immediate effect while the detail of a more comprehensive one is worked out."

Continued from page 1 — Anger and shock in RTÉ

pressure. They have been further undermined by the extent of the scandal involving senior management and very highly paid broadcasters that has been unfolding over the last few weeks," Hannick continued.

"The hidden payments, Toy Show musical shambles, expensive flip flops and 'cars for stars' all took place at a time when the workers in RTÉ were told by the executive management that there was no money due to a financial crisis.

"Union members had to deal with bogus self-employment schemes, wage cuts and reduced staffing resulting in increased workloads and real term salary reduction programmes over an extended period. It is now apparent that there was

plenty of money to pay some already high earners. Our members have long had deep misgivings relating to the governance of RTÉ and the last three weeks have demonstrated that they were right to have doubts."

"Many members believe statements made by the new Director General, Kevin Bakhurst, in his first week are positive, but they have received similar assurances before from other incoming director generals relating to progressive change in the organisation.

"Unfortunately, words will not change the dire situation in which the station finds itself. Trust, credibility and accountability can only be restored by actions. In order for this to be achieved, the Director General

must fully engage with the unions representing RTÉ employees concerning all aspects of the proposed reform of the organisation.

"The Government must also act. The Future of Media Commission recommended last year that RTÉ be funded by the exchequer. It is generally agreed that the licence fee is an outdated model that doesn't work. For years, RTÉ has been underfunded and has had to rely on commercial revenue to keep going while politicians have kicked the funding can down the road. RTÉ is a public service and we cannot allow it to be stripped down, sold off or diminished in any way."

See page 3

Sadness and anger at RTÉ staff protests



By Kevin Brew

I REMEMBER listening to an edition of *Documentary On One* called 'The Runners'. The documentary tells the story of Christy Fagan – a child sent to Ferryhouse Industrial School in Clonmel and the man, Jemmy Gunnery, who helped him to escape.

As shown in the Ryan Report (2009) – sexual and physical abuse were endemic in industrial schools. Christy took every chance he could to escape. As a result, he was labelled "a runner". The powerful documentary follows the adult Christy as he visits the school for the first time in 40 years.

At one point, we hear producer Ciarán Cassidy in the background. He asks a simple question about the location, and this helps Christy to find even greater clarity in describing his experience. He remembers occasionally hiding for whole days by a riverbank near the school, before moving off to a safe spot under cover of darkness, because "you'd do anything to get away from them".

Ciarán's question reminds me of what RTÉ workers do every day. As researchers, producers, reporters, camera operators, sound engineers, and in other roles, we work in the background, to create stories.

These will be added to a publicly-owned archive of interviews, documentaries and dramas, Irish language programmes and concerts, a treasure trove that



RTÉ staff in Donnybrook HQ.
Photo: Rollingnews.ie



Teresa Hannick, SIPTU Services Divisional Organiser addressing members at the protest outside RTÉ



RTÉ staff at Raidió na Gaeltachta, in Connemara.

wouldn't exist but for the public funding of RTÉ. We're living through a sorry saga of unreported payments, testimonies, and decisions that have risked sabotaging RTÉ's fund of public trust.

The daily revelations of life at the top flight jar bitterly with stories shared by RTÉ staff in recent rallies at Montrose.

Articles by my colleague and Chair of NUJ Dublin's Broadcasting Branch, Emma O'Kelly, highlight an in-house mantra, "there's no money". This mantra has been used to excuse the deterioration of facilities, the stuck-ness endured by those at the top of their scales in lowly-paid grades, and the increased workloads resulting from the non-replacement of retirees.

The mood at Montrose is one of disorientation, sadness, and anger, but also there is a sense that we must speak up and participate in articulating what RTÉ is really for.

The public have shown that they appreciate the work of RTÉ staff and this has been an incredible boon to us.

RTÉ workers want to make the case for the programmes that epit-

omise public service broadcasting, which, like well-resourced news and investigative journalism, are key to promoting a new funding framework for RTÉ that is more secure than the outmoded TV licence model.

Alongside landmark television documentaries like 'States of Fear', and last week's 'Milking It: Dairy's Dirty Secret', these programmes include specialist radio programmes and podcasts.

A great example is the RTÉ Jr's 'Ecolution', an inventive and beautifully-crafted podcast that is for and by children who want to make a difference in the fight against climate change.

As with the best of children's programming it works for adults too – one episode interweaving children's experience of gardening with commentary from environmentalist George Monbiot on the magical properties of soil, a crucial consideration for biodiversity.

These public service programmes also include the poignant radio reflections of 'Sunday Miscellany', the entirety of the RTÉ Players' 1982 recording of 'Ulysses', the nationwide exploration of culture and heritage in 'The County Measure' and the soundscapes of 'Ambient Orbit' on Lyric.

Stories and sounds like these can hopefully repay the faith of the public, building the case for a stronger funding model for RTÉ and the constellation of livelihoods that depend upon it.

And nestled in among these recordings is 'The Runners', documenting the heroism of docker Jemmy Gunnery, who rescued Christy Fagan from Ferryhouse Industrial School.

Kevin Brew is a SIPTU rep for RTÉ Radio Drama and a radio producer working with Kevin Reynolds and Gorretti Slavin in RTÉ's radio drama department, Drama On One.



RTÉ staff at Raidió na Gaeltachta, Baile Na nGall, co. Kerry.

From Liberty Hall in '17 to World Cup '23



Photo top: Caroline Quinn, below: INPHO



Castlereagh Celtic under 12s girls team in Roscommon supporting the Women's Football team. Photo: Annette Donlon, SIPTU PAC Division

The countdown to the Republic of Ireland's opening game of the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup has reached fever pitch. On the eve of the FIFA Women's World Cup, SIPTU will unveil a huge good luck banner on Liberty Hall that recalls the struggles of the team and their watershed strike of 2017 (left) all the way through the team qualifying for their first ever major tournament in 2023.

Led by captain Katie McCabe, Ireland qualified for the World Cup by hammering Georgia, holding giants Sweden to a draw, and securing a play-off place with narrow wins over Finland and Slovakia. In the play-off, Amber Barrett's 72nd-minute thumping strike propelled the team past Scotland and into our first-ever FIFA Women's World Cup finals, where we will face hosts Australia, Nigeria, and Canada. The match against Australia will be shown in Liberty Hall Theatre, at 11.00 a.m. on Thursday, 20th July.

A dramatic press conference took place in Liberty Hall in early April, 2017 when 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.

Many players and commentators have said that the improvement in terms and conditions for the women footballers helped to lay the basis for the teams 'more' recent successes, notably its qualification for World Cup 2023 in Australia.

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 kit could be passed on to junior teams.

The 14 members of the team who attended the press conference included then captain, Emma Byrne, striker, Stephanie Roche and FAI Women's International Player of the Year for 2016, 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



Republic of Ireland Women's team press conference, Liberty Hall, 4th April 2017. Photo: INPHO Photography

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

adequately deals with all the issues they had raised.

Central to the negotiations were

then SIPTU Services Division Organiser, Ethel Buckley and Sector Organiser, Denis Hynes.

Buckley told Liberty: "This was a short, sharp and successful campaign to advance the rights of women in sport. It was 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."

Many players and commentators have said that the improvement in terms and conditions for the women footballers in 2017 helped to lay the basis for the teams 'more' recent successes.

This was a short, sharp and successful campaign to advance the rights of women in sport.

secured.

Although confidential, the team players were quick to declare the agreement a victory which

Union members vote to accept Tara Mines proposals

By Paddy Cole

SIPTU, Unite and Connect members have voted to accept proposals brokered by the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) in relation to the temporary lay-offs at Tara Mines.

The proposals include assurances on improved allowances for members facing lay-off and guarantees that workers will return on existing terms and conditions following the proposed temporary closure. SIPTU

Divisional Organiser, Adrian Kane said: "SIPTU members have voted by a 60% to 40% majority to accept the proposals. We will be meeting later this month with management to discuss their implementation.

"The union will now embark on a major campaign to bring unemployment benefits in line with the EU norm.

"The reform of our grossly inadequate and unfair social protection system should be the lasting outcome of this dispute."

Kane welcomed a commitment by the Minister for Social Protection, Heather Humphreys, to provide in-

creased payments to workers who lose their jobs and to link them to previous earnings.

SIPTU sector Organiser, John Regan said: "Our campaign now turns to seeking to get the mine back in production at the earliest opportunity. We have always said that the Government has a key role to play in bringing this about."

A formal review of the WRC proposals and of the future of the mine will take place between union representatives and the owners, Boliden, in October 2023.



SIPTU TEAC Divisional Organiser, Adrian Kane with workers from Tara Mines before a meeting with Oireachtas members in Leinster House on Wednesday, 12th July. Photo: Aoife Ní Shúilleabháin.

SIPTU members win pandemic recognition payment



HUNDREDS of members working as contract cleaners and security workers in hospitals across the country have finally been paid the €1000 pandemic recognition payment following a day of action by the 'Forgotten Frontline Heroes Campaign'.

In mid-June, protests were held outside Beaumont Hospital in Dublin, University Hospital Limerick and Galway University Hospital by contract cleaners to highlight the fact that they had not yet re-

ceived the payment. SIPTU Services Division Organiser, Teresa Hannick, said: "Following the successful day of action by our members in Dublin, Limerick and Galway, we have received confirmation that the Pandemic Special Recognition Payment has been paid to the workers involved.

"The speedy processing of this payment shows the power of effective protest. Our members showed tremendous strength and unity over the last number of months to win this campaign."

Retained firefighters set to reject Labour Court recommendation

A LABOUR Court recommendation aimed at resolving a dispute involving thousands of retained fire fighters looks set to be rejected by the majority of union members working in the service.

SIPTU Public Administration and Community Division Organiser, Karan O'Loughlin, said: "Our members in the retained fire service believe the content of the Labour Court recommendation in relation to the many issues in the service is a major disappointment.

"While there are some small adjustments made to the previous position of the employers, there was just not enough political will to inject the resources necessary to resolve the current impasse and create the environment for re-engagement on the broader issues in this dispute.

"While the headline figures that describe the percentage rises in relation to pay look meaningful, in fact they are large percentages of a small annual retainer."



Retained fire crew of Bantry Fire Service with (now former) Mayor of County Cork, Cllr. Danny Collins on the picket line before talks took place.

She added: "There is nothing in the recommendation to deal with the precarious nature of firefighters' earnings with the retainer, drill and training still the only guaranteed source of pay.

"SIPTU retained firefighters will ballot on this document in

the coming days, with a recommendation for its rejection from their National Committee. Accordingly, we anticipate the document will be overwhelmingly rejected and there will be a return to strike action."

Pride at work, Pride in the union...

As part of Pride month, SIPTU LGBTQ+ Network hosted a special screening of the movie 'Pride' in Liberty Hall Theatre on Tuesday 20th June. Based on a true story, the film depicts a group of lesbian and gay activists who raised money for the families of striking Welsh miners during the British Miners' Strike in 1984. The film was followed by a Karaoke Night in the Cois Life Bar.



Welcoming migrants through conversational English



By Diane Jackson

CERTIFICATES of achievement were recently presented to a group of English language learners at the SIPTU office in Galway.

Honorary President, Mary O'Sullivan, and Deputy General Secretary, Ethel Buckley, were guests at the event, held on 27th June, and both spoke about the union's policy of welcoming and supporting refugees and people from all countries.

The gathering included learners, tutors, members of Galway District Council and SIPTU staff.

SIPTU welcomed members of the Ukrainian community in Galway along with their English language tutor, Olena Bratchenko, who also presented awards to her group of learners. The union pro-

more with my colleagues at work. I can send text messages and I understand more. It is great."

Algerian, Mahmoud Bouziane, who arrived in Galway only a few weeks ago, said: "I found everyone very friendly at the classes and I really appreciated my tutor's patience."

Olha Petrova fled the war in Ukraine along with her husband Oleksandr and has been living in Galway for over a year now.

She said: "I really enjoyed coming to the classes every Tuesday. I have made great friends from Ireland, and I can practise English more. I am very grateful for that."

The classes have been of great benefit not only for learners but also for their tutors.

SIPTU Organiser, Aneta Sobczak, is a co-ordinator and tutor for the classes. She said: "It is great opportunity for all of us – volunteers and learners alike – to get to know each other and hear our stories while learning and improving English."

"We learn about different cul-



Tutor Olena Bratchenko (third from left) with Ukrainian English language learners. Photos Graham Seely.

I really enjoyed coming to the classes, I have made great friends from Ireland, and I can practise English more. I am very grateful for that...

encourage anyone who has a bit of free time to spare to participate."

Free conversational English classes resume in September, 2023, and will take place every Tuesday during lunchtime and at 7.00 p.m.

Diane Jackson is a SIPTU Sector

Anyone in the Galway area wishing to become a tutor or to improve your English language skills, please contact Aneta Sobczak at: asobczak@siptu.ie ALL ARE WELCOME



Tutor Pat Daly (centre) presenting awards to Oleksandr and Olha Petrova.

vides space in the Galway building for their weekly English language classes.

Conversational English classes have been running at the Galway SIPTU office since 2018 with the help of Fáilte Isteach, a community project that supports groups that provide such services across the country.

The Galway classes are attended by learners from all over the world and have been a great success. The aim of the classes is to make learners feel welcome here in Ireland through conversation in English and to empower them to communicate better in their workplaces and local communities.

Dorota Majcher, who is from Poland and works as a hospital cleaner, said: "I am very happy that I attended the classes. It helped me to improve my English. I speak

tures and talk about different topics, so it has been an amazing experience and I highly recommend it."

It's great to see their confidence growing and their vocabulary increasing week by week. Some of our learners have gone through a very difficult and challenging time in their lives.

We want them to feel welcome here and to use their new English language skills to connect with their neighbours, colleagues at work, and new friends within the Galway community.

President of Galway District Council, Pat Daly, who has been a volunteer tutor from the start, said he found the classes personally very rewarding.

"I have made great friends from Ukraine, Sudan and Spain and find the classes very enjoyable. I would



1. Tutor Mary O'Brien, presenting certificate to Mahmoud Bouziane



2. Aneta Sobczak, SIPTU Organiser presenting certificate of achievement to Anait Sarhsian



3. Deputy General Secretary, Ethel Buckley presenting a certificate of appreciation to tutor Pat Daly along with Mary O'Sullivan, SIPTU Honorary President.



Deputy General Secretary, Ethel Buckley with Diane Jackson presenting certificate to Aneta Sobczak, co-ordinator and tutor for the classes.

Hope amid land theft and oppression



By Kevin Callinan

THE eight-metre high wall traverses the West Bank countryside in Palestine serving as an unnatural reminder of Israeli apartheid. It is built in a way that isolates a significant amount of Palestinian land and people from the rest of the West Bank territory.

It's not the only stark picture of an apartheid regime. The roofs of Palestinian houses and buildings are topped with black or white water tanks because access to water is restricted. Neighbouring buildings without the water tanks almost certainly belong to illegal settlements where no such water shortage exists.

And the growth of these settlements is relentless. Jewish settlers seize land, establish a base and enjoy the protection of the occupying Israeli Defence Forces having evicted the people who, in many cases, have lived there for centuries. In Palestinian east Jerusalem a similar process is under way but, in this case, it is done house by house.

The illegal settlements, effectively stealing land from Palestinians, is a flagrant breach of international law and the Oslo Accords. The fact that this can happen with impunity, and the failure



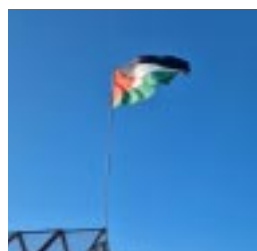
Palestinian children in Bethlehem refugee camp



Settler homes in East Jerusalem formerly owned by Palestinians



ICTU delegation meet with Palestinian Deputy Foreign Minister Dr Amal Jadou



of the government of Israel to prevent it, is an affront to the international community.

Seeing this with one's own eyes stays with you. At the end of June, in my capacity as President, I led the first ICTU high-level delegation to Palestine since 2007. I was joined by Vice-President Phil Ní Sheaghda (INMO), past President Patricia McKeown (UNISON) and Assistant General Secretary Gerry Murphy.

Of course, there have been many trade union delegations in the meantime, often organised through Trade Union Friends of Palestine (TUFPP). And we were pleased to make a small presentation in Bethlehem in memory of the northern secretary of TUFPP, Eamonn McMahon, who passed away last year.

Our visit was brief. We travelled overnight there and back, spending five busy days on the ground.

One day was spent visiting hospitals. In Bethlehem, this included the Caritas baby hospital, the Beit Jala government hospital and the Holy Family maternity hospital which has a strong connection with Irish midwives. In Jerusalem, we toured the Augusta Victoria hospital and met with the representatives of the workers.

Our meeting with the Palestinian trade union federation (PFGTU) was switched to Ramallah from Nablus due to the current level of settler violence taking place there and in Jenin. And we

were unable to access Gaza. This was disappointing.

Some of our most informative meetings, both in the West Bank and in Tel Aviv, were with NGOs. We received a good analysis of what was happening including the weakening authority of the traditional leadership in the West Bank.

When we met with the deputy foreign Minister Dr Amal Jadou, who had visited Ireland recently, we were most impressed with her passion and commitment.

We had an informative session with the International Labour Organisation representative and separate meetings with the Irish team in the Representative Office in Ramallah and with the Irish Ambassador to Israel.

It would be easy to despair about the situation. Hope is in short supply. But then you think of the children in the Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem who live under the gaze of the watchtowers on top of the separation wall that borders the camp itself and the tremendous work of the Lajee Centre there. Or you reflect on the special bond that exists between Ireland and Palestine and what it means. "We see our flag at football matches," a local said to me and I knew it meant a lot.

And you know as a country, we can and should do more. Recognising the State of Palestine would be a good start.

Kevin Callinan is General Secretary of Fórsa

Jenin refugee camp killings

Just days after the trade union delegation left Palestine, Israeli military forces invaded the Jenin refugee camp on 3rd July using drones and Apache attack helicopters as well as hundreds of ground troops.

Twelve Palestinians were killed and over one hundred wounded while several thousand fled the camp during the raid which continued for several days. There was massive destruction to homes and medical and other infrastructure in the camp where 14,000 people live in already cramped and unhealthy conditions. Those killed included militants of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Fatah armed

organisations along with one Israeli soldier.

Susan Akram, a clinical professor at Boston University's School of Law, said the raid on Jenin clearly amounts to war crimes for a number of reasons, including intentionally attacking a civilian population and attacking medical units.

"The Geneva Conventions include as war crimes during occupation, willful killings, willfully causing great suffering to an occupied population and extensive destruction of property not justified by military necessity," Akram said. "There's no doubt that what Israel carried out in Jenin constitutes war crimes."



Funerals held for those killed during Israel's raid on the Jenin refugee camp. Photo: Mohamad Torokman/Reuters

Urgent action needed on mental health staffing crisis



By Aideen
Carberry

SIPTU representatives shed light on the critical challenges being faced by workers in mental health services at a recent Policy Forum for Ireland online seminar.

The seminar, titled 'Next steps for mental health services in Ireland' and which was held in June, looked at the pressing issues of staff shortages and burnout among healthcare workers in the sector.

SIPTU members underlined the need for high-quality mental health care to be made available for all and flagged up its intention to engage constructively with Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People, Mary Butler, to find solutions to these problems.

SIPTU Sector Organiser, John McCamley, set out the difficulties encountered by this group of workers, with heavy workloads and an increasing risk of burnout due to staff shortages.

The situation is particularly dire in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), where there is an urgent need for adequate staffing.



Need for immediate action to address the staffing crisis and prevent further attrition of mental health workers

McCamley stressed the need for immediate action to address the staffing crisis and prevent further attrition of mental health workers.

Acknowledging the Minister's commitment to tackle the challenges in CAMHS, SIPTU representatives have asked for a meeting with Minister Mary Butler.

The union hopes to communicate the concerns of members working in CAMHS and call for tangible solutions. It was encouraging to learn the Minister is putting in place a series of

roundtable discussions with key stakeholders, including SIPTU.

SIPTU wants the engagement to focus on the experiences and perspectives of workers, while also being aware of the need to provide a world-class service to vulnerable patients.

SIPTU's intention is not to merely highlight problems but to work towards tangible solutions that will benefit both the workers and those who depend on mental health services.

By involving the voices of work-

By involving the voices of workers in the decision-making process, a more comprehensive and effective strategy can be developed

ers in the decision-making process, a more comprehensive and effective strategy can be developed.

Engagement with the Minister and the ongoing roundtable discussions present a significant opportunity to effect positive change.

It is crucial that all stakeholders come together to ensure the well-being of mental health workers and the delivery of high-quality services to those who need it most.

Claim over Long COVID and special leave with pay goes to Labour Court

By Aideen Carberry

In a continued effort to advocate for the well-being of healthcare workers and the patients they serve, the Staff Panel of Health Unions engaged in a conciliation conference on July 10th, 2023 regarding Long Covid and Special Leave with Pay (SLWP) at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC). The employers, represented by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the Department of Health and the HSE, unfortunately,



failed to put forward a proposal with would address union members' concerns during conciliation, leading to the referral of the dispute to the Labour Court.

The first aspect of the union claim stresses the necessity for a special scheme catering specifically to healthcare workers who have been diagnosed with Long COVID. The second aspect of the

claim focuses on the need for a comprehensive Special Leave with Pay scheme for healthcare workers.

Currently, the existing scheme for all public servants only allows for 5 days of paid leave, aligning with the recommended isolation period for the general public. However, SIPTU representatives have argued that healthcare workers, who are constantly in contact with vulnerable individuals within the healthcare system, require a longer period of paid leave to safeguard the health of the patients they serve.

The number of days provided within the scheme should match

the isolation period recommended by the HSE clinical advice for engaging with individuals who may be high-risk, which is 10 days for individuals exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms.

At the conciliation conference, employer representatives maintained that the existing 4-month extension until October 31st, 2023, should be considered a goodwill gesture. It was their view that staff would transition to the regular sick leave policy after that date. Union representative will now pursue the matter at the Labour Court.

Public water strike called off after demands conceded

By Scott Millar

A MAJOR campaign of industrial action in public water services was averted in early June when the Government conceded to SIPTU members' demands that local authority workers who decide not to transfer to Uisce Éireann will have all their earnings protected.

The action had been due to commence with a strike on 7th June which would have had a major adverse impact on public water services across the country.

More than 2,000 SIPTU members in local authority water services had overwhelmingly voted for industrial action in a ballot conducted in local authority areas across the country in April.

Following this vote, the union im-

mediately prepared for a major campaign of industrial action, including strike action, to protect members hard-fought-for terms and conditions.

A decision by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien, to concede to their demands was set out in a departmental letter issued on the evening of Friday 2nd June, just before the bank holiday weekend.

The letter specifically includes guarantees of workers' allowances and overtime payments they accrue currently as part of their work. The letter gives concrete examples of how the earnings of SIPTU members will be protected and removes an attempt by individual local authorities to renege on this commitment.

Local authority worker and chair of the SIPTU water workers national negotiating committee, Stephen



Karan O'Loughlin, SIPTU PAC Division Organiser

Kelly, said: "This was a very challenging situation for local authority water workers.

"Their level of commitment to the communities that they serve is very strong and this decision to take industrial action was not taken lightly. The demand from our members was simple; that the Government provide

cast-iron guarantees that a commitment that their earnings would be protected if they do not transfer to the new national water utility would be honoured.

"We believe we have now secured such a guarantee from the Minister in a manner which will not allow individual local authorities to deviate from it."

SIPTU Public Administration and Community Division Organiser, Karan O'Loughlin, said: "This is a major success for our members who had been forced to schedule strike action that would have had a far-reaching impact.

"The concession by the Minister to their demands is a testament to the power of workers when they stand in solidarity with their colleagues to protect their interests."

SIPTU Sector Organiser, Brendan O'Brien, said: "The protection of our

members' earnings was a commitment given by local authorities and the Government in the Framework for the Future of Water Services document which lays out the move towards a national public water utility.

"Unfortunately, as this document was being implemented it became clear certain local authorities were not living up to the protection of earnings commitment. This forced our members to vote for strike action. It is to be welcomed that the Minister has seen sense and provided the guarantees which were demanded."

Uisce Éireann is the national utility for public water services. It has begun a process of taking over the operation of all public water services formerly provided by local authorities – a move that is scheduled to conclude in 2026.

ICTU conference backs referendum to keep water public

TRADE unionists from across the island have voiced their support for the Name the Date campaign for a referendum on the public ownership of water services.

The campaign received endorsement from delegates at the ICTU Biennial Delegate conference in July and now has more than 10,000 signatures on its petition.

SIPTU Head of Organising and Campaigns, Darragh O'Connor, said: "Union members in water services have been fighting to keep water public for years. As part of the 'Hands off Public Water' campaign, they protested, petitioned and balloted for strike action. Their campaign was a success."

He added: "Right now, Government is legislating to make Irish Water a non-commercial, national state authority. This is a big win – but we need a final step to make sure that water services are never privatised. We need a referendum to seal the deal."

The Government has previously committed to a constitutional referendum to keep Uisce Éireann in public ownership. However, it has refused to establish a set date for the vote or the wording of the constitutional change to safeguard public ownership of water services.

To learn more about the 'Keep Water Public – Name the Date' campaign and sign its petition visit keepwaterpublic.ie



Trade union officials and activists show their support for the 'Keep Water Public – Name the Date' campaign at the ICTU Biennial Delegate conference in Kilkenny on 6th July

Pay crisis in private home care

SIPTU warns of crisis due to pay disparity in public and private home care services

SIPTU representatives have warned that the disparity in pay between workers in public and private home care services is leading to a staffing crisis in the sector which is severely affecting vulnerable clients.

SIPTU Sector Organiser, Pat Flannery, said: "The reality is that staff are moving from private and voluntary services to the public service as the HSE is

moving to recruit Healthcare Support Assistants. Staff are voting with their feet and opting to work for an employer that provides better terms and conditions of employment. It is our firm belief that private and voluntary providers will continue to struggle to recruit if the issue of pay is not addressed."

The warning came on 21st June, a day on which the Dáil debated a motion tabled by the Regional Group regarding the crisis in home care and shortages in home help hours. Among the

measures called for in the motion is that the Government ensures that all training for people engaging in the home care industry be paid for by the State to assist private providers in replacing staff who have moved to jobs within the HSE.

Flannery said: "The 'Report of the Strategic Workforce Advisory Group on Home Carers and Nursing Home Healthcare Assistants' was published in September 2022 and contained 16 recommendations aimed at alleviating staffing issues in the sector. To

date, the Government has only implemented one of these recommendations, which was to increase the number of work permits available for home carers to come from outside the EU to work in Ireland.

"The permits made available are for full-time positions with a minimum salary of €27,000. A Healthcare Support Assistant in the HSE can earn up to €40,738 working full-time and has access to far more favourable terms and conditions of employment including premium payments,

travel, and mileage payments, as well as access to a pension scheme. These benefits are not available to their private and voluntary sector counterparts in many instances."

He added: "The absurdity of the situation is that many private and voluntary providers are contracted to provide services on behalf of the State. Yet staff are leaving these services to take up employment directly with the HSE due to the more favourable conditions of employment."

Big rise for lower paid members at Dosco

SIPTU members at the Cork-based cleaning products distributor Dosco have agreed an 8.25% pay rise over two years – with 10 members receiving an enhanced increase of 16%.

It follows a series of intensive local negotiations in March, April and May. The workforce had been split into two categories so that lower paid members could benefit most from the outcome of the talks.

Trade union density at the employment was below 100% at the start of the year, so shop stewards

Peter Dorgan and John Rock set about organising the lower paid workers into the union.

Peter Dorgan explained: "It was no coincidence that most of the lower paid workers were not union members and, as shop stewards, we could not sit idly by and watch them work for lower pay.

"Our goal was to have 100% union density before pay talks commenced so that we could maximise the potential to secure a decent pay agreement for everybody."

He continued: "Before the final

meeting, we had secured the 16% increase and were close to achieving the 8.25% which would be paid over two years – but our lower paid members, recognising their power, insisted that the full 16% should be front-loaded and paid in full from year 1. Management, acknowledging the efforts of all workers, offered no resistance to this request."

The full terms of the agreement are:

- For 10 employees, the rate of pay increases to €13.50 per hour for 24 months from 1st

March, 2023 until 1st March, 2025.

- The pay rise for the remaining staff is 8.25% from 1st March, 2023 for 24 months until 1st March, 2025, payable as follows: 4.25 % increase from 1st March, 2023 and a 4% increase from 1st March, 2024.
- Employees who have reached two years' continuous service are eligible for the rate of €13.50 per hour or equivalent.



Recruitment drive: SIPTU shop steward Peter Dorgan

Collective bargaining key to fair share of wealth for workers

SIPTU Manufacturing Division Organiser, Greg Ennis, has told trade unionists from across Europe that expanding collective bargaining coverage is the best means of ensuring workers get a fair share of the wealth they produce.

He made the comments during an address to the IndustriAll mid-term conference in Thessaloniki, Greece, held over two days in June.

Ennis said: "In setting the priorities for workers across Europe, we must instill the view among all workers that collective bargaining is the only true mechanism for the fair distribution of profits and wealth across society. While workers generate such profits, they rarely see their fair share of it."

He explained the current situation in Ireland and the work under way to expand the number of workers covered by collective bar-

gaining.

"In Ireland today, we do not enjoy the right to collectively bargain with our employers. Ireland has a voluntary system for industrial relations and the battle to achieve the right to collectively bargain has been ongoing for 110 years since the famous 'Dublin Lockout' of 1913, where 20,000 workers took industrial action to secure the right to be represented by the trade union."

Ennis continued: "In Ireland, the Government and its trade unions under the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) have very recently agreed a new approach to dealing with the unacceptable voluntary industrial relations system.

"This new approach will hopefully end the days of employers ignoring Labour Court recommendations, whereby the Labour Court recommends that the employer



SIPTU Manufacturing Division Organiser, Greg Ennis, with ETUC General Secretary, Esther Lynch at the IndustriAll conference in Thessaloniki, Greece, in June.

should engage with its workers through their chosen trade union, and the employer simply ignores it. This new departure, which we expect to be legislated for in 2024,

will mean that in such cases, the trade union can take its case to the law courts to get a Labour Court recommendation enforced, where financial penalties will apply to employers

who refuse to co-operate with the recommendation."

He added: "Comrades, this is the new Irish approach to building our trade union density, so as to bring about a fairer distribution of worker-generated wealth and to ensure that we build trade union power for fair pay and conditions both within the workplace and outside of the workplace, so as to improve the lives of working people and their families."

A colourful background displaying building blocks to close the growing inequality gap set the scene for conference discussions on current and future challenges as well as strategic priorities.

Attended by more than 600 representatives from 179 unions in 64 countries, the conference was held from 20th to 22nd June.



SIPTU members at Connolly Hall, Cork, before the Raise the Roof protest on Saturday, 10th June. Photo: Graham Seely.

Action needed to address vacancy rates for radiation therapists staffing

SIPTU activist and Allied Health Professionals Sector member, Debbie Kelleher, spoke at the launch of the Irish Cancer Society's pre-Budget submission last month.

Debbie, a radiation therapist in University Hospital Galway, focused on the sustainability of cancer services in Ireland, given continuing issues with the recruitment and retention of radiation therapists nationally.

She also spoke about access to cancer services and the impact this is having on patients, families and staff within these services.

Kelleher said: "It was a privilege to address the launch. I wanted to highlight the work that we do as radiation therapists in treating cancer, but also to speak about the difficulties we're facing as a workforce.

"A recent survey conducted among our member-

ship in SIPTU highlighted key issues around recruitment and retention of staff. These need to be addressed without delay.

"Nationally, the vacancy rate for radiation therapists in December 2022 was 15%. It has now risen to closer to 38%. This clearly demonstrates the difficulties we are facing in staffing our cancer services," she added.

It's time to 'reset the clock' at RTÉ

IRISH Equity has said it is time to "reset the clock" at RTÉ and committed its members to engage fully with the Government review following the scandal over governance at the national broadcaster.

Irish Equity President, Gerry O'Brien, said: "It is of great concern to the Irish Equity Executive and our members that the relation-

ship between the national broadcaster and the entire cultural sector is, we believe, now in jeopardy.

"We believe that this has been brought about by the actions of the organisation which have shown a lack of transparency, absence of good-faith negotiations as well as the unilateral alteration of agreements and contracts.

"We are particularly concerned

about the terms of engagement displayed by management in relation to in-house productions and towards our members employed in Fair City.

"Irish Equity has at all times engaged in fair, open and good faith negotiations that ensure a level playing field. This has not been reciprocated. Therefore, we welcome the terms of reference for

the RTÉ review process."

Irish Equity Organiser, Michelle Quinn, said: "Our members will fully participate in the review process and stand in solidarity with our colleagues on the RTÉ Trade Union Group. Following the conclusion of this process we look forward to a new dawn for our members who work in RTÉ.

"We hope that what will follow is a new era for the national broadcaster where good governance, accountability, transparency, fairness and good faith negotiations are displayed in both word and deed.

"In order to achieve this outcome a total cultural shift is now required. It is time to reset the clock in RTÉ," she added.



RTÉ National
Symphony
Orchestra

Orchestra members refer health and safety concerns to WRC

MEMBERS of the National Symphony Orchestra have referred "health and safety" issues to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), claiming they have been frustrated by National Concert Hall (NCH) management's failure to address long-running concerns.

SIPTU Sector Organiser, Michelle Quinn, said: "Our members have highlighted a number of psychosocial risks which they have faced in their workplace over an extended period of time.

"Such a risk is an occurrence that can either physically or psychologically harm an individual or collective of people. We believe currently within the NCH, for a variety of reasons, that potential exists."

Quinn said members had now lost confidence that these issues would be dealt with at local level and that management had been informed about this.

"The National Concert Hall has already been made aware repeatedly of the psychosocial risk fac-

tors our members believe already exist due to the organisation's failure to take corrective action."

She said SIPTU members are calling on the executive management team and NCH board to "redouble its efforts" to fulfil its obligations under Section 8 of the 2005 Safety Health Welfare at Work Act.

Section 8 compels employers to ensure "so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of his or her employees".

Quinn added: "These bodies should also be mindful of Section 80 of the Act, which makes clear that managers will be held accountable for any breaches of workplace rights committed due to neglecting to intervene to prevent them taking place.

"While we remain willing and anxious to engage with management to resolve the issues, in the interim the matters are being referred to the WRC."

The NSO was set up in 1948 by RTÉ but was placed under the remit of the NCH in 2021.

SIPTU joins 'chains' protest in Brussels



Protestors outside European Commission in Brussels hold up 'chains' signifying the exploitation involved in sub-contracting within the construction industry

A PROTEST to call for the EU to curtail the exploitation in sub-contracting chains in the construction sector took place in Brussels, Belgium, on 7th June.

SIPTU members joined colleagues from across Europe in a call for the European Commission to take action.

SIPTU TEAC Division Organiser, Adrian Kane, said: "At the protest, construction workers called on the European Commission to take firm action against exploitation in sub-contracting chains. The event was part of a wider campaign by the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW) with to which SIPTU is affiliated.

"A recent study, carried out by the European Commission, shows that sub-contracting is a major risk factor for the exploitation of workers. The longer and more complex the chain is, the higher the probability of crime and abuse."

He added: "Often, companies use sub-contracting chains to disguise employment relationships, circumvent tax and social security payments and hide from controls by labour inspection bodies.

"Sometimes, sub-contractors

vanish without paying the workers the wages due to them after months of working. It is time to put an end to this."

The EFBWW has 77 affiliated unions in 36 countries and represents 1.5 million members.



Flag-waving SIPTU members joined the 7th June protest

Ex-Rehab workers win enhanced redundancy after long campaign

SIPTU members formerly employed at the Rehab Enterprises logistics centre in Raheen, county Limerick, have voted to accept a redundancy package from the company following a successful protest campaign to highlight its breach of a collective agreement.

SIPTU Organiser, Robbie Purfield, said: "A settlement to this long-running dispute was accepted in a vote by our members.

"They welcome the additional payments which they have secured and it's a testament to what can be achieved by workers sticking together and fighting for their rights."

He added: "Our members showed resolve in this campaign. They would like to thank all those who supported them which included elected representatives, disability rights campaigners and

their local community."

SIPTU Manufacturing Division Organiser, Greg Ennis, said: "This is a welcome resolution of this dispute which has delivered enhanced redundancy payments. The dignified and unflinching courage of our members throughout a long and public campaign for justice over redundancy pay was remarkable.

"The support received by these workers from their families and the wider Limerick community was key to this successful outcome," he added.

The settlement involves 38 SIPTU members made redundant by Rehab Enterprises in early 2021.

The company contended that it could not afford to pay the agreed redundancy terms.

Instead of honouring them, it paid the workers only their statutory redundancy entitlements and let them go.



Greg Ennis, SIPTU Manufacturing Divisional Organiser (front row right) with former Rehab workers protesting outside the Rehab Group premises in Limerick in March 2023.

Celebrating Cork's Rebel Daughter

SPiRiT of MOTHER JONES

FESTIVAL 2023

Thursday
27th
July

to

Saturday
29th
July

Shandon
Cork

VENUES

Dance Cork Firkin Crane
Maldron Hotel Shandon

FEATURING

Mick Lynch, Anne Twomey, Mary Crilly,
Eoghan Dalton, Liz Gillis, Luke Dineen
Mavis Ramazani, Pat Murphy,
Ger Mullally, Niamh Guiry

DOCUMENTARIES

Salt of the Earth
Mother Jones and Her Children
A Sense of Wonder
Mother Jones America's Most Dangerous Woman

WALKS

Peter Foynes
Maggie O'Neill

MUSIC AND SONGS

Cork Singers' Club, John & Gearóid Nyhan
Jimmy Crowley and Eve Telford
Cork Ukrainian Choir, Martin Leahy
A tribute to Victor Jara (1932-1973)

VIRTUAL

Mother Jones Festival archives on
Cork Community Television
www.corkcommunitytv.ie

Main image by kind permission of artist Lindsay Hand and Consulate General of Ireland in Chicago where the original portrait is on display

Details of full programme of events at
www.motherjonescork.com
& facebook: @MotherJonesCork

Emergency workers win long running battle



SIPTU Emergency Service Control members working in the Munster Regional Control Centre, have won their long running battle to secure a comprehensive review of their terms and conditions. Karan O Loughlin, Divisional Organiser for the PAC Division said: "This win follows our members balloting for industrial and strike action to secure the implementa-

tion of a previous Labour Court decision which directed the parties to engage on these issues. On foot of the ballot, management finally conceded our members claim and at discussions held on 3rd July at the Workplace Relations Commission, the terms of reference for the comprehensive review of our MRCC members' terms and conditions were finalised.

This demonstrates how workers themselves can leverage their own position to resolve matters that have been outstanding for years when they are well organised and stand together. The review will be conducted by an agreed independent chair and it is intended to complete the review by the end of August.

Trade unions must be a bulwark against hate

President Michael D Higgins addressed the ICTU Biennial Conference on Tuesday, 4th July, in Kilkenny.

WE NOW live in a world with the deepest challenges, where climate change has become a reality as our planet burns, scarred by its insatiable exploitation, with all the attendant biodiversity loss so evident.

Global poverty and inequality are rising. Hunger and famine are increasing, particularly in Eastern Africa. War has returned to our continent of Europe with devastating consequences for the Ukrainian people, while the armaments industry prospers. A cost-of-living crisis across Europe shows little sign of abating, hitting individuals and families hard and causing great hardship.

At an institutional level, the discussion on the threat to democracy is urgent with the rise of the opportunity to fuel old hatreds. The rise and rise of the unaccountable constitutes the most significant threat to democracy, even in what describes itself as the 'developed' world, thriving in an elusory system of power that has shed any accountability to those it was meant to help and govern.

From interference in election systems, to companies buying better ratings from ratings agencies, to the extreme influence of lobbyists, all are, to quote Janine Wedel¹, "embodying a 'new corruption' and remain unaccountable to our society's supposed watchdogs, which sit idly alongside the same groups that have brought the government, business and much of the military into their pocket"¹.

Such a trend is among those fuelling the rise of the far right, with its exclusionary, reactionary ideology a cause for the greatest concern. I am so glad that you are debating this issue during your conference.

We must not be afraid to call this movement for what it is: a politics of fear through the sowing of the seeds of hatred, one that is focused on the oppression of the 'Other', a political movement which has in the past been the source of policies of forced assimilation, ethnic cleansing, and genocide against groups of people based on their supposed inferiority.

Such ultra-nationalisms, authoritarianisms and exploitation of ignorance and bogus certainties have produced tendencies, chauvinist, xenophobic, theocratic, racist, homophobic, transphobic, and reactionary views which, it is easy to say, have no place in our tolerant, pluralist contemporary



PICTURES: Áras an Uachtaráin/Office of the President

Irish society.

They have no place in our contemporary European society. How open are these societies? How actual is the deepening of democracy, the sharing of discourse, transparency, openness to change?

Education and dialogue among the general population to help prevent hateful and exclusive attitudes is important. I am heartened when I, as Uachtarán na hÉireann, attend events in schools throughout the country and witness first hand schools with up to 35 nationalities working harmoniously together.

This is a model that should be rolled out across the education system and indeed into the work-

place. We must, all of us, voice our abhorrence of intolerant speech, in whatever media it appears.

Trade unions are functioning as the vanguard in facing up to this threat, a threat to democracy itself. Trade unions are championing and promoting values of inclusion, respect and equality, being proactive in denouncing any group that stirs hateful division, propagates misinformation.

Trade unions must be steadfast in challenging the various forms of hate and discrimination when and where they appear; after all, that is their legacy.

Ensuring that we have a society that remains open and welcoming is of grave importance in the con-

Trade unions must be steadfast in challenging the various forms of hate and discrimination when and where they appear; after all, that is their legacy

text of the arrival of displaced people seeking asylum and refuge, many of whom are desperate and vulnerable, and some of whom have not received the welcome for which we Irish are known.

Workers – and I wish I did not have to repeat it so often – continue to be exploited around the world. The International Labour Organisation tells us that 49.6 million people were living in modern slavery in 2021, of which 27.6 million were in forced labour and 22 million were in forced marriage.

Of the 27.6 million people in forced labour, 17.3 million are exploited in the private sector, 6.3 million in forced commercial sexual exploitation, and 3.9 million in

forced state-imposed labour.

Women and girls account for 4.9 million of those in forced commercial sexual exploitation, and for 6 million of those in forced labour in other economic sectors. Some 12 per cent of all those in forced labour are children. More than half of these children are in commercial sexual exploitation.

On all of these issues, it is trade unions who are demanding that trade advantage and other sectoral issues, must not take precedence over issues of rights.

Unions know only too well of the impacts that the arrival and announcement of cost-of-living crises is causing on individuals, households and families nationwide. With inflation running at levels not seen in four decades, we are witnessing a reduction in workers' real incomes which is making life increasingly difficult for so many, with impacts on wellbeing, including increased anxiety and worsening mental health, as workers, particularly low-paid workers, struggle with making ends meet.

We need complete transparency on the research and what is guiding policy choices as well as drivers of this inflation. Is it unreasonable to ask of the European Central Bank that it publishes the informing papers of its analysis of inflation?

We are witnessing a particular form of non-investing profit-driven inflation bring fuelled perhaps by sky-rocketing corporation profits, an inflation that is corrosive and has the potential, if it continues, to deepen and circulate poverty, deprivation and inequality levels.

Individuals and families on state benefits, including pensioners who have given their working lives to the State, those workers on a modest fixed income, those with high energy needs, those at the mercy of a precarious rental market, and those with tracker and variable-rate mortgages have all been hurt the most by this inflation, while others – including corporations, their shareholders and those with large portfolios of assets such as property – may actually become wealthier in a high-inflation environment.

This is an extract from the Presidents pre-scripted speech

¹ Wedel, Janine (2014). 'Unaccountable: How the Establishment Corrupted Our Finances, Freedom and Politics and Created an Outsider Class'. Pegasus Press: New York.

Profits not wages drive up inflation

SIPTU General Secretary, Joe Cunningham, has called for action to stop profits ramping up inflation and impacting on workers' living standards during the current cost-of-living crisis.

He made the comments while proposing a motion on the crisis at the ICTU Biennial Conference in Kilkenny on 4th July.

Cunningham told delegates: "International studies from the US, the UK and Australia show that we are experiencing a 'profit-price' spiral with profit-margins at their highest in decades.

"Even the European Central Bank is now acknowledging the role of profiteering on the back of inflation. Our own Central Bank has recently published data showing the extent to which corporate profits are fuelling inflation.

"Workers are being hit twice by this profit-price spiral. First, many companies are driving up profits while wages are struggling to maintain pace with inflation. At



Even the banks agree: SIPTU General Secretary Joe Cunningham on dangers of profit-price spiral

Photos: Kevin Copper

the same time workers are paying higher prices to finance this profit-drive."

He added: "The one upside to all this is that the ECB and our own Central Bank acknowledge that wages can rise in the future without any impact on inflation. This can be done by paying wage in-



SIPTU delegation at ICTU conference

creases out of excessive profits."

The SIPTU General Secretary also told the conference that public services were key to reducing costs.

"We can reduce prices in the economy by providing free health, subsidised medicine, affordable childcare, low-fare public trans-

port. We can eliminate the cost of sending children to school – costs which are essentially a tax on learning." Cunningham added: "We don't have to listen to scare-mongering about wage-price spirals. We are experiencing a profit-price spiral. Wage increases can help depress this spiral and

provide the economic benefits that comes with higher wages.

"High prices, high living costs are not inevitable. They are politically driven. They can be tackled through a combination of workplace strategies and new policy initiatives."

Unfair Dismissals Act must be overhauled

SIPTU Deputy General Secretary, Ethel Buckley, called for a radical overhaul of the Unfair Dismissals Act to ensure that employers can no longer find it "cheap and easy to fire union activists".

Speaking at the ICTU Biennial Delegate Conference in support of a motion calling for a trade union campaign on the Right to Organise, Buckley said that statutory protections and facilities should be

provided to allow union activists to carry out their role.

Referring to a new EU Directive which provides for a large scale expansion in collective bargaining coverage, she said that it would only increase trade union membership if there is a framework of support and protection for trade union activists in workplaces across Ireland.

She told delegates: "Collective bargaining and union organising are intrinsically linked. They are two

sides of the same coin.

"Collective bargaining coverage does not equate to trade union membership.

"Expansion in collective bargaining coverage does not a single additional union member make.

"What we need is a 'Right to Organise' framework of supports and protections which would include three main elements. Such a framework would make it safer for workers to unionise and would

involve a radical overhaul of the Unfair Dismissals Act so that it is no longer cheap and easy to fire union activists.

"It would provide statutory protections and facilities for union representatives to carry out their role and it would provide access for full-time union organisers to workplaces so that we can ask workers to join the union."



Right to Organise: SIPTU Deputy General Secretary Ethel Buckley

New economic model is needed to face challenges of the future



SIPTU Deputy General Secretary John King

THE trade union movement must develop a long-term industrial and enterprise strategy that prioritises prosperity, equality, better public services and improved living standards, SIPTU Deputy General Secretary, John King, told the ICTU Biennial Delegate Conference in Kilkenny on 4th July.

Proposing a motion on a 'new economic model for Ireland', King

said that a lack of in-depth government analysis of how our economy should develop had left "a gaping hole where a long-term industrial and enterprise strategy should be".

This failure, he argued, has left the Irish economy unprepared to face the challenges of climate change, digitalisation (including AI and automation) and the danger of a long-term, low-growth future.

King said: "We need to develop a long-term economic and business model that in the first instance ad-

dresses the deficits in our productive economy – a model that can drive not only workplace prosperity but equality, public services and living standards.

"We need to return to the fundamental issues of what we produce, how we produce it and who benefits from that production. We need a new economic and business model that can address these deficits, confront the central challenges that we face, and put the Irish economy on the high road of

inclusive and sustainable growth."

The motion, which was carried, called for a debate throughout the trade union movement to help "develop a comprehensive long-term model of economic development for both economies on the island of Ireland" which will be unveiled at the ICTU conference in two years' time.

See Liberty View page 17.

Pension promise campaign goes national

By Paddy Cole

WELL-ATTENDED town hall meetings calling for an increase in the contributory pension rate in Ireland have been held across the country over the last number of weeks.

Hundreds of people, including SIPTU members and public repre-

sentatives as well as activists from the Pension Promise Campaign, heard calls for the Government to keep its promise and pay a pension rate of no less than 34% of average earnings.

The current weekly rate of the state pension is €265 per week.

Speaking to Liberty, SIPTU economist, Michael Taft said: "What we are asking is that the Government keeps its promise to link old age pension payments to

34% of the average wage.

"It made this commitment a number of years ago and it has said it is still committed to it but pensions lag considerably. One in eight people over the age of 65 is living in what the Government itself describes as official deprivation conditions.

"That means they suffer multiple deprivation experiences. That is a very high number. Older people are at greater risk of poverty

than any other age group except children."

At the Cork meeting SIPTU economist, Daniel Higgins, told delegates that earnings grow more over time and therefore benchmarking the state pension against earnings will provide older people with a fairer share of economic prosperity.

"Currently, there is an enormous €53-a-week gap in what the Government pays out to people on

state contributory pensions and what people would receive if our campaign to have its promise to bring the state pension rate to least 34% of average earnings is successful."

Retired SIPTU member and former printer, Brendan McNamee, told Liberty that the extra €53 would make a colossal difference to people on the state pension.

"The cost of living has really skyrocketed and if you are on a fixed income this would make a huge difference. The Government made this promise and now it's time to keep it," he said.





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Members of the Meath Trades Council pictured with Fintan O'Toole following the Liam Cahill memorial lecture at the Hinterland Festival in Kells, County Meath on Sunday, 25th June.

The Irish Times journalist gave the lecture on the topic of 'Journalism and Truth: Challenges Of The Current Era' as a tribute to Liam, himself a former journalist, historian and committed trade unionist.



Liam Cahill

Populist tax cuts and pro-cyclical Budgets are no way to run the economy



By Dr Tom
McDonnell

THE economy is in an unusual place. It's been buffeted by Brexit, by the shock and disruption of the Covid crisis, and it is still coming through an energy price shock and cost-of-living crisis.

There is a sense of winners and losers – household wealth has reached record levels and corporate profits are healthy – while deprivation rates among Irish households are on the rise.

Despite the sense of perma-crisis, the labour market has never been stronger. Total employment, the employment rate, and hours worked are all at record highs while the unemployment rate is at a record low. There are clear capacity constraints across the economy.

Even so, real wages have fallen over the last year. Inflation remains high (though falling) across most of the euro area. Driven by their fear that high inflation will become 'sticky', European Central Bank policymakers are likely to increase interest rates twice more this year and then only start to gradually reduce rates sometime in 2024. Eventually this tightening of monetary policy will start to weaken demand and indeed the economy as a whole. However, so far, the economy is holding up.

Economies move in cycles, although each of these cycles has its own unique causes and characteristics. In general, we want to reduce the amplitude of the economic cycle and prevent boom-bust dynamics developing. Such dynamics can lead to permanent economic scarring and to a waste of human and physical capital. We can think back to the 2008 financial crash as a particularly bad example of this.

Macroeconomists are therefore always trying to understand where along in the cycle the economy is at any point in time. A correct understanding of whether the economy is 'overheating', 'in recession', or somewhere in between matters greatly for budgetary policy and for the appropriate fiscal stance taken by government.

If the economy is in a downswing then it makes sense for the Government to stimulate the economy through higher levels of public spending or even, where appropriate, tax cuts. The opposite



Irish governments have a long track record of pro-cyclical budgets

is true if the economy is overheating. In other words, fiscal policy should lean against the cycle or behave 'counter-cyclically'. My own view is that the economy is indeed overheating.

However, Irish governments have a long and unhappy history of pro-cyclical budgets and Budget

2024 seems likely to be the next chapter in this tradition. The Irish Fiscal Advisory Council has already attacked the Government for breaking its own spending rules and for risking further overheating while the ESRI and the Central Bank have both cautioned against tax cuts.



Setting up a housing company would be a good use of any surge in revenue from corporation tax receipts

The Budget in its current form will add to overheating and to inflation, while the income tax cuts will disproportionately benefit the better off.

We also need to move beyond the fiscal stance and reflect on the composition of the budget. For example, we need to protect low income households from cost-of-living pressures – not half-heartedly through targeted once-off measures as was done last year, but through structural uplifts in working age and old age payments that benchmark against wages and the cost of living.

In addition, we need to deal with the chronic issues in housing supply and affordability and we need to ensure that we consistently allocate adequate capital resources for the green transition. This is essential to achieving a successful and 'just' net zero transition. These areas (setting up a housing com-

pany and a green transition fund) seem to me to be two strong candidates for how best to use the windfall and possibly unsustainable surge in corporation tax receipts.

On the other hand, paying for ongoing future ageing costs is best done through structural increases in self-employed and employer PRSI.

And of course there is a long list of other public funding issues that need addressing – from waiting lists and chronic underfunding of mental health services, to large classroom sizes, high childcare costs and lack of public transport services.

Crucially, the fiscal rules allow us to increase spending by as much as we want each year provided that there are offsetting measures that increase taxes.

The Commission on Taxation and Welfare correctly pointed out just last year that we will have to meaningfully increase government revenue as a proportion of national income over the medium-term. The Government seems set on ignoring this advice.

Dr Tom McDonnell is co-director of the Nevin Economic Research Institute

In addition, we need to deal with the chronic issues in housing supply and affordability

LibertyView

A new economic model

Whenever the subject of the economy is brought up the first thing people turn to is tax and spending issues. How much can we spend? Can we afford tax cuts? What should we do with the large surplus? While these are all valid questions, they are not, in the first instance, about the economy. Rather, they concern budgetary issues.

The economy is about how people in society organise the production of good and services they need or want to buy. The economy is about what we produce, how we produce it and who benefits from that production. From this perspective, trade unionists should play a major role in economic debates. Trade unions were born in the world of production and the workplace. The issues they raise concern the nature, process and benefits of production – whether it is pay, working hours, right to strike, health and safety, precariousness, gender discrimination and so forth. Over the decades, the issues have changed but they remain rooted in the world of production.

Today, we face new challenges that affect the workplace and, so, workers' living standards. Climate change is one of the most crucial and it will have a fundamental impact, not only on our lifestyles, but on production and

Trade unions were born in the world of production and the workplace. The issues they raise concern the nature, process and benefits of production – whether it is pay, working hours, right to strike, health and safety, precariousness, gender discrimination and so forth.

consumption of energy. Automation and AI will also have a considerable impact on working lives throughout the economy. In addition, there is the prospect of a low-growth, low-productivity future as predicted by a range of international bodies from the United Nations to the EU and the IMF, and a number in Ireland.

Despite all the positive headlines, the Irish economy faces considerable deficits – especially in our domestic sectors where most people work. Whether we measure this in investment, wage levels, productivity, equality or environmental sustainability, our domestic sectors lag far behind comparable economies in the EU. Given these deficits, our economy is not prepared to face the considerable challenges coming down the line. We are sleepwalking into a future for which we are not prepared.

That is why the adoption of an Executive Council motion at the recent ICTU Bi-annual Delegate Conference is so crucial. Moved by SIPTU's Deputy General Secretary John King, the motion calls for a two-year debate across the trade union movement over a 'New Economic Model' – one that is capable of promoting workers' interests by addressing the challenges we will face.

This is what the Swedish trade union movement did in the early 1950s. Faced with the prospect of high inflation and potentially high unemployment, they initiated a two-year process of discussion and debate. What emerged came to be known as the 'Rehn-Meidner' model, named after two economists who worked for the trade union federation. But, in truth, this was a model that was devised by Swedish trade unionists. And this model set the foundation for one of the most successful economies for years to come, addressing issues such as full employment, equality, price stability and economic growth.

While we face different issues in a far different international context, the

principle remains the same. Trade unionists can take charge of the economic debate by proposing a new economic and business model that can meet the challenges ahead, promote sustainability, and champion living standards. That model does not exist today.

Indeed, Ireland doesn't have long-term policies, just policies that have lasted a long time, many of which are well past their sell-by dates.

Despite all the positive headlines, the Irish economy faces considerable deficits – especially in our domestic sectors where most people work.

There is a considerable gap between the rhetoric of economic performance and the reality on the ground. Recently, the Government published a White Paper on Enterprise. What was notable was the exclusion of workers and their trade unions in proposals to promote enterprise performance. It was as if workers didn't matter, their contribution wasn't important, their participation in the decision-making process of the enterprise wasn't needed. This omission can only undermine economic efficiency, social equity and workers' living standards.

It is time for the trade union movement to step forward and fill this gap through a new long-term economic model – one which can meet the challenges in the decades ahead. And one in which workers are at the heart of the solutions.

Consultative Forum raises concerns

By Frank Connolly
and John Montgomery

THE consultative forum on international security policy heard from a range of politicians, academics and diplomats who addressed a wide spectrum of issues concerning Ireland's current and future defence strategy.

Over several sessions in Cork, Galway and Dublin in late June, participants listened to speakers directly involved in defence and military matters in various EU agencies as well as the UN and NATO. It also heard from some of those who support Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality and wish to see it maintained.

In advance of the consultative forum, President Michael D Higgins, warned of what he believed was a political drift away from neutrality and expressed his concern at the number of those who were encouraging a deeper involvement by Ireland in military alliances and, by extension, in the global arms industry.

He criticised what he perceived as the over-representation of defence, security and military analysts on the programme of the consultative forum.

"The most dangerous moment in the articulation and formulation of foreign policy and its practice, since the origin of diplomacy, has been when you're drifting and not knowing what you're doing. I would describe our present position as one of drift," he said in an interview with The Sunday Business Post.

Speaking about the consultative forum, he criticised the various panels claiming they were stocked with "the admirals, the generals, the air force, the rest of it" and also of former neutral countries that have now joined NATO.

President Higgins asked why there was no representation from still-neutral countries such as Austria and Malta.



Tánaiste Micheál Martin speaks at the Forum insisting there is no 'secret [Government] plan' to join NATO. Photo: RollingNews.ie



Brass, Suit and Camo - Tánaiste and Minister for Defence Micheál Martin and Chief of Staff of the Irish Defence Forces, Lieutenant General Seán Clancy, hosted a media day in Farmleigh House, Dublin, to announce, highlight and promote the Defence Forces Open Day which will take place in Farmleigh House on Saturday 29th July. The snipers in camouflage are, not surprisingly, remaining unidentified. Photo: RollingNews.ie

The most dangerous moment in the articulation and formulation of foreign policy and its practice, since the origin of diplomacy, has been when you're drifting and not knowing what you're doing

lethal assistance, to NATO. Ireland has been involved with the NATO-led Partnership for Peace, but the Government has insisted that this relationship does not compromise the country's military neutrality.

Participants also heard about the role of the EU Defence Agency which operates with full consent of all member states and is tasked with control of expert panels, procurement, its budget, partner panels and their co-ordination.

The evolution of, and Ireland's engagement with, the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) was discussed in some detail while the country's involvement through membership of the associated Permanent Structured Co-operation (PESCO) was also explained.

The EU's mutual assistance clause, the European Peace Facility, and the prospects of European common defence were also the subjects of some elaboration.

This was the broader context for the discussion of Ireland's obligations under Article 29 (4) 9 of the Constitution and its commitment to the 'triple-lock' procedure. This mechanism prevents any military engagement involving more than 12 personnel by the Irish government unless mandated by the United Nations, by the Government and by Dáil Éireann.

It arose from debates during the two Nice referendums, with the latter passed in 2002. Many who voted down the Nice Treaty in the first referendum feared that, if passed, it could result in the Irish Defence Forces being involved with EU rapid reaction forces while others also feared it could lead to conscription of younger people into a European army.

During the Forum discussions, speakers including Green Party leader, Eamon Ryan, argued that



Patricia McKenna



Matt Carthy



Eamon Ryan



Leo Varadkar

The president also criticised the EU for, what he termed, was a more military-aligned posture.

"Any time that Ireland puts itself behind the shadows of previous empires within the European Union it loses an opportunity of expanding and enhancing and using its influence for the world,"

he said.

Higgins also said he was distressed about the reduction in the influence of the United Nations on world events. Inevitably, much of the discussion at the Forum was influenced by the current war in Europe which followed the illegal invasion of Ukraine by Russia in

early 2022. In particular, it heard speakers explain why Sweden and Finland had swiftly applied to join NATO following the invasion.

During the first day of discussions in Dublin Castle on Monday, 26th June, participants heard more detail of the EU's relationship with, and its provision of non-



Protesters outside Forum make their opposition clear

over future of Irish military neutrality

the UN veto was now problematic as some countries (including Russia) could obstruct motions that they consider against their national interests. He said his party had now suggested that the triple lock would involve regional organisations (presumably such as the EU) instead of the UN in this regard.

Former Green Party MEP, Patricia McKenna, among others, took exception to what she described as Ryan's failure to adhere to the founding and principled commitment to 'peace' of the original green movement in Ireland and Europe.

Her views were echoed by speakers from the Peace and Neutrality Alliance, the Irish Anti-War Movement, Sinn Féin and others in the audience as well as by a number of panellists who insisted that, if anything, Irish neutrality should be reinforced in the light of global developments, including the war in Ukraine and the war-mongering of some major western powers.

"Any time that Ireland puts itself behind the shadows of previous empires within the European Union it loses an opportunity of expanding and enhancing and using its influence for the world"

On the previous day at Dublin Castle, An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, said that remaining outside NATO was beneficial to Ireland in its relations with countries in the 'Global South' and in obtaining a seat on the UN Security Council. He has also said recently that the Government is not seeking to join NATO while acknowledging that Ireland does depend on the support of NATO members in the face of cybersecurity, naval and air threats.

In advance of the Forum, Tánaiste, Micheál Martin said that the event was not part of "a secret plan by the Government to join



Senator Frances Black addressed the meeting organised by the Irish Neutrality League in Liberty Hall on 19th June.

NATO". As Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence, he said, however, that there was a need to examine Ireland's ability to pursue an independent foreign policy, including through the "triple-lock" mechanism, due to the "increasing use of the UN Security Council veto".

"Since Russia's brutal and illegal invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, which blatantly violated the UN Charter and international law and fundamentally altered the European security environment, every country in Europe has examined and re-examined its foreign, security and defence policies," Martin said.

Sinn Féin defence and foreign affairs spokesperson, Matt Carthy, said Ireland should be "proud" of neutrality. He said the party wanted Ireland to play a constructive role in the wider world which was committed to diplomacy, humanitarianism, and peacebuilding.

"An independent foreign policy and military neutrality are crucial to allow Ireland to play that important role," he said.

Carthy said public discourse on foreign and security policies has been "sorely lacking".

"The starting point to any such discourse must be a recognition that military neutrality has served us well. It is for this reason that we want to enshrine the principle of neutrality in the Irish constitution and within the EU treaties."

At its biennial delegate conference in Kilkenny in early July, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions unanimously adopted a motion in support of Irish military neutrality.

Since the Forum, Turkey has withdrawn its objections to Sweden joining NATO soon after the US promised to supply F-19 fighter aircraft to President Erdogan's autocratic regime.

Military neutrality has served us well, it is for this reason that we want to enshrine the principle of neutrality in the Irish constitution and within the EU treatie



Protestors at Dublin Castle during Consultative Forum on Monday 26th June. Photo: RollingNews.ie



Protesters at the Consultative Forum on International Security Policy, at UCC on 22nd June.



Photo: William Murphy

There has also been global concern, including by other NATO members, at the decision by the US to supply Ukraine with cluster bombs, the use of which are banned under a 2008 convention signed by 111 states, including Ireland. The convention was agreed at a conference hosted by the Department of Foreign Affairs in

Dublin in 2008 and attended by then incoming foreign minister, Micheál Martin.

In the light of these developments, the reservations of President Michael D Higgins on Ireland's foreign policy drift and his wider critique of the global arms industry, appear justified.



Protesters and peace activists on boats with flags at the Ha'penny bridge, Dublin and the river Liffey over the government's Consultative Forum on International Policy on 26th June.

Photo: RollingNews.ie

Argentina may well lurch to the right at the polls...



By
Vic Duggan

ARGENTINA'S World Cup triumph in December 2022 prompted a predictable outpouring of national joy. But, the feeling was to be short-lived as the country reels from a devastating drought that is exacerbating one of the country's periodic economic crises.

The inflation rate is more than 100%. The economy is flatlining. More than a third of the country is in poverty. Talks are ongoing to restructure the country's \$44bn IMF bailout. Meanwhile, approval of the Peronist government is barely in double digits.

Against this backdrop, Argentina prepares to go to the polls. On 13th August, all potential candidates will take part in a single, national primary election that will winnow down the field to a single standard-bearer for each party or electoral coalition. The first round of the Presidential election proper will take place on 22nd October. Current President, Alberto Fernández, announced earlier this year that he would not seek re-election.

Even though the country's economy has been in something of a tailspin, its economy minister, Sergio Massa, appears best-placed to emerge as leader of the Peronist Frente de Todos coalition.

It is nearly 50 years since Juan Domingo Perón died in office, but the popular movement he founded and led still bears his name and dominates the perceived left of Argentine politics.

Peronism has long been riven by factions. Former two-time President – and current Vice-President – Cristina Fernández de Kirchner remains the single most powerful Peronist politician and represents its left-leaning factions.

Sergio Massa, however, is more closely aligned with conservative factions – and the current President – and has been busy cutting government spending to tackle inflation. Since failure to present a united front could have further narrowed their potential path to victory, the President and Vice-President agreed to row in behind Massa as a unity candidate.

Three months out from the



Bowing out:
current President
Alberto Fernández



Juan Perón left a long-lasting
political legacy in Argentina



Charismatic
populist libertarian
Javier Milei



Right-wing hopefuls
Patricia Bullrich
and (left) Horacio
Rodríguez Larreta



Peronists current
VP Cristina Fernández
de Kirchner and (right)
Sergio Massa



election, it is the centre-right opposition coalition, Juntos por el Cambio, that looks to be in pole position to recapture the Presidency.

Former Security Minister, Patricia Bullrich, and Mayor of Buenos Aires, Horacio Rodríguez Larreta, are locked in a close battle ahead of the August primary, which should see one of them emerge as front-runner ahead of October's vote. These two candidates are associated, respectively, with the hardline and moderate centre-right camps.

Despite the dire economic situation and weak government approval ratings, it will be far from plain sailing for the opposition, however. Peronism can still count on bedrock support among about a third of voters. In a fractured field, this could be sufficient at least to reach a second-round run-off.

In fact, polling suggests support is split three ways. Javier Milei, a charismatic and populist libertarian, has risen to prominence by castigating both the Peronists and the centre-right as being part of the same corrupt 'political caste'.

Although he will not be able to count on the deep political organisation of other leading

Whoever emerges as
new president later
this year, it seems the
best Argentina can
expect is more
austerity under guise
of the IMF programme

candidates – this is, after all, part of his appeal – he has nonetheless forced himself into the reckoning.

Opinion polls put him within striking distance of placing second in October and forcing a run-off. In that event, it is far from inconceivable that supporters of the centre-right would rally behind Milei to shut out the Peronist, assuming the latter is a second round contestant.

A Milei victory would represent something of a national experiment: not only does he come from outside the traditional political duopoly, his

policy programme is one of radical free market fundamentalism. He proposes slashing public spending, abolishing the central bank and unilaterally adopting the US dollar.

Whoever emerges as the new president later this year, it seems the best the people of Argentina can expect is more austerity under the guise of the IMF programme, albeit that president's political inclinations may be decisive in the programme's renegotiation. A shift to the left is not on the cards.

Independent trade unions enjoy new lease of life in Mexico

By Vic Duggan

DONALD Trump was no friend of the labour movement, nor of Mexico. But, ironically, his sabre-rattling around trade policy led to the renegotiation of North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and – following pressure from the US's AFL-CIO during those talks – a landmark labour reform in Mexico.

This move has subsequently led to a strengthening of independent trade unions in the country.

And it means more leverage for Mexican workers campaigning for better pay and conditions as well as reduced risk of US-based employers shifting – or threatening to shift – production to Mexico to take advantage of lower wages and labour standards.

In fact, Mexico's trade unions played an important political role through the 20th century. But, in an effective one-party state from 1930 to 2000, the vast majority of trade unions in the country, under the umbrella of the Confederation of Mexican Workers, comprised the labour wing of the corporatist government headed by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

Political support and labour peace were traded for relatively good pay and conditions for those lucky enough to have union jobs.

Powered by a state-owned oil industry, Mexico enjoyed decades of strong economic growth before hitting the skids and experiencing a debt crisis in the 1980s amid higher interest rates and lower oil prices.

The country then took a neo-liberal turn, with fiscal austerity combined with deregulation and privatisation, culminating with NAFTA coming into force in 1994.

Workers' pay and conditions took a huge hit, and many industrial trade unions degenerated into 'yellow' trade unions, representing the interests of employers over workers. Corruption, coercion and ruthless suppression of organisers were rife.

When PRI finally lost the Presidency in 2000 (until 2012), it was to the right-leaning Party of National Action (PAN) headed by former Coca Cola executive Vicente Fox.

The trade unions lost their privileged place as power brokers with



Independent union SINTTIA ousted an employer-friendly union at a GM car plant in central Mexico, winning its first contract in May last year



Left leaning: Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador

the end of the corporatist regime. However, space slowly opened up for those campaigning for independent trade unions to represent

workers' interests.

There was modest progress with a 2012 labour reform leading to improvements in union transparency and accountability. But, employers – and employer-dominated unions – still held the whip hand.

With NAFTA's successor – the United States, Mexican, Canadian Agreement (USMCA) – due to come into force in 2020, and Mexico now led by Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), arguably the country's first left-wing President, the stage was set for the 2019 labour reform.

A pre-condition of the USMCA, the reform enshrined in law free affiliation and participation in trade unions, federations, or confederations. Meanwhile, union votes would now be carried out on democratic principles. For the first

time Mexican trade unionists would be guaranteed the basic organising rights that we have long taken for granted in Ireland.

For its part, the labour chapter of the USMCA also includes an innovative "Rapid Response Mechanism". This is a streamlined dispute settlement mechanism that helps ensure workers' free association and collective bargaining rights at workplace level.

If a Mexican factory is suspected of failing to comply with Mexican labor legislation, the US and Canada can suspend preferential tariff treatment of the facility's exports within 120 days unless remedial action is taken. By mid-2023, the mechanism had already been invoked at least a half dozen times.

Already, Mexican workers have recorded important wins under

the new regime. Independent trade unions have gained footholds in manufacturing plants, winning recognition and better pay and conditions for their members. Recent reforms represent important progress for trade unionism in Mexico, but much work remains.

Employer-aligned trade unions still predominate in many workplaces and they are adapting their tactics to the new legal regime so as to bolster their position.

Independent trade unions have gained footholds in manufacturing plants, winning recognition and better pay and conditions



For the independent trade union movement to consolidate and grow, it will need resources for mass recruitment.

An important challenge will be to learn to operate strategically at sectoral and national levels, building on successes in individual workplaces.

And, it will need to ensure hard-won autonomy is not eroded by neo-corporatism. Continued international solidarity will be crucial to success on the long road ahead.

Irish Labour History Society

2nd International Conference

14th - 17th September 2023

Thursday 14th September

Registration: 12.00 to 14.15, Liberty Hall.
LIBERTY HALL THEATRE

14.30 Introduction and welcome to Conference by Shay Cody (President ILHS).

14.40-15.25 'Labour, class and labour history since 1980'. Marcel van der Linden, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam.
Chair: Jack McGinley, (ILHS /TCD).

15.30-17.15
Decade of Centenaries presentation on 1923.

15.30-15.45 'Setting the scene, the Irish delegation to the ILO.' Francis Devine (Honorary President ILHS/ Member of the Decades of Centenaries Committee).

15.50-17.15 'The admission of the new state into the League of Nations and membership of the International Labour Organisation'. Patricia O'Donovan and Gerry Finnegan.
Chair: Mary E Daly (UCD).

17.15-17.30 Tea/Coffee break

17.35 -18.55 Labour Historiography – Irish labour history. 'Two sides of the same coin? Connolly & Walker reassessed', Mike Meham; 'Expanding Labour: The Irish New Wave & the New Global Labour History', Christopher J V Loughlin; 'Soviets & Workers Councils in Ireland & Europe, 1917-23: A Comparative Study', Olivier Coquelin.
Chair: Francis Devine.

18.55 -19.25 'Towards a labour history of the Great Famine', John Cunningham.
Chair: Kevin Murphy.

19.30 Launch of ILHS 50th Anniversary Essays, Labour History in Irish History. Edited by John Cunningham (Galway University), Francis Devine (SIPTU College) & Sonja Tiernan (Royal Irish Academy), published by Umiskin Press in association with the ILHS.
Bean an Ti: Catriona Crowe (Hon. President ILHS).

20.15 Followed by reception in Cois Life Bar & Connolly Room, Liberty Hall.



*Irish Labour
History Society*



*Supported by the Department of Tourism,
Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media as
part of the Decade of Centenaries
Programme 2012 - 2023*

Friday 15th September

Registration continues 8.15 to 8.55, Liberty Hall.
LIBERTY HALL THEATRE

9.00 - 9.30 'To the Linen Slaves of Belfast: The Plight and flight of the Millies, 1800-1997', Rebecca Waterson (UU).
Chair: Donal O'Drisceoil.

TCD LONG ROOM HUB
9.00 Welcome: Professor John Horne TCD.
'Comparative European Histories'

9.10-10.00 '1970s Trade Unionism in Italy & France'. Anna Frisone & Luca Bertolani Azaredo.
Chair: John Horne.

FÓRSA HEAD OFFICE, NERNEY'S COURT
9.00-9.45 'UNITE History Project', Jim Mowatt
Chair: Francis Devine.

9.50 Transfer to **LIBERTY HALL** for Plenary Sessions from 10.15 to 13.00 & 13.50 to 15.00

10.15 - 11.00 'Gender, Class & Labour History Since 1980', Sarah-Anne Buckley, GU,
Chair: Moira Leydon (LHS Vice President/ Assistant General Secretary ASTI).

11.05-11.50 Labour Biography: 'Christy Ferguson' Charles Callan. 'From Textiles to human rights, reflections on women and trade unions in Northern Ireland', Margaret Ward.
Chair: Mags O'Brien (ILHS/SIPTU).

LIBERTY HALL
11.15-13.00 'Oral History'.

11.55 -12.55 'Labour in the Newspaper Industry', Ida Milne. Dockers & their Work Practices, Joe Mooney. 'The Guinness Park Royal Brewery, London', Tim Strangleman.
Chair: Mary Muldowney (LHS/DCC).

13.00 -13.45 Lunch in Liberty Hall

LIBERTY HALL
13.50-14.55 'Industrial relations, bargaining, wages & labour law'. 'Americanisation & the reshaping of Ireland's Organised Labour Movement', Peter Murray. 'Political Change, Ideology & Influences in Attitudes to State Ownership of Business in Ireland', Tom Turner.
Chair: Mags O'Brien (SIPTU/ILHS).

15.00-16.00 TU's History Public & Private 'Craft Unions', Luke Dineen; 'Civil & Public Service Unions', Martin Maguire; 'The Irish Women Workers Union: An Activist's Perspective', Therese Caherty.
Chair: Pat Bolger (ILHS/Fórsa).

16.15 Film Session 1 – 'Jim Connell & the Red Flag', Courtesy of: Jim O'Brien, Meath Council of Trade Unions. Introduction by Francis Devine.

FÓRSA, NERNEY'S COURT
15.15-16.15 'Michael Davitt', Carla King. 'The UIL & Labour Unions', John O'Donovan.
Chair: Donal O'Drisceoil.

16.20-17.10 'Planning a new education model for

the island of Ireland' Frank Connolly (SIPTU) & Lexie White (UTU).
Chair: John Boyle (INTO).

TCD LONG ROOM HUB
15.15-16.25 'Gender History, Class, and Sexual Orientation'. 'Queer histories of those involved in the 1916-1923 revolutionary period', Brian Crowley. 'He comes from a most respectable family: Class and policing homosex in Northern Ireland in the 1940s & 1950s', Charles Lynch
Chair: Michael Cronin (Maynooth University).

16.30-17.00 Session on Irish Language – Sceim na gCeardchumann, Des Geraghty.
Chair: Micheal Mac Donncha (ILHS/DCC)

17.10-17.24 Proceed to Liberty Hall Theatre to be seated. N.B. Delegates to be seated by **17.25**.

17.30-19.00 Evening Session (includes invitees from IAIR). 47th Countess Markievicz Memorial Lecture in conjunction with the Irish Association of Industrial Relations (IAIR) – Awaiting formal confirmation of our guest speaker. 'After Hobsbawm (1980) - Globalisation, Europe, and the Irish Working Class'
Chair/Moderator: Michelle O'Sullivan (President IAIR).

Saturday 16th September

FÓRSA, NERNEY'S COURT 9.15 to 18.00

9.15 Film Session 2 – 'A Breed Apart', Gerry Gregg – film on the Slieve Ardagh miners featuring Paddy Bergin.
Introduction: Francis Devine (ILHS-MUI).

9.45-10.45 Voices of Experience - 'The Health Workers Dispute, Northern Ireland, 2019', Anne Speed, (Unison); 'Limerick Soviet: History in the Present', Mike McNamar (Limerick Trades Council); 'A contrasting experience in organising and representing trade union members in Dublin and Kildare', Norman Croke (SIPTU & Kildare Council of Trade Unions).
Chair: Francis Devine (ILHS-MUI).

10.50-11.30 – Socialism, Nationalism & Labour History. 'Whither the Workers' Republic?' Brian Hanley.
Chair: Noel Ward (ILHS, INTO).

11.35-12.15 Trades Councils Republic of Ireland. Betty Tyrrell Collard Dublin (CTU); Kieron Connoll (Bray TC); Luke Dineen (Cork TC); & Michael Wall (Wexford TC).
Chair: Pat Bolger (Fórsa).

12.20-13.10 Irish Public Policy. 'The Marriage Bar in the Civil Service 1893-1973', Laura Bambrick. 'Public Policy & Minimum Wage Regulation', Michelle O'Sullivan.
Chair: Rachel Ryan (SIPTU).

13.15-13.55 Lunch

14.00-14.55 Workers in Literature. 'Inventing the Myth: the protestant working class in Literature', Conall Parr; 'Scottish support for the Irish Citizens Army', Steve Coyle.
Chair: Jack McGinley (ILHS/TCD).

14.50-16.00 The Peace Process, Good Friday Agreement

& Brexit Trade Negotiations. Patricia McKeown (Unison) and Joe Cunningham (SIPTU)
Chair: Bill McCamley. (ILHS-SIPTU)

16.05 -17.05 Irish Labour in the Diaspora. 'The Kirkintollock Bothy Fire 1937 & Irish Seasonal Migrant work', Michael Halpenny. The Connolly Association. Patrick Smylie.
Chair: Donal O'Drisceoil.

17.10 -17.45 Film Session 3 'The Race to the Bottom'. Shirt industry in Derry & Bangladesh. Niall Kearney, A Life.
Speaker: David Joyce (ICTU).

TCD LONG ROOM HUB
14.05-14.45 'Young & Migrant Workers', Yvonne O'Callaghan (ICTU Global Solidarity Committee). 'Migrant Labour in Ireland – a lived experience' Shintija Sheerin (SIPTU).
Chair: Fiona Dunne (ILHS/Fórsa).

14.50-16.00 Trades Councils Northern Ireland: Jim Quinn (Fermanagh Trades Council); Paddy Mackel (Belfast Trades Council); Dooley Harte (Craigavon Trades Council).
Chair: Gerry Murphy (DGS ICTU).

16.05-16.35 Race, Ethnicity, Religion. 'The Irish labour movement & the Catholic Church', Gerard Madden.
Chair: Gillian O'Brien.

16.45-17.30 Reviewing Social Partnership. Phillip O'Connor & Jack O'Connor.
Chair: Jack McGinley (ILHS/TCD).

17.35 Close of Long Room Hub Sessions and vote of thanks to Long Room Hub.

Sunday 17th September

LIBERTY HALL

10.00 Film 'Jer O'Leary - the Bard of Drumcondra'.
Introduction by Francis Devine.

10.30 -11.15 'Social Europe and its Future', Sean Byers (Trademark).
Chair: Owen Reidy.
11.20-12.00 'Class & Class Structure, Globalisation & Austerity', Esther Lynch (ETUC).
Chair: Kevin Murphy (ILHS/KCC).

12.00-13.00 Marxism & the Future of Socialism. 'Back to the Future-Class and its Distinction in 20th Century Intellectual Thinking'. Bernd Buehlbaeher, Eugene McCartan (retired GS of CPI); Helena Sheehan (DCU).
Chair: Oisín O Drisceoil.

13.00 to 13.30 Light Lunch

13.30-14.30 Social Dialogue Discussion, Kevin Callinan (ICTU) & Danny McCoy (IBEC).
Chair: Tom Geraghty (Labour Court).

14.30 -16.00 Labour History in 21st Century. Panel: Emmet O'Connor; Tish Gibbons; Henry Patterson; Mike Meham.
Chair: Shay Cody (ILHS)

16.15-16.30 Conference formal closing and vote of thanks Owen Reidy (Gen Sec ICTU/Trustee ILHS).

Petro building peace and protecting rights



By Nick
MacWilliam

AS Colombia's first progressive government, under President Gustavo Petro, approaches one year in office, what have been its main achievements and challenges?

Petro has attempted to introduce labour, healthcare and pensions reforms to alleviate crushing living conditions that make Colombia one of Latin America's most unequal countries.

However, the president's Historic Pact coalition lacks a majority and has struggled to pass legislation amid strong right-wing opposition towards the progressive agenda.

Despite the historic 2016 peace deal with the FARC guerrillas, many regions of Colombia remain racked by conflict. Having campaigned against the peace process, the previous right-wing government refused to implement important elements such as rural development and security programmes.

These failings have played a major role in an emerging human rights crisis that has seen the killing of more than 1,500 social activists and 370 former FARC members since the agreement was signed in November 2016.

In 2021, trade unions and social movements launched a wave of protests against these developments. A violent police response resulted in the deaths of scores of young people along with other appalling abuses.



President Gustavo Petro

Petro has attempted to introduce labour, healthcare and pensions reforms to alleviate crushing living conditions

Public anger towards the right-wing establishment paved the way for Petro to win the 2022 election on the promise of change.

The victory was achieved through the grassroots mobilisation of rural communities, Indigenous and African-Colombian populations, young people and trade unions.

SIPTU Deputy General Secretary Ethel Buckley visited Colombia with JFC last year. The delegation met survivors of an army massacre that had taken place two months earlier in the village of El Remanso. Eleven villagers had lost their lives in the unprovoked attack.

Following the visit, and along with an international campaign for justice supported by the Irish trade union movement, 25 military officials are now facing trial over the killings.

The Petro government is attempting to build peace and protect human rights by entering dialogue with armed groups, a policy welcomed by the United Nations and others.

There are many complex challenges facing the government. More than 180 young people are still in prison over the 2021 protests despite a lack of evidence. They recently ended a hunger

There are many complex challenges facing the government. More than 180 young people are still in prison over the 2021 protests despite a lack of evidence

strike after the government agreed to meet with them. The Attorney General, however, has blocked their release.

Justice for Colombia, along with SIPTU and other Irish trade unions, is campaigning for the release of these young people, along with support for trade unionism, human rights and peace.

You can support JFC's important campaign work by visiting www.justiceforcolombia.org

Nick MacWilliam is Trade Unions and Programmes Officer at JFC. He recently briefed a fringe meeting of Congress BDC on the latest news from Colombia.

'Not On Our Watch' has been written by actor and playwright Louise Mathews after many hours of talking to the members of staff who occupied a homeless hostel in West Belfast.

It is a searing account of events that followed the hostel's management committee announcing the closure and how the workers, supported by Unite and their community took a stand.

Bringing the play back this summer places a spotlight on how the former hostel remains empty despite the offer of 'enhanced services' to be in place by May 2022.

The Dublin performance takes place in the Teachers Club, Parnell Square on 12th August.

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Promoting 'culture of safety' at Dublin Port

SAFETY must be the key concern of all employers and trade unionists. Following a spate of accidents, some fatal, at ports in recent years, Dublin Port launched an initiative in a bid to maximise what Harbour Master, Michael McKenna, calls a "culture of safety" at the facility.

Launched in September 2022, the Dublin SafePort initiative is the result of collaboration between Dublin Port Company and seven terminal operators at Dublin Port.

The initial seven participating terminal operators are Dublin Ferryport Terminals, Doyle Shipping Group, Irish Ferries, P&O Ferries, Peel Ports Group (MTL), Seatruck Ferries and Stena Line. Together, they account for an estimated 75% of port activity.

As McKenna highlighted to Liberty, the port is an environment with a large number of risk factors including cars being offloaded from ships, oil and other flammable materials being pumped in bulk and millions of tonnes of containers being unloaded annually.

McKenna said: "You have an awful lot of heavy machinery and vehicles moving in an area where you also have very delicate human beings. You are also beside the water so there are marine risks as well."

The port-wide initiative has seen Dublin Port Company and the seven terminal operators increase their collaboration to align and standardise safety practices and procedures across the 261-hectare port estate. Under Dublin SafePort, safety awareness campaigns, training and initiatives take place port-wide with the objective of enhancing the 'safety culture' in the Port.

McKenna explained: "Each company has safety management plans, where we saw there was a gap in that human relationship to safety beyond the nuts and bolts processes.

"They can be enhanced in a great way if people have a better understanding that they are cared about by their leaders, that they can look out for their colleagues on the ground and that they can intervene if necessary."

He added: "If you see something speak up is the key message."

Dublin SafePort operates on three levels with an executive group bringing together the CEOs of the various companies involved, this then empowered a working group which has drawn up the policies to improve safety across the Port. The working group,



You have a lot of heavy machinery and vehicles moving in an area where you also have very delicate human beings

where appropriate, liaises with the relevant authorities, including An Garda Síochána, the Road Safety Authority, and the Health and Safety Authority.

However, according to McKenna, the most crucial element is the on-the-ground-level approach which brings the initiative to the workers



in the port facilities.

This is focused on a weekly engagement session for workers on a Friday morning. These are led by 'safety champions' who are workers specially trained to lead improvements in safety culture in their workplaces.

Some of the measures which have emerged as part of the SafePort initiative have been a reduction in the speed limit across the

Port estate to 40 km per hour on the main roads. Signage has also been made more uniform and obvious. Varying speed limits in the terminal areas which were from 15 km to 25 km have also been aligned at 20 km.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) has been aligned at level 3 which is the highest standard. This includes high-visibility clothing which is in a process of being standardised across all terminals.

McKenna said: "We now have a set of 'golden rules' concerning the operation of vehicles in the Port area, the management of freight trains and other key operations such as walkways. These 'golden rules' are being shared across the Port in a uniform manner. There are now relationships across all the Terminals which is driving a positive culture of change."

He added: "The Irish Port Safety

Dublin SafePort initiative is supported by our members ... It provides greater safety for workers and of other port users in this major gateway to the country

Forum, which brings together management from other Irish ports and some terminal operators, is now considering the successes of the Dublin SafePort scheme which may see some of them replicated elsewhere."

SIPTU representatives are among those who have endorsed the effectiveness of the SafePort initiative. SIPTU Organiser, Fran McDonnell, said: "The Dublin SafePort initiative is supported by our members as vital in the day-to-day operations of the port estate. It provides greater safety for workers and of other port users in this major gateway to the country.

"SIPTU members are also currently involved in the health and safety initiatives in individual companies within other ports. Vast improvements have been made by their efforts and there has been a tangible reduction in the risk of injury in these busy environments."

He added: "One other port in the country operates a similar SafePort model. That is Warrenpoint Port in county Down. We are of the view that the SafePort initiative should be implemented throughout all ports on the island of Ireland."



Dublin SafePort

The Dublin SafePort logo is inspired by the Poolbeg Lighthouse, the original safety beacon for Dublin Port



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Putting quality and sustainability in the driving seat at Bus Éireann

THE purpose of Bus Éireann, as Ireland's national bus company, is to connect people with whom and with what matters to them, helping to make life better for many people across our cities, towns and communities.

It is now a proud member of the Supporting Quality campaign, sharing its values of creating quality products and services in good workplaces.

The importance of Bus Éireann to the country is clear – with 89.5 million passenger journeys recorded in 2022. This was a return to growth above pre-Covid-19 levels with record passenger demand trends evident by the end of the year.

This period has also seen major progress on the sustainability agenda at Bus Éireann, including the launch in January 2023 of Ireland's first all-electric bus service in Athlone town.

The new 100% electric town bus service provides a glimpse into the future – one where low carbon/carbon-free emissions transport is the norm throughout Ireland.

The service also highlights its future role as a key sustainable mobility provider under Ireland's Climate Action Plan to reduce transport emissions by 50% by 2030.

In encouraging people to shift to public transport alternatives, Bus Éireann had major success in 2022 with its Navan town bus service, with greatly expanded services re-

sulting in a 750% increase in passengers.

Bus Éireann Chief Executive Officer, Stephen Kent, said: "One of the lessons learned is that customers are encouraged to use public transport when provided with reliable and frequent services. Combined with the Government's initiative to reduce fares, public transport is a more compelling proposition than ever before."

"Our schools transport services remain a source of enormous pride for the company."

"In 2022 we enlarged the scheme and issued tickets for school transport for over 150,000 pupils per day for the 2022/2023 school year, including 17,500 Special Educational Needs students."

Bus Éireann and push for gender balance

IN WHAT has been a traditionally male-dominated sector, Bus Éireann has been making progress in recent years to achieve greater gender balance.

In 2022, the company's first gender pay gap report, found a mean gender pay gap of -10.2% in favour of female employees and a median gender pay gap of -5.6% in favour of female employees.

Notwithstanding this outcome, the report also identified areas for action, in particular the overall high male-to-female employee ratio, 90% male and 10% female in the company.

A strategic goal is to address gender imbalance including increasing Service Supervisor roles from 2% in 2019 to 10% in 2030, and to attract more female driving and craftworker roles.

To this end, Bus Éireann held female driver recruitment open days at bus stations in Dublin and Cork earlier this year.

SIPTU Organiser, Andrew Quigley, said: "SIPTU members welcome Bus Éireann holding female driver recruitment open days.



SIPTU member Margaret Lynch had been a school bus driver for 20 years. For the last two years she has worked on Bus Éireann commuter services based in Westport. She said it is a rewarding and enjoyable job, adding 'the crew in Westport are more like family than colleagues'. Bus Éireann female driver recruitment poster (right).



"Women bus drivers play a vital role in supporting quality transportation services."

"Their presence ensures diverse perspectives and experiences in the transport industry, leading to a more inclusive and responsive public transport system. Women bus drivers as skilled professionals, contribute to enhancing safety measures, punctuality and providing customer service."

"Bus Éireann actively recruiting women bus drivers produces role models that will inspire others to pursue a career in what is seen as a male-dominated sector."

He added: "These women create a positive impact on society fostering equality and reinforcing the importance of equal opportunities

for all.

"They join a team dedicated and committed to support the overall quality and efficiency of Bus Éireann's public transport network throughout Ireland."



Heineken pioneers Life Stage policies

SIPTU activists in Heineken Ireland are leading the way on the introduction of new Life Stage policies which seek to assist workers facing challenges which can impact on their working lives.

On 1st June, five new policies were introduced by the company for its employees at its plants and offices in Cork and Dublin or those employed as reps across the country.

These included policies on the following areas; adoptive leave and fostering leave, domestic violence and coercive control, fertility leave, maternity leave/surrogacy leave, and the menopause.

SIPTU shop stewards, Fiona Herbert and Siobhan Spillane, played a crucial role in their introduction. Both activists had been engaging with the Human Resources (HR) department in Heineken Ireland since 2017 highlighting the need for such policies that would feature specific entitlements and wider workplace education programmes.

SIPTU Shop Steward, Siobhan Spillane, whose personal interest in the initiative was fired by her trade unionist and left-wing feminist politics, said: "Recognition of these issues and opening up the dialogue about them was key. There is a need for an honest approach with everyone in the workplace about the life challenges that many of them and their colleagues face.

My involvement with the SIPTU

Equality Committee was crucial. Attending its meetings would motivate me to keep on going with pushing for the best policies in these areas in my own workplace.

"Equality Committee members would share the best policies from other workplaces, or parts of them, which I would then pull together and present to the Heineken HR department. Fiona Herbert and I supporting each other and working together was key to keeping these topics alive in the workplace.

"Fiona's openness and willingness to broach what can be seen as a taboo topic meant many of us felt that we could do the same and we shared our stories.

"The company really came on-board with what we were doing after the Covid-19 pandemic. We had our first post-Covid company conference in May 2022. It brought together people from the offices in Cork and Dublin along with reps who are mainly out on the road. The focus of that conference was really about caring and looking out for one another."

Fiona Herbert added: "I hit the menopause in 2017 and there was nothing available to me, so we got together to try and make change. I was lucky to be supported by my colleagues and in a company that was willing to engage. We kept it on the agenda with management until we got something concrete over the line. We all had a "can do" attitude so we got there in the end.



SIPTU Shop Steward, Fiona Herbert, Heineken HR Director Alfonso Garcia, SIPTU Shop Steward, Siobhán Spillane, and SIPTU Organiser Sharon Ryan, at the Heineken Ireland production plant in Cork

"The reality is that the menopause will affect half of the workforce at some stage so these policies should not be taboo they should be the norm. We had the union at our back and that gave us confidence to follow it through until the end."

SIPTU Organiser, Sharon Ryan, said: "I wish to acknowledge the unbelievable work and commitment of Fiona and Siobhán. They are a credit to SIPTU and we are extremely lucky to have these ladies as our representatives.

"The Heineken Human Resources Director, Alfonso Garcia, meets the SIPTU Heineken national committee once a month. At these meetings, Fiona and Siobhán passionately spoke about the importance of these policies. Thankfully Heineken Ireland listened and worked with our activists to introduce effective measures in these areas."

She added: "I believe the success that we have had in Heineken provides a clear blueprint for similar action in other SIPTU-organised workplaces."

To this end, the SIPTU Agriculture, Ingredients, Food and Drink Sector Committee, under the direction of the Sector Organiser, Denis Gormalley, has set up a sub-group to help with writing up Life Stage policies in conjunction with shop stewards from across the country.

New Life Stage policies at a glance...

Fertility leave policy

- Up to 10 additional paid leave days at critical stages of the treatment process in a 12-month period.
- Working from home during key treatment dates where feasible.
- Time off to attend clinical appointments for both partners.

Domestic violence & coercive control policy

- Change of work phone number, where relevant, to mitigate any unwanted calls/messages.
- Redeployment, relocation, remote working, return to the office (if working remotely).
- Up to 10 days additional paid leave to attend legal meetings, court attendances, or other meetings as required.
- Assistance in finding emergency accommodation.

Adoptive leave & fostering leave policy

- If the child is under school going age, you will be paid a top up on your Foster Carer allowance to your full salary for the term of the placement for up to 24 weeks.
- Additional flexibility over and above the current flexible working model during school holidays. You will also be able to attend medical appointments as required for the child without any loss of pay.

Maternity leave & surrogacy leave policy

- Up to 10 days additional paid leave, for both parents, outside of the company sick pay scheme in the case of a the loss of pregnancy.
- Entitlement to additional paid break times during the working day to enable you to express milk.
- Both parents are entitled to paid time off work to attend two ante-natal classes.

Menopause policy

A commitment to provide:

- On-site shower facilities.
- Where possible the option to move to a desk close to a window/bathroom.
- Sanitary products in all female bathrooms.
- Flexibility outside of Hybrid Working model.
- Paid time off for menopause-related health appointments.
- Understanding when a need arises for a colleague to leave work, decline a meeting at short notice.





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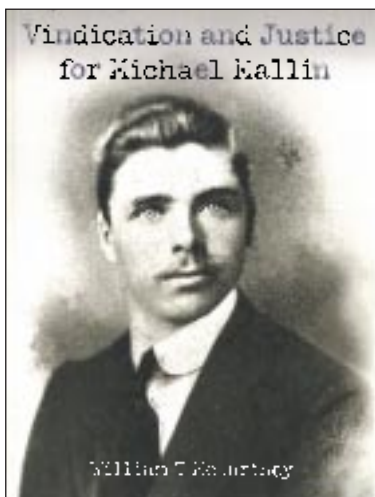
Vindication and justice for Michael Mallin

Vindication and Justice for Michael Mallin

By William T McCartney
(Pennybourne Highmoor Publishing, 2023)

As its title suggests, this book is a response to what the author believes is a "slur on Michael Mallin's reputation" which only came to light in 2001. Mallin was one of the executed leaders of the 1916 Rising and fought at St Stephen's Green along with his vice-commandant in the Irish Citizen Army, Constance Markievicz, during the rebellion.

According to contemporary and subsequent records, testimonies and other evidence, Commandant Mallin led the troops until the surrender on 30th April, 1916. Following his court martial on 5th May, 1916, it was alleged by the British presiding officer, Colonel EWSK Maconchy that Mallin had denied



his role as commander and said that Countess Markievicz, was giving the orders. This claim only came to light in 2016, eight-five years after his execution on 8th May, 1916.

For decades, his son, Father Joe Mallin SJ, spoke of his father's heroic life and death and in 2016 compiled a detailed statement refuting the claim made in notes

submitted by Maconchy after the 1916 court martial. Father Mallin died at the age of 94 in 2018 in Hong Kong.

Born in the Liberties in 1874, Michael Mallin served in the British army in India (where Ma-

This book is not just important for its vindication of Michael Mallin but also for the detail it provides of his public and private life

conchy also served) and on his return to Dublin worked as a silk weaver, was active during the 1913 Dublin Lockout and the ICA of which he later became chief of staff.

The assertion that he had denied his position as commander is in conflict with an abundance of evidence gathered by McCartney in this well researched and presented work, including one of his final letters from jail which he signed as "first in command".

This book is not just important for its vindication of Michael

Mallin but also for the detail it provides of his public and private life and the letters, photographs and other original material that significantly adds to our knowledge of this courageous socialist, republican and labour activist.

Frank Connolly



A contingent of the Irish Citizen Army outside Liberty Hall in September 1914.

CAN YOU SING!

THEN THE PEOPLE'S COLLEGE CHOIR NEEDS YOU!

We are a mixed-voice choir of 45 members, are a friendly and welcoming bunch of people from Dublin and neighbouring counties and include trade union and community activists. This year marks our 30th anniversary and we are looking for new members to share in the joy of singing together in harmony.

The choir was founded in 1993 by the then President of the People's College, Dr Sheila Conroy, first ever female member of the ITGWU Executive. The College itself was established in 1948 to promote worker and cultural education and the choir is part of that wider programme. We sing an extensive range of songs in a non-competitive atmosphere; some old, some new, some folk, traditional Irish airs and modern popular songs as well as songs of social progress - some of which we have performed at trade union organised events and even in Áras an Uachtaráin.

We rehearse from 8.30 p.m. until 10 p.m. each Tuesday evening in Club na Múinteoirí (the 'Teachers' Club', Parnell Square). Our choral year runs from September until May of the following year.

Why not join some fellow union members? Contact the musical director, Paul Walsh, at peoplescollegechoir@gmail.com. Rehearsals resume in the 'Club' on Tuesday, 12th September 2023.

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Liberty Hall Theatre
Dublin

Touissant L'Ouverture: the Black Bonaparte



By Michael
Halpenny

'The Black Jacobins – Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution'
By C.L.R. James
Published by
Penguin Modern Classics, 2022

ON 21st June, crowds gathered at Vinegar Hill outside Enniscorthy, county Wexford, to witness the re-enactment of the battle which was fought there on that date in 1798 between 16,000 United Irish freedom fighters and 13,000 British Redcoats.

It was a seminal moment in the rebellion of that year which saw risings in the North and also in the West.

A relatively small revolutionary French force landed at Killala, county Mayo, joining up with United Irish rebels there and routed the British at what came to be known as the "Castlebar Races" and established the short-lived "Republic of Connacht".

An earlier, much-larger French expedition sent to aid the United Irish cause, had attempted to land at Bantry Bay in December 1796. This failed mainly due to winter storms with substantial losses of ships and men. Had it succeeded the course of Irish – and probably European history – would have been markedly different.

The Rebellion of 1798 failed but the willingness of revolutionary France to aid the United Irish cause was never forgotten and is immortalised not just in the history of the period but in songs such as 'O! The French are on the



sea'. Not for nothing was 1798 known as "Bliain na bhFrancach" (The Year of the French).

However, what is less well known is that the French were also on the sea during that wider period of change in European affairs, combatting a popular rebellion in the French colony of Saint Domingue in the Caribbean, on an island roughly the size of Ireland.

The island as a whole had been annexed by the Spanish following

The Rebellion of 1798 failed but the willingness of revolutionary France to aid the United Irish cause was never forgotten



Christopher Columbus's expedition to the "New World". They named it Hispaniola and in 1517 with the blessing of both church and state began the practice of importing African slaves to work the colony. In 1695, the western part of the island came under French control and under their rule from the mid 1700s on the importation of African slaves for labour in French coffee plantations leapt by thousands each year.

The rebellion itself began in 1791, two years after the storming of the Bastille in Paris, starting as a revolt seeking emancipation and the abolition of slavery. It eventually grew into a movement for national freedom and independence, in the process defeating local colonists and forces of the French monarchy.

They also contended successfully with first a Spanish and then a British invasion finally overcoming an expedition sent by Napoleon Bonaparte in 1803 and replacing the colony of Saint Domingue with the independent state of Haiti.

James's pioneering book on the Haitian Revolution was first published 85 years ago and completely changed the way colonial history was written by placing the insurgent slaves and their leader, Toussaint L'Ouverture, at the centre of the story.

In terms of his gifts and abilities, the author regarded L'Ouverture as on a par with Bonaparte himself and "one of the most remarkable men of a period rich in remarkable men".

'The Black Jacobins' was written and read at a time when colonised peoples the world over were struggling to break free of European colonial rule. As such it was not only a meticulous account of the Haitian Revolution from a Marxist stance, but moreover an inspiration to struggling peoples from Africa to Castro's Cuba and his own native Trinidad.

It also pointed up the contradictions of the French Revolution and the subsequent history of the French Empire. In the words of Christienna Fryar who supplies the Introduction to the 2022 edition "... for France in the nineteenth century, the existence of Haiti was inconvenient to the revolutionary mythology ... In other words, the Haitian Revolution asked questions that French revolutionary ideas were insufficiently universal to answer".

For Irish readers, it provides a more-nuanced context within which we view the Irish struggle for national self-determination from 1798 onwards and also removes the Haitian Revolution from the shadows of history to its proper place as, in the words of Fryar, "the third great Enlightenment revolution".

The greatest athlete you've never heard of

"Beryl"
By Jeremy Wilson
(pursuit) 2022

As the annual men's Tour de France enters its third week, all eyes begin to turn to Sunday 23rd July when the remaining cyclists, stars and "domestiques" alike, roll through the streets of Paris for what is more often than not a coronation long decided in the earlier gruelling mountain stages and high tactic team

performances. When the whole caravan wraps up, it does so only momentarily, for next up is Le Tour des Femmes, the womens' race.

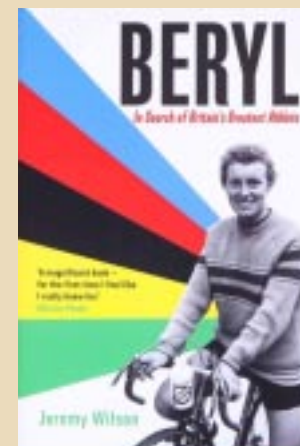
However, standing in the shadows on the Champs-Élysée at both Tours end will likely be the ghost of the woman regarded as the greatest British athlete you've never heard of. She is described by well-known actor and left-wing activist, Maxine Peake, who's 2014 play about her ran to sell-out audi-

ences, as "housewife and mother, who worked full-time and yet this incredible specimen of an athlete". Her name was Beryl Burton and she dominated both women and men's competitive cycling in Britain in the 1950's and '60's, establishing indoor and outdoor records including one set in 1959 which lasted until 2017. All this time she kept working, mostly on rhubarb farms in her native Yorkshire. If ever there was a real "tough of the track" here she is in

this, award winning, work that captivates cyclists and general readers alike.

She is best remembered in cycling and sporting lore for the moment when she was on her way to establishing a world record that would stand for 50 years. Passing the crest fallen leading male rider of the day, she turned and offered him a liquorice allsorts sweet. Now that's what you call style!

Michael Halpenny



Who will lift Sam on final day?

Kerry's younger legs will outpace Dublin experience

■ By Ted Kenny

THIS YEAR's All-Ireland Football Final between Dublin and Kerry will be an epic affair with Dublin's Stephen Cluxton and James McCarthy seeking to achieve a record-breaking nine All-Ireland medals which will ensure their entry into GAA history books – an achievement that will probably never be beaten.

Dublin is a very dangerous team this year and I would compare them to a dying wasp with one last sting left in them. Ciaran Kilkenny, Stephen Cluxton, James McCarthy and Dean Rock have multiple All-Irelands between them and a home advantage that is worth a lot to them.

The Dublin players will be trying their utmost to win this game

to ensure their captain, McCarthy, achieves his ninth All-Ireland medal as he is a player, along with Cluxton, that is regarded highly within the squad.

The midfield battle is going to be a big decider on the day with Dublin's Brian Fenton and Brian Howard going up against Jack Barry and Diarmuid O'Connor. I believe whoever wins the ground here will be champions.

Dublin's forward line have a huge addition in Con O'Callaghan and is a goal-scoring team so the Kerry backline will have to be on top of their game to stop them firing goals.

Has Dublin the defensive strength to deal with the Cliffords and Seán O'Shea? That is a difficult question and only time will tell, but the Dublin backline have



been vulnerable in previous games.

There won't be too much between the teams. Last year, it was down to the last kick of the game and Kerry was lucky as, I believe, if the game went to extra time Dublin would have won.

Dublin has McCaffrey, Cluxton and Con O'Sullivan back this year but will they be able to match a

young Kerry team who may have the legs on them?

Kerry's defence has been improving in every game since matches against the Louth, Tyrone and then the Derry games. They are back to where they were last year which will be a key area to beat Dublin.

It will be important for Kerry to get the ball transitioned from their

defence up to the forwards as quickly as possible.

Here's hoping for another classic between these two great teams.

Verdict: Kerry by the slightest of margins, but maybe after extra time.

It's sure to be a close-run thing but Dublin will edge it

■ By Conal Devine

IT IS going to be a high scoring game because both teams have some defensive flaws. Ultimately, it is going to be the strength of the bench in the last 15 minutes that will determine the winner.

Kerry rely heavily on David Clifford and Seán O'Shea for scores and they would be on any team in the country. They were very fortu-

nate that both played well against Derry. The other Kerry players did not step up at all until substitutions were made and the Derry legs went in the last quarter.

What Dublin can bring on in the last 15 minutes are players who are getting on a bit like Jack McCaffrey and Dean Rock but they have the experience to bring it over the line against Kerry.

The quality coming off the bench for Dublin is far better than

what is available to Kerry.

Kerry will need to put in a big lead as they did last year in the semi-final until the super point from O'Shea that won the game. It is likely to be as narrow but will probably be a higher scoring game this time.

There is always a Dublin player that out-performs such as Colm Basquel did against Mayo in the quarter finals this year. Con O'Callaghan is coming into top

form and will be key as a lot will revolve around him.

It is difficult to control David Clifford unless you put two men on him and he needs to be kept away from his favourite foot. Derry did a good enough job but he still scored nine points.

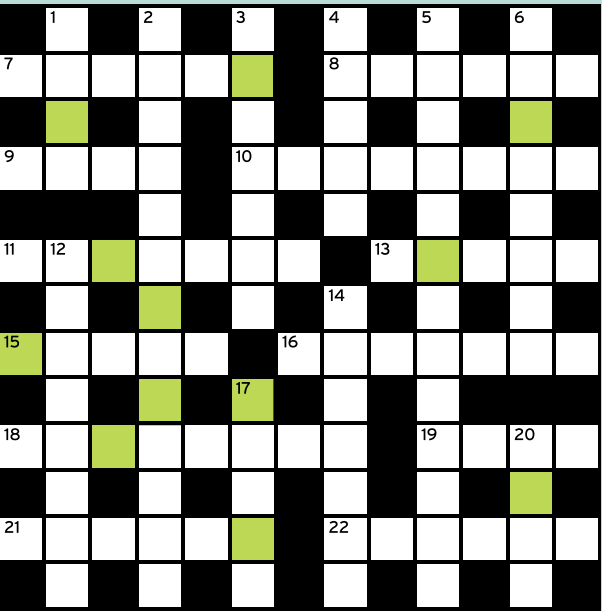
Hopefully, there will be a Dublin forward who is on fire. In the last final we won against Kerry, it was Eoin Murchan. He sauntered up in the first minute of the second half

and scored the decisive goal.

The other point is that Pat Gilroy is pacing up and down the sideline and he has had a huge influence on this year's team.

Verdict: There won't be much in it, maybe two or three points at the end, with Dublin coming out on top.

Liberty Crossword



ACROSS

- 7 Go-getter (6)
- 8 Caused by injury (6)
- 9 Immediately after (4)
- 10 Lines of defence in war (8)
- 11 Moving at a very slow pace (7)
- 13 Ancient Peruvians (5)
- 15 Cutting Tools (5)
- 16 Once the major culture of Spain (7)
- 18 Records the story of one who has died (8)
- 19 Chilly (4)
- 21 A primate (6)
- 22 On the train (6)

DOWN

- 1 Thick rubber ring (4)
- 2 Taking part in something (13)
- 3 A sailor (7)
- 4 Saccharine (5)
- 5 Carries out work on behalf of another company (13)
- 6 Can't get a word in... (8)
- 12 Viking ship (8)
- 14 Does the same as (7)
- 17 Jeer (5)
- 20 "___ of the Flies" (4)

*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 to be entered into a **prize draw to win a hamper to the value of €200**. The winner of the crossword quiz will be published in the next edition of Liberty.

*Terms and conditions apply.

The winner of the crossword competition in the April/May issue was Carol Anderson.

The answer was solution.

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