

Liberty

Vol. 20 No 2

April/May 2023

ISSN 0791-458X

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Low pay cause of childcare crisis

by Scott Millar

Childcare workers are suffering increased stress and burnout because of a staffing crisis in services due to low pay rates, a SIPTU survey has found.

The annual SIPTU Early Years Staff Survey, published on 20th April, found that of non-managerial staff, 81% agreed that staff shortages are a problem in their workplace. The top three consequences were 'stress and burnout' (73%), 'increased workload' (68%) and 'not enough time for non-contact work' (61%).

A majority of managers who had to recruit staff in the last 12 months described it as 'extremely difficult' with the increasing workload for existing staff identified as the biggest consequence of the staffing crisis. They identified low pay as either the 'biggest obstacle' (38%) or a 'significant obstacle' (39%) to recruiting staff. A majority of services also reported that they currently have a staff vacancy. *Continued on page 2*



From left to right: SIPTU Early Years members Aisling Butler, Lynnette Monk and Edel Dunne who are employed at the Kilbarrack Foxfield Preschool, Dublin 5, hold copies of the SIPTU Early Years Staff Survey 2023, launched on Thursday 20th April. Photo: Tim Gannon.



WORKERS RIGHTS CENTRE

1800 747 881

8.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m.,
Monday - Friday
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Produced, designed, edited and printed by trade union labour.

Printed by The Irish Times, City West, Dublin.

Liberty is dedicated to providing a platform for progressive news and views.

If you have any ideas for articles or comments please contact: communications@siptu.ie

Liberty is published by the Services, Industrial, Professional & Technical Union, Liberty Hall, Dublin 1

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National Ambulance Service members begin ballot for strike action

SIPTU members in the National Ambulance Service (NAS) commenced a ballot for strike action on 24th April, in a dispute regarding the failure of the HSE to fully implement a series of reforms which would benefit this vital public service.

The proposed reforms are contained in the Roles and Responsibilities Report for NAS, which was commissioned by NAS management, SIPTU and the HSE. Its recommendations include the

introduction of new grades of staff, new job descriptions and the upskilling of existing staff.

SIPTU Sector Organiser, Ted Kenny, said: "Our members have fully co-operated with the plan drawn up by management to develop the service and they expect commitments concerning new grades and pay scales which were made to them to be met. It is management's function to secure the necessary funding to deliver the agreed vision for the service. This includes any payments

arising to staff as part of the overall restructuring plan."

He added: "SIPTU is of the view that the business case for the implementation of this report is outside the terms of the Building Momentum Public Service Agreement. We do not accept the premise that delivery of the service level aspects of the plan are permitted yet the commitments to staff in return are deemed to be a cost increasing claim.

The ballot for strike action will

Cartamundi redundancy package to be voted on

SIPTU representatives and management at the board game manufacturer, Cartamundi, have concluded a set of redundancy package proposals following negotiations. Members, who will lose their jobs at the company's Waterford plant when it ends production later this year, will vote for the acceptance or rejection of the proposals on 4th May.

SIPTU Manufacturing Division Organiser, Greg Ennis, the lead negotiator for members employed at the plant in the redundancy proposals talks told Liberty: "In the negotiations, we sought to secure a package for workers which respects fully their commitment to the company over the 45 years this plant has been in operation.

"Several of our members have been employed at the plant since it opened. They have been deeply

affected by what is now the inevitable closure of the plant.

"The decision of the company to end production is not just a major blow to the workers, their families and the Waterford community but will have significant economic consequences for the South-East region."

In late March, management announced that it intended to end all production at the plant on 31st August, 2023.

SIPTU says domestic waste sector needs radical reform

Following the announcement by waste companies, Panda Recycling and Citybin, that they are to increase charges for compost bin collection in Dublin, SIPTU Divisional Organiser, Karan O Loughlin, has said that the entire domestic waste collection sector is in need of radical overhaul.

Karan O Loughlin said: "Almost 1 in 4 households in the state currently have no domestic waste collection service. A recent report by the Institute of Public Administration (IPA),

commissioned by Dublin City Council, showed that this country is unique across the EU in the manner in which the domestic waste sector is organised.

"This comparative IPA study also found that Dublin was the only city reviewed which has a chronic illegal dumping problem. There is an intrinsic link between the lack of universal waste services provision and illegal dumping.

"The Government has adopted an exclusively market approach to domestic waste collection, with side-by-side competition within a single local authority area. In all

other European cities, there is a tender for a single provider, within each local authority area, who must meet strict criteria in relation to the quality of customer service, labour contracts and environmental controls.

"The current structure of the domestic waste sector is bad for the citizen, bad for the workers in the sector and bad for the environment. SIPTU, Fórsa and Connect unions will be meeting with Oireachtas members in early May to discuss the findings of the IPA report and to campaign for legislative reform within the

Continued from page 1 — Low Pay cause of childcare crisis

Early Years Manager, Lynnette Monk, said: "I dread the thought of any staff leaving our service. Hiring is so difficult now we could be short staffed for months. If we can't reach our staff to child ratio, it means we have to reduce the number of children we can care for."

"Between 2011 and 2021, over 52,000 childcare qualifications were obtained in Ireland. There is no shortage of qualified childcare workers. There is a shortage of

adequate pay."

SIPTU Head of Organising, Darragh O'Connor, said: "The Early Years sector is caught in a vicious cycle. Stress and low pay are pushing people out of their profession, which in turn increases the workload on the remaining staff, driving more people to leave.

"The survey clearly shows that low pay is by far the biggest obstacle to recruiting and retaining staff. Until this is addressed, the staffing crisis will continue with

real consequences for children, parents, staff and services."

He added: "This survey will help inform negotiations at the Workplace Relations Commission between childcare sector employers, SIPTU workplace activists and the Government concerning a new deal aimed at setting minimum rates of pay in Early Years workplaces."

Politicians from Sinn Féin, the Labour Party and Social Democrats attended the launch of the survey

Low pay undermines childcare quality

By Scott Millar

The annual SIPTU Early Years Staff Survey, has found that 38% of Early Years managers believe that the recruitment and retention of staff is the biggest problem facing their services. A further 33% stated that it is a 'significant problem'.

Specifically, recruiting staff was 'extremely difficult' for a majority of services, with low pay identified as either the 'biggest obstacle' (38%) or a 'significant obstacle' (39%). A majority of services also reported that they currently have a staff vacancy.

Many of the more than 2,000 respondents to the survey left their own comments outlining how the staffing issue was affecting their own workplaces. These comments were collected on a confidential basis with respondents only providing their first name.

Early Years Manager, Elaine, said: "It is a constant battle hiring inexperienced staff who are unaware of the requirement of the role, unaware of education programmes and other regulations. Many find the rates of pay so low that they cannot find suitable accommodation and end up leaving the job and we go back to square



From left to right: SIPTU Head of Organising, Darragh O'Connor, SIPTU Early Years activist Lynnette Monk and SIPTU Sector Organiser, Diane Jackson, outside Daíl Éireann on 20th April. Photo: Bryan Meade

one."

An overwhelming majority of managers (93%) also reported that recruitment challenges are negatively affecting service provision. They identified 'difficulty in maintaining staff to child ratios' (66%), 'lower quality

for children' (49%) and a 'reduction of service' (42%) as key concerns.

While staffing challenges clearly affect the sustainability of services, high staff turnover and understaffing also undermine quality for children.

Early Years Manager, Aoife, said:



"Children don't have the same care giver for very long. This affects their routine and the trust they build up with the care giver. Understandably, the children are upset and the parents too."

SIPTU Head of Organising, Darragh O'Connor, said: "High-quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) plays a vital role in the cognitive, social and emotional development of young children. Not only does it provide a safe and

nurturing environment but also offers opportunities for them to learn, socialise, and grow.

"However, low pay and high staff turnover can significantly affect the quality of ECEC with studies

While staffing challenges clearly affect the sustainability of services, high staff turnover and understaffing also undermine quality for children

showing that higher staff turnover rates are associated with lower quality care and poorer outcomes for children. Additionally, low pay has been found to be a significant predictor of staff turnover."

The full survey can be read at

Union seeks urgent meeting with Stryker after incident leaves man critically injured

SIPTU representatives have sought an urgent meeting with the management of multinational medical products manufacturer Stryker to discuss health and safety issues after a serious industrial incident at its plant in Carrigtwohill, county Cork, left two workers injured, one of them critically.

The incident which occurred on 18th April concerned an explosion and fire on the roof of the plant where the two injured men were working. One of the men, aged 41, suffered extensive burn and blast injuries to his head and upper body and remains in a critical condition in hospital.

SIPTU Sector Organiser, Neil McGowan said: "The two workers and their families are uppermost in our thoughts and

all SIPTU members at the plant wish them a speedy and full recovery from the serious injuries they suffered.

"We will await the outcome of an investigation by the Health and Safety Authority (HAS) before we comment further on the incident.

He added: "We have written to management seeking an urgent meeting to discuss the safety concerns of workers on the three Stryker sites in Carrigtwohill. We want to ensure that the best safety systems possible are in place across the sites."

SIPTU Organiser, Allen Dillon, added: "Our members have previously raised health and safety concerns and we have been seeking engagement with management on these matters since 2019. We want to take a collaborative approach in order to ensure the safest possible

environment for all workers on the Cork sites."

In a statement issued on behalf of the family of the critically injured man, a spokesperson said: "He is a kind, mild-mannered family man, 41 years old, with a loving wife, a baby, a young child, and a stepson who are in his world. His devoted parents, wife and siblings are devastated and keeping vigil at the hospital. Our extended family are heartbroken and feel helpless at the shocking turn of events."

In November 2021, The Irish Examiner reported that a group of Stryker employees had made a protected disclosure to the HSA about a raft of health and safety concerns in relation to operations at the three Stryker plants in East Cork.

Women's Equality over 50 years

Looking to the past and lessons for the future on May Day 2023

nwc 2023 50 YEARS

May 3rd
6.00 p.m.
Liberty Hall
Eden Quay

Join us for our May Day 2023 event in Liberty Hall to discuss and reflect on the advances for women over the past 50 years and highlight ongoing challenges around women's economic independence and workers' rights for women.

The event will be chaired by Broadcaster Ingrid Miley.

SPEAKERS AS FOLLOWS:

Orla O'Connor, Director, NWC
Aline Brüser, ETUC Advisor and Comms Officer
Ethel Buckley, SIPTU Deputy General Secretary
Karen Kiernan, CEO One Family
Rosemary Kunene, Community Activist & Social Entrepreneur
Aoife Price, Disabled Women Ireland

Register on
www.eventbrite.ie

Biden support for trade union rights



SIPTU general secretary, Joe Cunningham meeting President Joe Biden at a reception in Áras an Uachtaráin on Thursday, 13th April. Photo: Maxwell

SIPTU general secretary, Joe Cunningham, was introduced to President Joe Biden by the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, at a reception in Áras an Uachtaráin on Thursday, 13th April.

During their meeting, President Higgins thanked President Biden for his continuing support for the Good Friday Agreement and they discussed the need for continued work to build on and strengthen the peace process in Northern Ireland. Among the other matters discussed were the future of work during which President Higgins referred to

President Biden's long-term support for collective bargaining and the right for trade unions to organise and for same sex marriage and LGBTQ+ rights.

In a statement, President Higgins said: "It is timely that President Biden is visiting not only on the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, but also in the year that marks the 60th anniversary of the visit of President John F. Kennedy to Ireland in June 1963. At our meeting, President Biden and I exchanged views on a number a topics.

"The global public have shown

a strong identification with local environmental interests and made early steps towards the changes necessary. However, significant challenges remain at the national and international level, particularly in relation to the growth of unaccountable corporate power.

"In this context, we discussed President Biden's continuing support for the trade union movement, as well as his work to ensure sustainable change and transformation and a green transition through his economic policies, including in the automotive industry and invest-



Trade unions, housing organisations and politicians joined the Raise the Roof protest against the removal of the eviction ban, at Leinster House on Thursday, 30th March. The campaign will continue to organise public events around the country over the coming weeks in pursuit of its demand that the Government embarks on a massive programme to build social and affordable housing. Photo: Aoife Ní Shúilleabháin

SIPTU campaign for access to publicly funded JJ Rhatigan sites to ensure SEO compliance

SIPTU Organisers are making early morning visits to Department of Education funded JJ Rhatigan construction sites across the south of the country seeking access to discuss Sectoral Employment Order (SEO) compliance with workers.

SIPTU Organiser, Rory Hawkins, said: "We have the unacceptable situation whereby a main contractor running publicly funded school building sites has so far failed to respond to our requests for access to trade union organisers. This runs the risk of workers not receiving information on their legal rights and entitlements under the SEO for the construction industry.

"We in SIPTU are the custodians of the SEO and it is part of our responsibility to visit sites around the country to ensure workers are aware of and in receipt of its minimum terms and conditions which are their statutory rights.

"Most other major construction companies on publicly funded sites have a working relationship with our union which allows organisers to visit canteens and places where workers assemble to distribute information on the SEO.

He added: "The position of this company is particularly unacceptable when it is in receipt of millions of euros of public funds for several contracts to build schools across the country for the Department of Education.

"JJ Rhatigan is mistaken if they think that failing so far to engage with our union will result in us just going away. SIPTU Construction Sector organisers are not going anywhere and are regularly present at the gates of this company's sites from 6.30 a.m. to meet as many workers as possible and hand them information on their rights and the benefits of being part of our union."

The SIPTU Construction Sector has also written to the Minister for Education, Norma Foley, informing her of the lack of access of union organisers to publicly funded school building sites. Among major JJ Rhatigan sites funded by public funds in the south of the country are the Patrician Academy in Mallow, and a new three-school campus in Carrigtwohill in county Cork which is one of the largest single building projects ever undertaken by the Department of Education.



Workers' Memorial Day Ireland

Remembering the past for a safe and healthy future

Date: Friday 28th April 2023
Venue: Garden of Remembrance, Parnell Square, Dublin 1
Time: From 10.30 a.m. - 11.30 a.m.

SIPTU water workers across country vote for strike action

SIPTU members in the water services continue to ballot across the country to protect earnings for workers not transferring to Uisce Éireann but remaining in their local authorities. Early indications from Limerick, Cork, Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown and Fingal have confirmed huge support for strike action.

Karan O Loughlin, Divisional Organiser for SIPTU's Public Administration and Community Division said: "There is a high level of frustration among our members in water services at the lack of commitment from the various local authorities as to how the value of earnings will be

retained once Uisce Éireann assumes responsibility for the provision of water services nationally.

"The framework agreement clearly states that terms and conditions are to be retained, but when we tested the meaning of that with the local authorities, it was clear that while core terms and conditions would be protected, the commitment on the retention of the value of earnings was not there. This is a key part of enabling the successful transfer to Uisce Éireann and without it the transfer just won't happen."

She added: "SIPTU members are dealing with the consequences of a political decision regarding the



future of public water services over which they had no control. Our activists and staff are doing their utmost to ensure that our members are not financially penalised because of this political decision.

"No member should be out of pocket as a result of the Government's decision to centralise water services within Uisce Éireann. The drop in income for many of our members could be catastrophic if this matter is not dealt with."

O Loughlin said that until the union has written confirmation from each Local Authority chief executive or from the Department of Housing, Local Government

and Heritage, in relation to the retention of earnings for members the matter will not be resolved. Brendan O'Brien, SIPTU Sector Organiser for the Local Authority Sector, said: "The high level of support for strike among the members balloted demonstrates that they are extremely concerned at the financial hit they will take if the principle of no loss of income is not retained after this change."

There will be significant disruption to water services, both domestic and for business, if the necessary commitments are not clearly spelled out."

The ballot will run until May 4th with more results to be declared as it concludes in each

Pension Promise Campaign

SIPTU has launched a campaign to hold the Government to account on its promise of a State pension rate of 34% of average earnings.

Launched at the Retired Members Delegate Conference in Liberty Hall on 24th April, 2023, the goal of the Pension Promise campaign is to ensure that retired workers have an adequate income to meet their living costs.

Speaking at the launch of the campaign, SIPTU Deputy General Secretary for Organising and Membership Development, Ethel Buckley said: "Currently, older people and those on fixed incomes worry about how they will afford to put food on the table and heat their homes. Some people are being forced to choose between food and heat. This is not acceptable in a country as wealthy as Ireland and SIPTU will not put up with it. Retired and older people deserve secure adequate retirement incomes. It's no more than they have earned after a lifetime of work and paying taxes."

The Roadmap for Pension Reform 2018 – 2023, produced by the Department of Social Protection, contained a commitment to a State pension contributory payment of no less than 34% of average earnings. It also stated that the Government would institute a process whereby future changes in pension rates of payment would be linked to changes in the Consumer Price

Index and average wages. The Government has repeatedly suggested this benchmark as the minimum adequate payment for the state pension contributory.

The current weekly rate of the

Retired and older people deserve secure adequate retirement incomes

State pension is €265. That's €45 per week short on the Government's commitment of €310 per week if benchmarked against 34% of average earnings.

Ethel Buckley said: "SIPTU demands that the Government honours its commitment to a state pension rate of 34% of average earnings. That is why we are launching the Pensions Promise Campaign. Just like the Stop67 campaign, Pension Promise is part of our Union's set of demands for fair and flexible pensions for all."

"Retired and older people need that €45 per week in their



Delegates attending the SIPTU Retired Members Conference in Liberty Hall Theatre on 24th April (left to right) Jerry O'Callaghan, Beattie Doohan, Mary Somers, Larry Duggan, Denis O'Donoghue, Imelda Vesey, Catherine McEvey, Paul Gallagher and Helen Murphy. Photo: Aoife Ní Shuilleabháin

The current weekly rate of the State pension is €265. That's €45 per week short on the Government's commitment of €310

pockets now so that they can stave off the devastating impact of inflation and the rise in the cost of living."

The Pensions Promise Campaign will work with other unions and with age sector organisations and other civil society allies to ensure that the Government's commitments to retired and older people are honoured.

"After a lifetime of work, the right to retire with dignity is hardly too much to expect," said Buckley.



Firefighters in Cork city protesting on 20th April at the Anglesey Street fire station.

Firefighters in Cork city begin industrial action due to staff shortages

SIPTU members employed as firefighters in Cork city have commenced a campaign of industrial action due to a shortage of staff which, they say, is endangering members and public safety.

The industrial action began on 20th April with a protest by firefighters as they ended their shift at the fire station on Anglesey Street in Cork city. The firefighters have stated they will continue to stage protests and escalate their industrial action if necessary.

SIPTU Organiser, Con Casey, said: "The root cause of this dispute lies with the failure of fire

service management to reinstate the Ballincollig Retained Fire and Rescue Service or provide additional resources to the Cork City Fire Brigade to provide cover in this area.

"The consequence of this has been to expand the area covered by the Cork City Fire Brigade without providing staff to operate the fire appliance in Ballincollig fire station, which is known as the 'Fourth Pump'. Vacancies for retained fire and rescue service members in the Ballincollig area have remained unfilled since September 2021 even though the first recruitment campaign commenced in October 2020."

He added: "Official notice of industrial action, up to and including strike action, was served on Cork City Council earlier this month. If our members must escalate their industrial action to force a resolution to this dispute, they will."

SIPTU Public Administration and Community Division Organiser, Karan O Loughlin, said: "The resolution to this dispute lies in the appointment of retained fire and rescue service personnel in the Ballincollig area to allow the 'Fourth Pump' to be operated at agreed manning levels. If this proves unattainable, the Cork City Brigade must be provided with ad-

Launch of Wexford Trade Union Centre

The Wexford Council of Trade Unions (WTCU) hosted the launch of the Wexford Trade Union Centre in April.

The project, which has been part of the trade union movement 'local' strategy, was formally launched by SIPTU General Secretary Joe Cunningham (Treasurer ICTU) and Fórsa General Secretary, Kevin Callinan (President ICTU).

The development was initiated with the strategic document produced following the ICTU Conference (BDC) in 2015 which was taken by the Wexford trade unions and built upon to create this local lively centre of our movement.

The Centre is located in the previous SIPTU Office and now houses Fórsa and Connect with facilities being developed to provide resource support for other unions active in the county or region.

The WCTU currently co-ordi-



Local and national representatives including Joe Cunningham and Kevin Callinan, of the trade unions active in the county and the ICTU outside the Wexford Trade Union Centre.

nates the use of the Centre and plans to see it further develop as a resource and training centre as well as a media and social networking hub.

As the Centre already houses the Peoples College outreach programme, it is also hoped to develop this further.

The launch was attended by

Irish Equity calls for EU protections of intellectual property rights for artists in Ireland

Irish Equity has called for the complete extension to Ireland of EU protections for intellectual property rights for performers in order to end practices which are denying these workers ongoing earnings from their work.

Irish Equity President, Gerry O'Brien, said: "At the recent Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Irish Equity, which took place on 2nd April, two motions were passed relating to copyright in the audio visual industry.

"The motions mandate the Equity executive to call on the Government to do two things. Firstly, to complete the transposition of EU Directive 2019/790 on Copyright in the Digital Single Market into Irish law. Secondly, the Government must include the Copyright Act and this EU Directive in the list of mandatory requirements for applications for the Section 481 tax credit, which seeks to incentivise film and

their intellectual property, that still has financial value, tied up in the back catalogues of producers and broadcasters.



Irish Equity President, Gerry O'Brien

The EU Directive includes articles that will ensure that performers receive ongoing payments for the use of those works.

"The Irish Equity position on this issue has been supported by the International Federation of Actors (FIA) in a letter in which it states that the provisions of this Directive have not been taken seriously by several EU states, including Ireland."

He added: "As part of the application for funding under Section 481, producers must sign an undertaking that they will comply with all relevant employment legislation but there is no mention of the Copyright Act. This Act is separate from employment law. It deals with the performers intellectual property rights and materially affects performers' ability to create a sustainable career. We recommend that compliance with copyright legislation be a listed and mandatory requirement when applying for direct funding and for Section 481 support."

The Irish Equity AGM also passed motions calling for the minimum rate for live theatre performance to be set at €600 per week and for a restructuring of the union's theatre agreement to bring it up to date with the hybrid nature of the exploitation of live per-



TV production in Ireland, and for all public funding in the audio-visual industry.

"The purpose of the EU Directive is to address 'the weaker contractual position when authors and performers grant a licence or transfer their rights'. Under the EU Directive, 'buyout contracts' are acknowledged as an exception rather than the rule, but for over 30 years Irish performers have been given little choice but to sign these contracts.

"This means Irish performers have not received their rightful residual payments for their work. It also means that there is a wealth of

Talks follow industrial action by workers in Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

Union representatives and management at Newry, Mourne and Down District Council met for talks on 17th April to discuss a solution to a dispute which has resulted in a campaign of industrial action by trade union members.

Members of SIPTU, GMB and NIPSA commenced a 'work to rule' industrial action at the council on 10th April, with Unite members joining them on 12th April. The action, which included workers refusing to take on overtime, tasks outside their job description, providing absentee cover or using their own vehicles for work purposes, has caused considerable disruption to council services.



Left to right Kevin Kelly, Nipsa Official, Kieran Ellison, Unite official, John Kearney, GMB steward, Alan Perry, GMB official, Niall McNally, SIPTU Official, Phelim Jennings, SIPTU Convenor, Michael McCreesh, UNITE Steward and Bernie McCreesh, UNITE steward.

The unions have warned that the industrial action, although confined to a 'work-to-rule' at this stage, could escalate following a vote by workers last month to mandate strike action if necessary.

SIPTU Organiser, Niall McNally, said: "Members of all four trade unions at Newry, Mourne and Down District Council have lost confidence in management. Workers have seen management has reneged on written agreements on issues including a partnership-based approach to job evaluation but has also removed allowances from new recruits creating a two-tier workforce. This is not something our members will

SIPTU to campaign to remove woman's 'place in the home' from Irish constitution

SIPTU's National Executive Council (NEC) has decided to campaign on gender equality and remove a constitutional reference to a woman's place being in the home.

Speaking after the March meeting of the NEC, at which the decision was made, SIPTU Deputy General Secretary Ethel Buckley commented on the decision saying: "the manner in which women and mothers are referred to in our Constitution has no place in modern Ireland and does not reflect the lives, families and work of Union members.

"For these reasons, I welcome the decision by our Union's NEC to mobilise our members to vote to amend the archaic 'woman in the home' clause and to replace it with language that values care work and places care at the centre of our constitution.

"As the union of care workers, SIPTU knows only too well the value of care. At different stages in our lives, every human being relies on the care of others, both profes-

sional care workers such as those who work in our nursing homes, hospitals and creches and family members who care for us when we are young, old and unwell. Society would not function without care. We believe that constitutional reform would be hugely symbolic and, if combined with proper investment in public services and decent work, could deliver a truly caring society." Buckley said.

Wording for the November referendum is expected by the end of June. SIPTU plans to issue voting recommendations to members and to mobilise an extensive get-out-the-vote campaign.

"Many of the essential workers upon whom society depended during the pandemic were care workers - frontline health care workers in hospitals, care workers in nursing homes, home care workers, early years educators and carers. SIPTU members believe it is time to truly value care and those who deliver it," she added.

SIPTU to consult with members concerning new SEO for construction industry

SIPTU representatives will consult with union members concerning a new Sectoral Employment Order (SEO) for the construction industry which contains increases to minimum wage rates but does not reinstate travel time allowances.

SIPTU TEAC Division Organiser, Adrian Kane, said: "The increase to minimum rates of pay for construction workers will benefit our members as they and their families attempt to cope with the cost of living crisis. In total, when combined with the existing SEO, our members will receive a rise in minimum pay of 8.2% staggered over a number of increases in 2023 and 2024.

"The SEO is an important mechanism for providing a minimum threshold of pay in

the sector. However, our members are disappointed that the SEO did not provide for the re-instatement of a travel time allowance."

He added: "With inflation still running at close to 8% on an annual basis until March this year, the SEO contains minimum pay rate increases which are below this for our members over the next two years. Of course, the actual cost of living increases for working people are running even higher than inflation.

"In light of this, we will consult with our members in relation to this SEO and what other actions they may support in order to ensure their standard of living is best protected during this period of extensive cost of living increases."

The SEO is expected to be signed into law before the end

of April and is scheduled to come into force on 18th September 2023 and be maintained until August 2024.

The new minimum hourly rates which will come into force on 18th September are €21.49 for a Craftsperson, €20.86 for a Category A Worker and €19.35 for a Category B Worker. Category A workers include those with an advanced Scaffolding Card and who have four years' experience as well as bank operatives, steel fixers, crane drivers and heavy machine operators, with Category B Workers comprising skilled general operatives with more than two years' experience.

Apprentices will also benefit from this SEO, with an increase in their legal minimum pay, including time they spend in education. This will see apprentices paid 33.33% of the Craft Rate in Year 1, 50% in Year 2, 75% in Year 3 and 90% in Year 4. This SEO also provides for increases to minimum pension contributions.



'Meet the Team' Belfast City Council Organising Committee

AFTER many weeks in preparation, SIPTU's Belfast City Council Organising Committee has launched its first major campaign, 'Meet the Team'.

The group, headed by SIPTU Belfast City Council union convenor Anthony McDonald, has been working tirelessly to build and consolidate membership and to reinvigorate a section that has been an institution within SIPTU locally since the 1970s.

The committee organised a day in Belfast's City Hall for members and would-be members to meet up and discuss the cost-of-living crisis, currently the most pressing concern for workers.

Community advice workers – many of whom were also members of SIPTU – were on hand on 21st February and 31st March to answer questions on a range of issues, including work, pay, bills, benefits, and work-life balance.

Northern Ireland District Official Niall McNally told Liberty: "This section committee is the epitome of organising in action. They meet regularly to map areas in the council underserved by unions, send out a regularly-updated newsletter keeping members briefed on what is happening in the Council, and addressing issues that are of the highest importance to our membership."

He added: "Being on the ground and being seen by members organising and advocating on their behalf is the greatest way to ensure workers know that SIPTU is working with them and for them."

The section includes shop stewards in most of the major sectors



Belfast City Council Organising Committee at the Meet the Team launch



From left to right: Darren Trowlen, Anton McDonald and Niall McNally join the rally in support of striking health and education workers outside Belfast City Hall

This section committee is the epitome of organising in action

within the Council – community, corporate, waste management, civic engagement, as well as parks and tourism. The section committee also took time out before the event to join thousands of fellow workers who had descended on Belfast city centre to take part in a rally organised by striking health workers and teachers.

Three marches from different hospitals, and many schools met to-

gether at Belfast City Hall.

Darren Trowlen, a SIPTU Belfast City Council activist, said: "It's about time all workers, whether they work in the private or public sectors, organised together to fight to improve living standards and to defend services for all people."

The sector committee will keep members fully briefed on the 'Meet the Team' campaign and other initiatives throughout this coming year of action for workers.

SIPTU is working with them and for them

STRONGER TOGETHER
CONGRESS
Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Northern Ireland Committee

MAY DAY MARCH AND RALLY

Sat 29 April 2023

12.30 March off - College of Art Gardens,
1pm Rally, Belfast City Hall

WORKERS DEMAND Better!

Keynote Speaker: Mick Lynch (RMT)

SIPTU wins recognition at Hunter Apparel in Derry

SIPTU members have won recognition and the right to access vital documents for pay negotiations at Hunter Apparel in Derry following a case brought to the Industrial Court.

SIPTU Hunter Apparel Shop Steward, Fiona Doherty, said: "SIPTU members in Hunter Apparel were forced to take their employer to the Department of the Economy's Industrial Court, to demand recognition despite our union being a fixture in the company for more than 40 years."

She added: "Our members did not have a pay rise in over four

years, despite their vital frontline work making personal PPE for the NHS. The employer had refused to hand over vital information for these pay negotiations when requested three years. The Industrial Court delivered a 23-page report on this issue and the company must now hand over the documents SIPTU representatives have asked for."

The Industrial Court is responsible for the resolution of disputes in Northern Ireland arising from statutory trade union recognition for collective bargaining purposes and employee information and consultation rights.

Game changers on the right to organise

■ By Conor Kavanagh

THE Irish Congress of Trade Unions held an important seminar recently on possible "game changers" on the future of collective bargaining in Ireland.

The event, at the CWU head office in Dublin on 3rd April, was chaired by Congress President Kevin Callinan, and was attended by more than 80 officials and organisers from several unions, including a sizeable contingent from SIPTU.

General Secretary Owen Reidy gave a detailed presentation on the recent Adequate Minimum Wages directive and the LEEF High Level Group (HLG) report on collective bargaining in Ireland.

Speaking after the seminar, he praised the "participative" nature of the event and pointed out that both the directive and the HLG report were "potential game changers" for Irish workers and unions.

Reidy said: "The directive requires the Government to promote collective bargaining with an aim to get coverage as high as 80%. Currently it's 35%.

"The HLG report will do away with the employers' veto in JLCs and promote the concept of good-faith engagement. What is key is



Congress General Secretary Owen Reidy who delivered the presentation

that we ensure the Government implements both the letter and spirit of both instruments."

The seminar also focused on how unions could best advance their interests in both initiatives.

He continued: "We need a robust campaign involving our allies in civil society also. The Irish governments must move from becoming disinterested bystanders on the issue of collective bargaining to advocates, enablers and supporters of collective bargaining.

"For our movement, the issue of access is key. We need to ensure

that workers who wish to be in unions and get the benefit of collective bargaining can do so, and that it is no longer the gift of the employer."

SIPTU was well-represented at the seminar, and was attended by officials and organisers from four of the union's five divisions as well from the organising department.

Reidy told Liberty: "The directive and the HLG report, if implemented correctly, has huge potential for a union like SIPTU. We in Congress are delighted with the

We need to ensure that workers who wish to be in unions and get the benefit of collective bargaining can do so, and that it is no longer the gift of the employer

level of collaboration we have got from officials and the leadership of SIPTU on this important issue.

"The issue is the key union priority over the next 18 months. We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to do something quite significant and as a movement we are determined to do it.

"The feedback from all affiliates that took part was very positive. We intend to host an annual seminar on collective bargaining, whereby we can all assist one another with best practice," he added.



Greg Ennis, and Eira Gallagher (right) of SIPTU, at the 3rd April seminar



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Congress welcomes signing into law of new Work-Life Balance Bill

CONGRESS General Secretary Owen Reidy has welcomed the signing into law of the Work-Life Balance Bill by President Higgins, claiming it will deliver "significant new employment rights to help workers combine work and family life".

He also pointed out that improved family leave and flexible working allowed men to be more involved in caring duties at home as well helping women remain in their jobs. "This is good for workers and makes good business sense too," Reidy said. "It will help

close the yawning gaps between women and men in the areas of caring, pay, and pensions.

The Act also extends the entitlement to breastfeeding breaks from nine months to two years without loss of pay, and introduces new workers' rights to paid domestic violence leave and when requesting remote work.

But he cautioned: "But there must be no further delays in commencing these important new workers' rights. The deadline for transposing EU work-life balance law into national law has long since passed," said Reidy.

Dublin Council of Trade Unions

MAY DAY!

- March and Rally -

A world in crisis:
climate, war, housing, cost of living, hate
- workers fighting back!

Assemble 1.30 pm, Monday, 1st May 2023

**Garden of Remembrance
Parnell Square, Dublin**

Speakers:
Tommy Simpson (SIPTU & DCTU), 'The Climate Crisis'
Mick O'Reilly (Unite & DCTU), 'War and peace'
Sue Shaw (CEO, Irish Senior Citizens Parliament), 'Cost of Living'
Lucky Khambule (Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland, MASI)
Tayra Lopes (Unite), 'Reinstate the Murphy 4'
Kevin Donoghue (Forsa), 'The 4 Day Week'
Chair: Betty Tyrrell-Collard (Forsa & President DCTU)

**March behind your union or campaign banner
Music and socialising in Liberty Hall after the rally**



Dublin Council of Trade Unions, Mandela House, 44, Gardiner Street, Dublin 1.
email: dctuforum@gmail.com

Opportunities to build union density

More than 150 delegates gathered for a combined set of AGMs for the three sectors in the SIPTU Manufacturing Division in Liberty Hall on 24th March.

The meeting began on a sombre note, with a moment's silence in memory of Manufacturing Division staff member, Ray Mitchell, who sadly passed away last year and SIPTU member Matt Foley, who died in February, following a

workplace accident at the Kerry Group Plant in Listowel, county Kerry.

Addressing delegates, SIPTU Manufacturing Division Organiser, Greg Ennis, highlighted the largely positive impact on Irish manufacturing of the Northern Ireland Protocol and 'Windsor Framework' as a means of overcoming Brexit-related issues.

He said both agreements came about because of concessions

made by both the EU and the UK in dealing with customs issues "relating to trade and the movement of processed meats, second-hand cars, medicines and other items".

"The EU can now avail of full data sharing in real time in relation to UK goods coming into ports in Northern Ireland. The new system sees the introduction of green lanes, with a minimum of paperwork, for goods from Britain which are to be sold within Northern Ire-

land and red lanes, with more rigorous checks, for goods that are moving on to the Republic or elsewhere in the EU."

Giving an update assessment of the year ahead, Ennis told delegates: "We have seen our endeavours on the need for occupational sick pay recognised with legislation taking effect in January. The EU Minimum Wage Directive will be transposed next year, and the Labour Employer Economic Forum

process is in a good place also, so I think we have plenty to look forward to with opportunities to build density across the three sectors of the SIPTU Manufacturing Division."

However, sounding a note of caution, he expressed severe disappointment about the proposed closure of the Cartamundi Plant in Waterford which could lead to major job losses for SIPTU members.

Tribute to Pharma Sector

The "extraordinary contribution" made by members in the Pharmaceutical, Chemicals, Medical Devices (PCMD) Sector during the pandemic was acknowledged at its AGM in Liberty Hall.

SIPTU Sector Organiser, Neil McGowan, told delegates these workers had made "an extraordinary contribution during the pandemic and this is to the forefront of our minds as we bargain with employers.

"The 'essential worker' status given to many in our sector during the harshest lockdowns has been forgotten about by employers, despite these same companies profiting massively from the pandemic."

He also highlighted the impact of inflation driven by "pent-up demand and transport bottlenecks" and the need for pay increases.

McGowan said it had been reported that inflation had affected employers, particularly the rise in energy prices, but pointed out that this had not reduced the profits they had made.

The AGM heard that 20 pay agreements across the sector had been brokered, with most agreed at local level or with help of the WRC and only a few needing Labour Court intervention. Industrial action has been conducted where required such as in Bausch and Lomb last summer.

Delegates also heard about those companies – Stryker, Abbvie, DePuy – which continue to deny their workers collective bargaining rights. Hope was expressed that a "progressive transposition" into Irish law of the EU Directive on adequate minimum wages will end this impasse.



SIPTU Manufacturing Division Organiser, Greg Ennis, addressed delegates at the sector AGMs of the SIPTU Manufacturing Division in Liberty Hall

Challenges faced by Agri-Food sector in 2022

Delegates representing the more than 10,000 members of the SIPTU Agriculture, Ingredients, Food and Drink (AIFD) Sector met in Liberty Hall to discuss how their workplaces had weathered a difficult year.

Addressing the Annual General Meeting (AGM), SIPTU Sector Organiser, Denis Gormally, said: "2022 was a year where the unpredictability and fragility of the world we populate continued to surface as we moved from crisis to crisis. Workers and their families bear the brunt of the effects of these crises and again it falls on organised labour – trade unions – to defend and protect the interests of working people."

He told delegates: "The many lockdowns of the Covid-19 era have hampered the activities of our union and tested our fortitude. Before we could begin our recovery from impact of the pandemic, Europe was plunged into war. Already-rising inflation spi-

ralled as fuel costs were the first of many necessities to sharply rise.

"We encountered a very changed industrial environment where our members faced significant erosion of their living standards. 2022 also saw continued uncertainty around the fallout from Brexit."

We encountered a very changed industrial environment where our members faced significant erosion of their living standards

The setting by the Government of an emissions ceiling for agriculture at a level requiring a 25% reduction by 2030 was flagged up as a major challenge for the sector.

The AGM also heard of the impact these challenges were having on individual industries.

Delegates were told there had been redundancies and restructuring in the dairy industry, and that Glanbia Ireland, now called Tirlan, had returned to co-op status with its full ownership in the hands of its farmer shareholders.

However, the alcoholic drinks sector saw a rapid recovery in 2022 after the devastating impact of Covid lockdowns. The soft drinks and water sector also continued to grow.

In the meat industry – which is predominantly low wage and low investment – workers faced a difficult year. SIPTU members in the red meat industry were able to make gains at a more modest level, as employers continued to seek work permits to cover labour shortages.

In the processed foods sector, SIPTU representatives secured improvements in members' terms and conditions of employment though outcomes varied greatly depending on both the profitability of the company and industrial leverage at company level.

Electronics Engineering and Industrial Production Sector gets a boost

The Electronics, Engineering and Industrial Production Sector Annual General Meeting (AGM) has reported a boost in membership, with an extra 200 members organised into the 10,000 strong-sector.

Addressing the AGM in Liberty Hall on 23rd March, SIPTU Sector Organiser, Martin O'Rourke, flagged up a number of challenges facing the sector – including Brexit as well as the continued digitalisation and automation of manufacturing.

He told delegates: "Despite these challenges, the Electronics, Engineering and Industrial Production Sector has successfully negotiated many pay deals and improvements in terms and conditions that benefit thousands of workers across Ireland."

Securing these improvements had on occasion required industrial action with O'Rourke pointed out that in "every dispute" the union had secured "a better final agreement than was previously on offer, clearly demonstrating that workers united can never be defeated".

And he claimed the growth in membership had been achieved "by the hard work and diligence of activists and staff", despite several high-profile closures of workplaces.

Pay deal success reported at Arts, Culture, Media and Sport AGM

Delegates from a range of workplaces organised by the Arts, Culture, Media and Sport Sector gathered for their AGM in Liberty Hall on 29th March.

Pay agreements featured prominently in discussions as well as work being done to promote union

activities across the sector.

SIPTU Sector Organiser, Michelle Quinn, said: "The MUI and Irish Equity executives are working extremely hard to raise the profiles of both unions.

"They are also mindful of the need to be strategic in our collective efforts and the need to build al-

liances on common issues of concern." She highlighted the successful input of the union to the 'Basic Income for the Arts' pilot scheme and around the transfer of the National Symphony Orchestra from RTÉ to the National Concert Hall.

A number of successful pay deals were highlighted by sector officials.

These included the securing of a €1,000 cost-of-living voucher for members in the Football Association of Ireland.

At Dublin Zoo, members will benefit from a 4% pay increase from 1st January 2022, with an additional rise of 3.5% from 1st January 2023,

and a final increase of 3.5% from 1st January 2024.

Members in The Irish Times have secured a pay increase of 4% to basic pensionable pay from 1st October 2022 and 2% from 1st October 2023.

Contract Services Sector rebuilding after pandemic

The SIPTU Contract Services Sector AGM was told the union's emphasis in 2022 was on rebuilding its strength in the wake of the pandemic.

Addressing delegates gathered at Liberty Hall on 29th March, SIPTU Sector Organiser, Ed Kenny, said: "Our focus is on rebuilding the Contract Services Sector following the severe impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This will mean building our activist base with a concentration on identifying, developing and training new activists."

In pursuit of this, it was reported that 34 Contract Services Sector activists had completed courses with SIPTU College during 2022.

He added: "We must organise contract services workers on a site-by-site basis. To this end our organisers worked in close collaboration with other sectors in the Services Division as well as our



Services Division AGMs were held at Liberty Hall on 29th March

colleagues in the Manufacturing and TEAC Divisions as part of the 'One Site One Union' initiative."

The 'One Site One Union'

approach allows for the use of the industrial power of all SIPTU members in a workplace to help in the organisation and industrial

claims of others organised into different sectors.

Kenny flagged up the 'Forgotten Frontline Heroes' campaign to secure the Pandemic Special Recognition Payment for contract services workers in the health service as one initiative that had encouraged more people to join the union.

The AGM also discussed the Transfer of Undertakings (TUPE) regulations and Employment Regulations Orders (EROs) within the sector. There was a particular focus on the move by some employers in the security sector to undermine the operation of the ERO in their industry.

Delegates were told sector membership – at 6,500 – had been severely affected by the pandemic, with the breakdown being: 58% men, 42% women, and 29% migrant workers.

Seminar: Local level pay deals brokered across Services Division

PAY agreements and the strategic direction of the union for 2023 were the focus of a seminar attended by delegates from all sectors in the Services Division, which followed their AGMs in Liberty Hall.

The seminar was addressed by SIPTU Honorary President, Mary O'Sullivan; SIPTU Deputy General Secretary, Gerry McCormack; and SIPTU Services Division Organiser, Teresa Hannick.

Hannick spoke about the devastating impact Covid-19 pandemic had on members and pointed out that some services industries had not seen an improvement during 2022.

The Division, however, was committed to increasing membership during 2023 with a focus on organising and the putting in place of a restructuring plan.

She also spoke about the pay strategy for 2022/2023 adopted across the Division for a basic increase with no link to productivity but including, if possible, an increase in annual leave entitlements, tax free vouchers and an agreement on a starting date for a successor agreement.

Delegates were informed that more than 90% of all pay agreements were negotiated at local level by shop stewards and their SIPTU Organiser, with the average pay increase across the Division of 2.5% for 12 months.

Successful pay deals highlighted at Hospitality and Financial Services Sector

Pay deals in various workplaces organised by the Hospitality and Financial Services Sector were highlighted at its Annual General Meeting in Liberty Hall on 29th March.

Within a number of credit unions, pay deals were achieved during 2022 with several also securing tax free vouchers of up to €1000. Elsewhere in financial services, other important deals were secured in workplaces such as AXA Insurance.

On that deal, SIPTU Organiser, Peadar Nolan, reported that "our members achieved a 4% increase on average on pay plus an additional ongoing day's leave. Tax Free Vouchers to the value of €1,000 were paid out to staff up to a certain level of earnings. This was paid in addition to an-

nual company bonuses."

On a living wage campaign within the Credit Unions, Nolan said: "When we launched this some of our sections were below the rate of €12.17 per hour in 2022, and some progress was made towards closing the gap. However, in line with the economic changes and cost of living this landscape has changed dramatically and the new rate of the living wage is now estimated to be around €13.85 per hour in 2023. This presents a serious challenge, and we need to revisit the issue in any upcoming talks with employers."

Pay increases were also reported at several other companies including Shannon Heritage, Killarney Golf Club and the Brandon Hotel, Tralee in

Focus on pay and building membership in Wholesale, Retail and Distribution Sector

Pay increases and work within the Sector on organising members was the focus of discussion at the Wholesale, Retail and Distribution Sector Annual General Meeting.

Among the pay deals highlighted by SIPTU Sector Organiser, Denis Sheridan, was 2.4% for one year from 1st January 2023 and an increase in the weekly lunch allowance from €115 to €140 at DHL Valero and a 5% pay increase from 1st June 2022 for one year at XPO Logistics.

The need to organise

more members in the sector was a topic of discussion, with SIPTU Organiser Jerry Browne highlighting the positive work in this area in Musgraves and Calor Gas in Cork.

He said: "We have brought in a lot of new members and have seen a lot of interest in joining SIPTU. As we all know, retention plays a vital role in increasing our leverage at the negotiating table. So, I am seeking to organise as much as I can on all sites, especially sites where the union has a good track record of organising and reten-

Transport Sector called on to prioritise organising

THE importance of organising workers into the union in all transport workplaces was emphasised at the SIPTU Transport Sector AGM which took place in Liberty Hall on 24th March.

SIPTU Sector Organiser, John Murphy, said: "SIPTU activists and representatives know the benefits of being part of a trade union, the benefits of bargaining collectively on wages and conditions.

"However, we need to look at ways to reach out to others in our workplaces and beyond to educate them on these benefits and promote SIPTU membership as the means of realising them."

He added: "While the transport industry is historically heavily unionised, and our membership in the sector has grown slightly over



SIPTU Transport Sector AGM delegates, Sector and Divisional staff outside Liberty Hall Theatre on 24th March

the last number of years, we can and should do more to ensure we can best influence and promote our agenda."

Murphy called on activists across the transport sector to look at "each employment, each grade of worker and each location and determine what we currently do right and where we can improve", in

order to organise more people into the union.

The AGM was presented with information on a number of recent pay agreements across the sector. These included an agreement in December 2022 with Aircoach which secured a 3% pay increase average across all grades, along with a £500 payment to all grades

(with the euro exchange rate on the day of ballot applied) and an increase in payment for rest day work.

An agreement with Bus Éireann includes all grades receiving a €1,000 payment as well as a 3% pay increase on 1st January 2023 and 1st January 2024.

At the private bus operator Go-Ahead Ireland, it was reported that membership numbers increased and are continuing to grow with workplace representatives in place and an agreed structured plan for regular industrial relations meetings with management.

Similar good news on the organising front was reported at Northern Ireland Railway with union membership in this organisations growing by 7% in 2022.

'Overall health' of construction industry 'clear'

Bringing more people into construction apprenticeships and membership of the union topped the agenda at the SIPTU Construction Sector Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Liberty Hall on 29th March.

SIPTU Sector Organiser, John Regan, outlined the recently launched apprenticeships for geo-technical drilling and scaffolding, as well as longer-established painting and decorating schemes.

Regan said: "The overall health of the industry is clear with the number of new safe pass cards rising to 125,141 in 2022. These are issued after a one-day safety course to all construction site workers and must be renewed every four years.

"However, this rise in the number of workers in the sector has not been reflected in a growth in union membership and this is an issue on which there must be increased focus."

Compliance with Sectoral Employment Orders (SEOs) and other agreements was also discussed. It was reported the Trade Union Federation (TUF) is engaging with Dublin City Council over compliance with industry agreements on public housing projects, including the appointment of an inspector agreed between both sides.

Regan added: "Compliance issues in construction are not just an Irish problem. It is also an area of concern to which the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW) and its EU affiliates are keen to find solutions."

Clearer skies ahead for aviation after Covid turbulence

IT WAS under clearer skies, and in person for the first time since 2020, that delegates met for the SIPTU Aviation Sector Annual General Meeting (AGM) in the Midlands Hotel, Portlaoise, on 11th March.

The AGM heard about the enormous impact the Covid-19 pandemic had had on the sector. Dublin Airport had reported an annual passenger number decline of 78% to just 7.4 million passengers in 2020.

The last time the airport had fewer than 8 million passengers in a calendar year was in 1994.

In 2022, the sector witnessed a very quick and sudden return to air travel when the Government announced it was dropping most of its remaining pandemic-linked restrictions in early March.

More than 28 million passengers travelled through Dublin Airport in 2022, representing a 231% increase on 2021 activity, and a 85% recovery of 2019 levels.

This surge in air travel resulted in chaotic scenes with many passengers forced to spend hours queuing outside terminals due to security staff shortages and more than 1,000 missing their flights due to the delays.

SIPTU Sector Organiser, Niall Phillips, told delegates: "While the media was focused on the effects this was having on passengers, SIPTU representatives were busy engaging with the media reminding them of the impact this upsurge in travel was having on union members and the abuse being experienced by some of them from angry passengers."

Like Dublin, Cork Airport saw a resurgence of passenger numbers in 2022, with 2.24 million passengers travelling through the facility



SIPTU Aviation Sector delegates and union organisers at their AGM in Portlaoise on 11th March

– an 86% recovery of 2019 passenger traffic. Phillips said that this massive upturn in passenger numbers had resulted in a sharp change of fortunes for union members employed in the sector.

He added: "In our AGM report presented in February 2022, we highlighted our concerns that members working in aviation

would continue to suffer from the impact of the pandemic for a longer period than workers in other sectors of the economy.

"However, things change very quickly in the aviation industry and by the end of 2022 we had secured pay increases in DAA, Aer Lingus, Swissport, Atlantic Aviation Group, Donegal Airport, SR

Technic (Cork), Collins Aerospace, ICTS, OCS and Aer Aran with many of our sections experiencing recruitment of new staff.

"This recruitment gives us an opportunity to organise these workers into this union and to rebuild the membership in the sector."

All-island organising in the Energy Sector

AN innovative all-island approach to co-ordinating the activities of unions in the energy sector and the organising of new workplaces were some of the positive developments outlined at the SIPTU Energy Sector Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 22nd March.

Addressing the AGM, SIPTU Sector Organiser, Willie Noone, told delegates gathered at the SIPTU Tullamore Office: "The voice of the ICTU Energy and Natural Re-

sources Committee has been used and will continue to be used strategically on behalf of our membership.

"Recent developments on this committee resulted in an agreement to progress an all-island structure of engagement with other unions who operate in the energy sector in Northern Ireland, such as Unite and Prospect, so common issues of concern can be discussed and strategically addressed.

"This committee is also inval-

able in making representations on workers' behalf on items such as the allocation of funds set aside for a Just Transition and for liaising with other unions internationally to protect workers who are employed in energy-based employments."

He added: "The Tynagh Power Station in county Galway was unionised and its members recruited into the energy sector in the past 12 months.

"At this company, recognition of the union is being resisted but we

are actively fighting on behalf of our members to address their concerns."

"The changing nature of the energy sector in Ireland was a key point of discussion with the continued move away from carbon-based fuels having a major impact, particularly at the Bord na Móna group of companies, where decreasing employment has continued to see a corresponding sharp decline in SIPTU membership."

Unity in the Community

More than 70 SIPTU community activists attended the SIPTU Community Sector AGM in the Midlands Park Hotel, Portlaoise, county Laois, on 30th March.

In the morning before the AGM took place, a 'Unity in the Community' convention was held which focused on bringing greater cohesion to union activities across workplaces.



SIPTU Deputy General Secretary, John King

Members took part in round-table discussions, agreeing on

what next steps to take in their campaign for pay justice and to protect services.

Later in his address to the Sector AGM, SIPTU Sector Organiser, Brendan Carr, spoke about the upcoming talks with government departments over pay.

He said: "We will be intelligent in our approach. However, make no mistake we must not approach government with a begging bowl seeking crumbs from the table but as a united sector willing to effectively use the weapon of industrial action to achieve what is best for you as workers and, in turn, the communities you serve."

Carr added: "Together we can win the fights that need to be won, and this new unity in the community and direction starts here today in this room."

SIPTU Deputy General Secretary, John King, and SIPTU Public Administration and Community Divi-



Delegates at the SIPTU Community Sector AGM held in the Midlands Park Hotel, Portlaoise

a 'Unity in the Community' convention was held which focused on bringing greater cohesion to union activities across workplaces

sion Organiser, Karan O'Loughlin also addressed the AGM.

The report to the AGM outlined the success of the 'Valuing Care, Valuing Community' campaign which included a number of days of industrial action during 2022.

It stated: "...by the end of the 2022 the Department of Social Protection had committed to entering into negotiations at the Workplace Relations Commission concerning

pay for workers in community organisations it funds."

"The 'Valuing Care, Valuing Community' campaign also resulted in an increase in membership in organisations which took part, meaning that we are now strengthened as a Sector as we push on during 2023 for pay justice for all our members and the protection of the vital services we provide."

State related agencies AGM hears upbeat assessment

AN active period for the union in the state related agencies was outlined at its Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Liberty Hall on 20th March.

Among the industrial relations issues resolved since the 2022 AGM, was the longstanding matter of secretarial assistants' pay scales in the Houses of the Oireachtas. Agreement was

reached which saw them included in future public service pay deals. A new dignity at work policy was also put in place.

More than 300 SIPTU members who are currently employed at the Office of Public Works (OPW), or are in retirement, won a claim that saw the distribution of payments totalling more than €1 million.

The union also reached agree-

ment with the OPW on the roll-out of an apprenticeship programme, involving a large number of crafts and trades, such as mechanical, painting, horticultural, carpentry, stonemasonry and plastering.

A claim won for members in the National Gallery of Ireland over a change to pay frequency was highlighted. Management sought to move from a weekly to

a fortnightly pay cycle with no offer of financial help, but SIPTU had challenged the move through the Workplace Relations Commission and Labour Court.

The final decision saw an award to all members affected of a one-off €300 ex-gratia payment, plus the offer of a €300 loan option drawdown and access to financial advice paid for by the employer.

Addressing the AGM, SIPTU Sector Organiser, Peter Glynn, spoke of the overall positive position of the sector while also highlighting the challenges that it will face over the coming year.

He pointed out that membership density remained high among direct employees of state agencies despite an overall drop in numbers.



(L to R) SIPTU Organiser, Cathie Shiels with SIPTU UCD Section members Ruby O'Riordan, Joseph Greene (Section Committee Secretary), Aileen Brennan, Charlotte Hall Tiernan, Mike Talbot, Tommy Murtagh (Section President) and Claire Nolan (Section Committee Vice President) following a meeting in UCD to discuss the organising initiative underway in the university on 20th April.

Education AGM calls for initiatives to assist organising in post pandemic workplaces

Delegates attending the SIPTU Education Sector Annual General Meeting (AGM) discussed the challenges of union organisation in post-pandemic workplaces and the other issues facing a rapidly changing area.

Those attending the meeting included members from a wide array of grades of education sector workers including lecturers, administrative staff, general operatives, research, catering and several others.

The meeting heard that the 'new normal' of changed work practices in the education sector,

including more working from home, necessitated changes to how the union organised, this included more contact with members through digital communications. There was also discussion of the new organising approaches which are underway as part of a pilot initiative in UCD.

The establishment of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in 2020 was widely seen as a positive development by delegates which would bring greater order to the

governance of the sector. Government commitments to end the spread of precarity within the sector were acknowledged but it was stated that the union would be taking increased action in seeking to end these practices throughout third level institutes.

Among those to address the meeting were Sector Organiser, Karl Byrne, General Secretary, Joe Cunningham, Public Administration and Community Division Organiser, Karan O Loughlin and Sector President, Ciarán McKenna. The AGM took place in Liberty Hall on

Gains for health workers

THE Health Division Sector AGMs took place throughout March, with reports being presented to delegates on activities within the sector and on organising over the last year. New Sector Committees were also elected.

The Sector AGMs were addressed by Deputy General Secretary, John King, and Divisional Organiser, Kevin Figgis.

John King presented delegates with a summary of challenges and

opportunities facing the union in the run up to the next public sector pay talks. These are likely to begin over the coming months, as the current Building Momentum agreement expires at the end of this year.

Kevin Figgis presented delegates with a summary of Division activities over the last year, flagging up the real gains made by SIPTU members under the Building Momentum agreement, the Sectoral Bargaining clause of the agree-



Divisional Organiser Kevin Figgis speaks before Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health

ment, and the Job Evaluation exercise over the last number of years.

Each Sector was also addressed by their respective Sector Organ-

isers who updated delegates on key issues of importance and on organising opportunities within the Sector.

Developments on pay parity over Serious Physical Assault Scheme

THE campaign for pay parity for support workers who need to access the HSE's Serious Physical Assault Scheme continues.

On 14th March, SIPTU representatives wrote to the Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly, calling on him to address the disparity in payouts to public healthcare employees seriously physically assaulted while at work.

SIPTU Divisional Organiser, Kevin Figgis, said: "We highlighted the fact that under the HSE Serious Physical Assault Scheme, healthcare support workers are only eligible to receive payments for three months while other grades may receive payments for up to a year, even if they are assaulted in the same incident.

"The union also provided data that demonstrates that support workers suffer the second highest level of assaults in healthcare workplaces, after nursing staff."

Later that month, on 23rd March, Labour TD Duncan Smith raised the issue again in the Dáil during a session on safe staffing within the health service, insisting the Minister for Health respond to the union on the issue.

At a meeting of the National Joint Council on March 28th, the HSE confirmed it had no objection to the claim, which was being backed by senior management. The union was told the HSE had submitted a business case to the Department of Health, which is currently being reviewed.

Department officials confirmed they intended to expedite this review and get back to SIPTU shortly.

Long Covid scheme discussions for WRC



Picket line at Ability West during stoppage in September 2022



By Aileen Carberry

THE HSE has confirmed it is available to attend the Workplace Relations Commission for conciliation on the issue of a special scheme for healthcare workers suffering from Long Covid. A date for the conciliation conference is awaited.

Members will recall the Government had approved a scheme for the public service which provided support for public servants infected by Covid-19. This included the continued effects of Long Covid.

Without any consultation, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform announced the scheme would cease from 1st July, 2022. SIPTU joined other healthcare unions in calling for immedi-

ate engagement on a replacement scheme for healthcare workers infected in the workplace and who remained out of work due to Long Covid.

A temporary scheme was announced by the Department of Health which would provide some support to healthcare workers but this will cease on 1st July, 2023.

The EU Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work confirmed Covid-19 is classed as an occupational disease in May 2022, while the European Commission recommended member states recognise Covid-19 as an occupational disease in November 2022.

SIPTU is seeking a replacement scheme that recognises how healthcare workers continue to be impacted by Long Covid.

Conciliation on this issue in advance of July 2023 is critical so that members can be assured they will receive support beyond that date if necessary.

Unions confirm availability for Section 39 pay talks

SIPTU, Fórsa and the INMO have confirmed they are available to attend conciliation over the issue of Section 39 sector pay.

Fresh pay claims have been lodged by unions at a number of Section 39 agencies seeking parity of pay with public service employers – part of a joint campaign for pay justice within the sector. The fresh claims were served in March 2023.

Last October, the Minister for Health acknowledged in the Dáil that the Government is the "main and often sole funder" of these organisations, and that its funding affects the ability of agencies to improve pay and conditions.

The Minister also spoke in support of a process, under the auspices of the Workplace Relations

Commission (WRC), to address the long-standing pay issue within these organisations.

In late March, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, and the Department of Health confirmed they would attend the WRC along with the HSE, for conciliation talks on the issue.

Until 2008, workers in these agencies received pay increases under national wage agreements. At the onset of the financial crisis, they were subject to FEMPI pay cuts in line with the same cuts applied to public sector pay.

Limited pay restoration measures were eventually won by unions in 2019 but pay in these agencies lags significantly behind and no formal mechanism for collective pay bargaining exists for workers in the sector.

Report update for Ambulance Sector AGM

SIPTU Ambulance Sector delegates at their online Sector AGM on 24th March heard that any foot-dragging on implementing the Roles and Responsibilities Report at the National Ambulance Service (NAS) would be unacceptable.

SIPTU Sector Organiser, Ted Kenny, said: "At present, the National Ambulance Service, senior HSE management and HSE Corporate Employee Relations Service have confirmed their agreement with the proposals in this report.

"We understand the matter is currently with the Department of

Health and we are asking that it progresses to the final stage which is at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for review and approval."

He cautioned that any failure by the Department of Health to agree the proposals "will result in a ballot of SIPTU members for industrial action up to and including strike action".

The Sector AGM was also updated on the NAS Organisational Re-design Business Case which has been steadily rolled out over the last 12 months.

This has resulted in the setting up of several new roles including

those of Tactical Shift Manager and District Operations Manager.

Delegates heard that the sector is actively working to ensure that there are trained shop stewards in every ambulance base.

Staff and activists will also continue to address student paramedics at training colleges with a view to ensuring high union density across the service.

Delegates also heard about ongoing engagements with management over the recruitment and retention of staff, rostering issues across the service, as well as turnaround times at emergency departments.

Major growth in AHP Sector numbers

AN increase in membership of 474 last year – bringing the total to 4,000 – was reported at the Allied Health Professional (AHP) Sector AGM in Liberty Hall on 30th March.

An extensive amount of work was carried out in 2022 to define sector membership, which included the removal of members who should have been allocated to other Health Division sectors.

Grades now within the sector are: radiographers, radiation therapists, clerical and administration, phlebotomists, dental nurses, supply officers, health service managers, social care workers and public analyst laboratory technicians (soon to be renamed pub-

lic laboratory scientists), along with other health and social care professional grades.

Addressing delegates, SIPTU Sector Organiser, John McCamley said: "In line with the Building Momentum agreement, SIPTU negotiated the use of the Sectoral Bargaining Fund to address pay claims arising from the National Radiographer Review 2020."

He told the AGM the union had also continued to successfully argue for public service pay rates in private hospitals.

"To date, two hospitals have implemented these pay rises and the last has committed to do so," McCamley added.

Other issues highlighted at the



Public analyst laboratory technicians confirmed as part of AHP sector after grades clarification exercise

PICTURE: Tom Wolfe (CC BY 2.0)

AGM were the setting up of an industrial relations forum which has successfully dealt with a number of outstanding historical issues with the Breastcheck programme.

Pay justice campaign being ratcheted up, ID Sector told

THE campaign for pay justice for Section 39 workers was to the fore of discussions at the Intellectual Disability (ID) Sector AGM in Liberty Hall on 22nd March.

Delegates were updated on the escalation of the pay justice campaign. New pay claims have been served on a number of organisations asking for public service agreement terms to be applied.

SIPTU Sector Organiser, Pat Flannery said: "Our members in Section 39 agencies provide an essential service but due to insuf-

ficient public funding their rates of pay have fallen behind those doing similar work in the public sector. This disparity is causing huge difficulties in staff recruitment and retention."

Delegates were reminded that until 2008, workers in these agencies received pay increases under national wage agreements in line with public sector health-care workers. At the onset of the financial crisis, they were subject to FEMPI pay cuts in line with the same cuts applied to public sector pay.

Support Sector secured significant pay awards

SIPTU Support Grade Sector delegates were updated on the progress of the HSE Support Grade Job Evaluation Scheme at their Sector AGM in Liberty Hall.

Phase IV of the job evaluation exercise was completed last year and a HSE circular issued which sanctions payments for support grade workers under the scheme.

The evaluation process, which started in 2019, led to roles within the HSE support grades being independently evaluated. The outcome of the process meant many of these roles would receive a lift to a higher band on HSE salary scales.

Meanwhile, SIPTU has lodged a claim with the HSE looking to explore a re-evaluation of grades that were unsuccessful in the recent process.

This is in line with the original terms of the scheme which provided for the option of a re-evaluation after 12 months.

Addressing the AGM in Liberty Hall on 31st March, SIPTU Sector Organiser, Damian Ginley said: "Officials have commenced the process of engagement with members and management to have the findings applied to members' pay as soon as possible while maximising organising opportunities arising from the successful outcomes secured."

Delegates also heard about the successful campaign by the SIPTU Health Division that resulted in a significant pay award for chefs in the public health service.

Ginley said: "After many years of campaigning on behalf of members who are chefs, we are pleased to advise that a break-



'Breakthrough' on pay for chefs

through was achieved this year.

A targeted and organised campaign on behalf of chef members resulted in a significant pay award being secured for our members within the chef grades."

A number of other issues were discussed at the AGM. These included the continuing talks with management about the fire in Wexford General Hospital on 1st March, the campaign to end the inequality in payments made to HSE support workers assaulted in the workplace, and the successful negotiation of the introduction of the terms of the public service agreement at a number of private hospital groups.

Delegates told Care Sector largest in Health Division

THE SIPTU Care Sector is now the largest unit within the SIPTU Health Division comprising more than 15,000 members, delegates attending its AGM in Liberty Hall on 21st March were told.

SIPTU Sector Organiser, Pat Flannery said: "The sector has continued a steady trajectory of growth despite considerable challenges.

"The HSE Personnel census report for January 2023 shows that Health Care Assistant (HCA) numbers continue to grow.

"There is considerable potential for organising and density building and it needs to be a focus for 2023 and beyond." Delegates also heard

about the SIPTU and ICTU contributions to the Report of the Strategic Workforce Advisory Group on Home Carers and Nursing Home Healthcare Assistants.

Flannery said: "The report was issued in September 2022. SIPTU and ICTU made submissions to the Department of Health on the issues associated with the difficulties around recruitment and retention of carers and HCAs.

"The report acknowledges the challenges faced by HCAs in the private and voluntary sectors and highlights that there are difficulties in attracting staff into the area due to poor terms and conditions of employment."

Members were also briefed on the implementation of the Review of the Role and Function of Health Care Assistants and told an oversight group has been set up.

SIPTU is represented on the various workstreams related to the rollout of this review.

There were also reports on the progress of the HCA Apprenticeship programme; the implementation of the Support Grade Job Evaluation Scheme; and the collaboration with the European Federation of Public Service Unions on the registration of HCAs.

Progress made on implementing nursing and midwifery review

THE SIPTU Nursing and Midwifery Sector AGM was briefed on the status of recommendations put forward by the Expert Review Body on Nursing and Midwifery.

The review, published in March 2022, made a series of strategic recommendations on staffing, professional development and leadership structures.

SIPTU Sector Organiser, John McCamley, told delegates gathered at Liberty Hall on 29th March: "Following its publication, an im-

plementation body was established. It has been agreed to place recommendations in different work streams to assist with their implementation.

"A dispute regarding the pay recommendations in the review report was referred to the Labour Court.

"This issue involved nursing unions asking that recommendations be implemented immediately, with the Department of Health pushing for them to be implemented as part of the next pub-

lic service agreement. The dispute is still unresolved."

He added: "Following lengthy engagements, the nurse and midwife sectorial bargaining unit concluded with the award of a 3.28% rise to promotional nursing grades which had been recommended under the review."

A number of other issues were discussed, including the setting up of children's disability network teams, the nurse sponsorship scheme, and the relocation of the Central Mental Hospital.

With profits driving inflation, workers take double hit



By
Michael Taft

WITH predictions that high levels of inflation could be with us for a while, the question being increasingly asked is: are profits driving inflation? And the evidence increasingly suggests that is the case.

It's certainly not wages. The IMF studied the relationship between wages and prices over the last 50 years and found almost no evidence of a wage-price spiral. This is confirmed by Ireland's recent experience. In 2022, inflation rose by 7.8 per cent. Wages rose by 3.4 per cent. No wage price spiral there. If anything, wages had a disinflationary effect.

But what about profits?

The evidence is piling up.

- Studies in the US, the UK and Australia have all found that profits, not wages, are the main contributors to rising prices.
- The Financial Times reported that after-tax profit margins in the US are the highest since 1945
- RTÉ recently reported that the European Central Bank has acknowledged the role of profiteering on the back of inflation.
- In its recent quarterly report, the Irish Central Bank published data showing that profit margins made up over 60 per cent of domestic business prices.



European Central Bank HQ in Frankfurt – the ECB seems intent on raising interest rates which, in turn, suppresses wage increases, costs jobs, and hits consumer spending

If profits are pushing inflation there's another question to be asked: why is the European Central Bank determined to continue raising interest rates? The effect of

rising interest rates is to suppress wage increases, drive up unemployment, and reduce consumer spending – all in the name of 'taking the heat out of the economy.'

The Government could identify sectors where profiteering is happening and which firms are engaged in this activity

But if profits are the source of that 'heat', what's the point of interest rate increases? As a chief economist for a global wealth management fund put it: "It's clear that profit expansion has played a larger role in the European inflation story in the last six months or so. The ECB has failed to justify what it's doing in the context of a more profit-focused inflation story."

It is important to note that rising profits are not uniform across the board. The ECB report suggested that it was larger, exporting firms that are the inflation-culprits as they have more pricing power in the market. For instance, fossil-fuel companies are driving up profits, dividends and CEO pay.

However, this may not be true of smaller companies. Many businesses in the 'contact-sensitive' sectors (retail, hospitality, transport, entertainment, etc.) may not be guilty (or as guilty) of price-gouging behaviour.

With profits driving wages, workers are taking a double-hit:

first, owners are increasing profits rather than inflation-proofing wages, leaving real cuts in people's living standards. And on top of that, workers are paying higher prices for the higher profits.

While the Government has no influence over the decisions of the ECB, it could still do the economy a favour by establishing as a matter of urgency a price monitoring agency, even on an ad hoc basis. The National Consumer Agency used to do some of this work (tracking prices)



Food bills on the rise

but has been less active since it was merged with the Competition Authority.

The Government could identify the sectors where profiteering is happening and which companies are engaged in this activity. By exposing their actions, public pressure could be brought to bear and, in extreme cases, the Government could enact emergency orders (which they have the power to do) to suppress price increases.

In this way, we can treat rising prices as a political issue. For that is ultimately what they are.

Economic outlook defined by low unemployment and high inflation

THE Central Bank has outlined how the Irish economy is experiencing a generational low in unemployment along with a high in inflation at a recent briefing for trade unionists in Liberty Hall.

The meeting, held on 9th March, was addressed by Robert Kelly, the bank's deputy head of financial stability.

He told the briefing that inflation was at a level that 80% of people had not experienced in their working lives. Unemployment was also at a 20-year low, which – at approximately 4% – equalled functional full employment.

Kelly highlighted some of the

impacts the Covid pandemic had on the economy including an increase in workforce participation by women over 35 years of age.

He said a number of long-term issues would be key to the future direction of the economy, which included the move towards a carbon zero economy, the ageing population, and – of most immediate concern – the lack of affordable housing.

Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI) co-director, Tom McDonnell, responded to the Central Bank presentation stating that a real wage "catch up" would be the core agenda for trade unions over the next year.



Briefing on the economy: (From left) Central Bank Deputy Head of Financial Stability, Robert Kelly; NERI co-director, Tom McDonnell; and SIPTU General Secretary, Joe Cunningham, in Liberty Hall, Dublin, on 9th March

On a response to the long-term economic challenges, he called for planning to be done "strategically in a multi-annual approach".

In pursuing such an approach, he highlighted NERI's proposal to use the unexpectedly high corporation tax revenue to provide seed capital to set up a semi-state company or companies to deal with the housing crisis and the move to a net zero economy.

The meeting was chaired by SIPTU General Secretary, Joe Cunningham, who said it was the first time he was aware of Central Bank representatives asking for a meeting with trade unionists to outline their view of the economic position – a move which he welcomed.

Liberty View

A new economic model to serve workers

WHEN attention turns to the 'economy' usually the first things mentioned are tax and spend issues. This, however, is not an economic discussion - it refers to how we distributed what the economy produces. We rarely get a discussion of the economy as such. Ironically, much of what passes for a debate about the economy misses the point; namely, the economy itself.

We should look to the example of the Swedish trade unionists. After the second world war, they began a debate over an economic model that would achieve their goals of growth, full employment, equality and price stability (low inflation). From this discussion emerged what has been called the 'Swedish model'. A lot of people mistakenly assume this model is about high tax, high spend and universal services. But that's just a consequence of the model's success which is focused on the productive economy - what people produce and how they produce it.

One of the key goals of the Swedish model was to support productive companies and sectors. This would enable the economy to grow and wages to rise (and allow for the high taxes that paid for strong public services).

Of course, the international context has changed and many of the instruments that the Swedish model used would not be applicable today. So how can we achieve these same goals with the tools that are applicable today?

The first instrument is collective labour rights; in particular, collective bargaining. While we often present collective bargaining as a labour right (and it is), it is also a key productivity-enhancing tool. Companies that engage in collective bargaining are likely to be more productive and have higher wages than companies that don't.

But collective bargaining - at firm and sectoral level - is just a start, the first rung on the productivity ladder. Collectively agreed employee-participation measures, co-determination and co-management, worker-directors - all these promote productivity, all

Companies that engage in collective bargaining are likely to be more productive and have higher wages than companies that don't

these make for better companies.

There are two important implications here. First, whenever we organise a workplace, we are increasing productivity throughout the economy as well as empowering members. Second, employers who obstruct collective bargaining in the workplace - and politicians who refuse to give legal effect to collective bargaining - are actually undermining economic growth.

The second goal is to initiate sectoral planning. There is already a basis for this in the Programme for Government's commitment to establish Sectoral Taskforces. These taskforces are to be made up of the main stakeholders (employee and employer representatives), supported by 'experts' and chaired by the line Minister. These committees would be tasked to assess sectoral challenges (low productivity or investment, labour shortages, high input costs, weak infrastructure, etc.). They would also be important to meet the impacts of climate change, automation and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in order to achieve a Just Transition.

An excellent example of how trade unionists would approach such analysis can be found in ICTU's 'Ireland's Meat Processing Sector' report. This exposed a low-value, low-waged, low-investment, low-road sector and put forward proposals to put it on the high road of productivity.

Sectoral planning is about creating a 'negotiated economy' rather than a free-for-all that drives wages and working conditions towards the bottom.

Third, how do we direct resources towards productive companies? We could start by

reforming Ireland's business subsidy regime. Forty government departments and public agencies distribute billions in public subsidies to business along with billions more in public procurement contracts. We should prioritise grant-funding and public procurement to companies that possess a 'Good Company Seal'; that is, to companies that demonstrate that they are 'good' companies.

To do this, we need to establish the components of a 'good company': collective labour rights, investment over value-extraction such as dividends and share buy-backs, financial transparency, environmental measures, in-work training & career development, gender pay equality, inclusive policies on digitalisation. There are a range of benchmarks for a good

By directing subsidies and contracts towards good companies we would be rewarding productive business activity and incentivising other companies to up their game

company. By directing subsidies and contracts towards good companies we would be rewarding productive business activity and incentivising other companies to up their game.

These are just some of the instruments and goals in a new economic model. Equally important is creating quality employment, driving wage equality, reducing living costs and preparing for a Just Transition.

It is vital that the trade union movement enters and takes charge of this debate. This is the best way to deliver for our members and create an economy that serves the interests of the producers of goods and services, namely, the working class.

A look at the first steps towards an all-island education system...

By Ciarán Gallagher

The 11th Vere Foster Annual Lecture took place on January 13 in the Malone Hotel, Belfast on the topic of What would an All-island Education System look like? What are the first steps to it?

Frank Connolly, renowned investigative journalist, author and Head of Communications for SIPTU, Ireland's largest trade union, gave a thought-provoking lecture, highlighting numerous challenges and opportunities.

The audience, which marked the largest attendance yet for this annual event, consisted of INTO activists, members of various bodies associated with the education sector, religious representatives from various churches, civic society and retired union stalwarts.

Recently appointed Northern Secretary of ICTU, Gerry Murphy introduced the lecture, stating, "as the largest teachers' union on the island, we believe we are well placed to contribute to this debate," while emphasising that Connolly's presentation may challenge those in attendance to look at the future of education on the island in a fresh light.

The lecture was a well-researched analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the current education systems in both jurisdictions on the island. Connolly, author of the book 'United Nation - The Case for Integrating Ireland' drew attention to areas that are likely to require change and those which might form part of a new, re-designed all-island system.

"It is commendable that INTO members have also begun a conversation on an all-island educa-



Frank Connolly delivered the Vere Foster Lecture



L-R: Northern Chair Siobhán McElhinney, Northern Secretary Gerry Murphy, INTO President John Driscoll, Frank Connolly and General Secretary John Boyle

tion system as teachers must play a central role in its evolution," he said.

"In order to meet this historic, once in a life-time challenge, it will require an honest and thorough assessment of what has worked and failed in both jurisdictions," continued Connolly, em-

phasising how a number of factors, including demographic change and the impact of Brexit, are building momentum towards a unity referendum as provided for in the Good Friday Agreement.

"The lesson from Brexit is the danger of calling a vote on fundamental constitutional questions

without adequate preparation and clear knowledge of the consequences of any such decision," said Connolly, who later added: "Just as in health, the challenge of building an all-island education system is immense given the difficulties, indeed obstacles, relating to academic selection and segregation in the North, as well as church influence and control, state funding and the disparity between public and private access across the island. "Integrated education is central to the future but is easier said than done."

Expanding on that theme, Connolly suggested that "the key questions about the nature of the systems, North and South, can be addressed under the three broad headings of 'class, church and curriculum', within which the controversial issues of integrated education, private versus public and de-secularisation, among others, can be examined.

"What is indisputable from the most recent comparative research into primary and post primary is that educational performance, or the lack of it, is a major contributory factor to the low growth rate, productivity and income levels in [the North]," said Connolly, citing a recent ESRI report on North-South education.

On the issue of class and opportunities, Connolly noted some interesting figures: "Last year, in the South private fee-paying schools were subsidised to the tune of more than €100 million in public funding, including for the pay of teachers. This is at a time when the Department is still considering an increase to the €65 million it provides for school meals each

year in disadvantaged areas across the State."

Commending co-operation between unions such as the INTO and the Ulster Teachers' Union (UTU), Connolly noted that various issues including pay, burnout, housing and the cost of living are challenges which may be best tackled in a new all-island system before quoting President Michael D Higgins: "Separating people in relation to education isn't helpful."

A lively Q&A session followed, with Gerry Murphy adding that the lecture will contribute to the growing discussion across the

Separating people in relation to education isn't helpful

wider trade union movement on the constitutional future of the island. INTO President, John Driscoll, closed the evening, thanking Connolly and re-stating the INTO's commitment to progressive and positive change in the interest of the education of all the children of the island.

Ciarán Gallagher is deputy director of communications at INTO and editor of InTouch, the union magazine. The full lecture is available to view at: bit.ly/VereFosterLecture22

This article first appeared in InTouch in March 2023.

Meath seminar looks at role of labour and women in fight for freedom

THE Meath Council of Trade Unions is to host a labour history seminar marking the end of the Decade of Centenaries on Saturday 6th May.

The seminar, which will be held at the SIPTU Dan Shaw Centre, Navan from 10am to 1.30pm, is to focus on the seminal role organised labour and women in Meath played in creating the revolutionary dy-

namic behind the struggle for national independence.

Workers – and women – have subsequently been made 'invisible' in historical accounts of this turbulent period, and according to the organisers, it is time their story was told. Presentations will include an overview of organised labour in the revolutionary decade; the mobilisation of agricultural la-

bourers in the ITGWU and the intense conflicts that ensued; and women and their multiple roles in the wider political and military struggle.

For further information, contact Secretary to Meath Council of Trade Unions, Moira Leydon, at moira@asti.ie or John Regan, Sector Organiser, SIPTU, at john.regan@siptu.ie

Veteran SIPTU DCC shop steward honoured on his retirement

Long serving SIPTU Dublin City Council shop steward Daron Smith was honoured by the SIPTU DCC Committee on his retirement at a meeting in early March.

Daron has been a member of the union for 46 years, 44 of those working at Dublin City Council, where he has been a shop steward for 22 years.

SIPTU-DCC Chair Anthony Ellis (right) and Deputy Chair Declan O'Reilly (left) presented Daron with the awards, while Convener Pat McCormack, on behalf of the committee, thanked him for his

many years of service to SIPTU-DCC and to the trade union movement and wished him all the best on his retirement.



Neurodiversity – a trade union issue



By Ethel Buckley

April is World Autism Month. Campaigners can take the opportunity to focus on the inclusion and acceptance of people with different neurologies. To mark World Autism Month, Liberty is taking a look at how our Union can ensure that workplaces are more inclusive and supportive of neurodivergent workers.

The term 'neurodiversity' is a non-medical umbrella term used to describe conditions such as autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia and ADHD.

'Neurodiversity' is used also as a term to describe an aspect of emerging trade union equality, diversity and inclusion campaigning that focuses on workers who are neurodivergent.

Neurodiversity in the workplace is the acceptance that there are natural and normal variations in the way that people think and process information; and that different cognitive profiles can present both strengths and challenges in the workplace depending on the environment in which people work.

According to consultancy and auditing firm Deloitte, between 10% and 20% of the population is

neurodivergent. The World Economic Forum accepts these figures. For us, that would equate to thousands of SIPTU members and in the region of 80,000 members of Irish trade unions who are neurodivergent.

We all have loved ones, family members colleagues neighbours and union comrades who are neurodivergent. Many people reading this article are neurodivergent. Many more are the parents or family members of people who are neurodivergent. The time has come for SIPTU to give voice to the challenges that these workers face and to advocate on their behalf in the workplace.

We all have loved ones; family members; colleagues; neighbours and union comrades who are neurodivergent

Let's look at the current situation regarding neurodiversity in the workplace in Ireland.

Employment law precedents are emerging on neurodiversity over recent years. For example, adjudications from the Workplace Relations Commission have found that autism and dyspraxia

constitute a disability within the meaning of the Employment Equality Act.

Section 16 of the Act requires employers, where their employee has a disability, to provide reasonable accommodation by way of undertaking appropriate measures to support that employee in performing their

include but are certainly not limited to the following: adapting the premises, workstation or equipment; adapting the employee's work pattern; providing access to a quiet space or a sensory room; providing access to a work environment free from fluorescent lighting or strong odours.

experiencing issues, up to and including discrimination, will have their issues addressed and resolved by their Union swiftly and expertly in the workplace. If it is not possible to reach a resolution with the employer, by way of collective bargaining or individual representation, neurodivergent members have recourse to expert representation by their Union at third parties.



It is crucial that neurodivergent workers themselves are involved in putting in place suitable accommodations

duties if that employee would be fully competent and capable of performing their required duties with the benefit of that reasonable accommodation. Reasonable accommodations provided to an employee with a disability should enable that employee to access, participate or advance in employment or undergo training.

Reasonable accommodations that may be necessary for neurodivergent workers will likely differ in each case depending on the specific needs of the worker. Examples might

It is crucial that neurodivergent workers themselves are involved in putting in place suitable accommodations and that the workers in question have an opportunity to refuse an accommodation if they do not deem it suitable.

As with all workplace issues, the benefit of being a SIPTU member is the opportunity to have issues resolved through discussion and representation in the workplace. Most neurodivergent members

The Pharmaceutical, Chemicals and Medical Devices Sector is currently leading the charge within SIPTU on behalf of neurodiverse members. In response to demand from members, the Sector is addressing issues at workplace level. Organising and Membership Development is supporting the Sector and has developed a template 'Neurodiversity Workplace Policy' for SIPTU-organised workplaces.

We encourage Shop Stewards to collectively bargain worker-focused neurodiversity policies with their employers.

Kids team set up with help of Castleview AFC

By David Curtin

Castleview AFC is a soccer club located on Cork City's northside. More than just a club, it is community driven and run by a committee which adopts very caring approach.

It is not just a committee of friends and past players but a family that cares for the club and for all those who live in the local community.

I am a father to a child with autism. There is so little for kids with additional needs to do in their areas, so I contacted Castleview AFC to see if I could set up a football team specifically for such children. The club welcomed me

with open arms – and the help I received from them from the first time I met them was overwhelming.

Recently, the kids were presented with their Castleview jerseys and water bottles by Garda Sergeant John Dwyer. And I would like to thank Sgt. Dwyer for taking the opportunity to come and spend some time with the children.

I also want to thank Castleview as well as the kids' parents – who do not just turn up to activities but also help out.

This will keep us going and help us achieve our goals with the kids as there is currently little that exists out there to help us to do that.



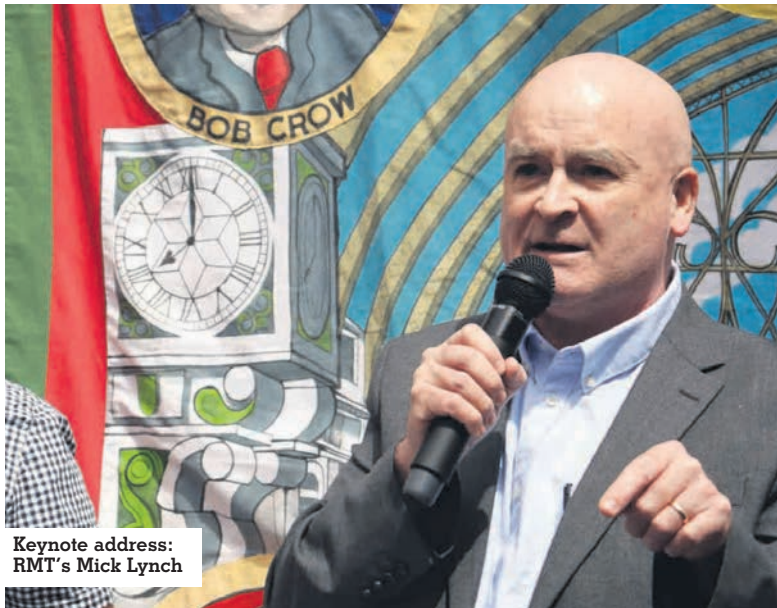
A festive day of debate, music, art and drama to honour Robert Tressell

By Scott Millar

THE work of Dublin-born author Robert Tressell (born Robert Noonan) and the wider culture of trade unionism will be celebrated in a day-long festival of debate, music, art and drama in Liberty Hall, Dublin on Saturday 6th May.

Among the highlights of the inaugural Robert Tressell Festival are keynote addresses by RMT General Secretary, Mick Lynch, and the ICTU Vice President, Phil Ní Sheaghdha, as well as music by Darragh Lynch of the renowned folk group Lankum and singer Karan Casey with Niamh Dunne and Sean Óg Graham.

The event will also include discussions around the themes raised in the book *The Ragged Trousered*



Keynote address: RMT's Mick Lynch



Dublin-born author Robert Tressell, a giant of working class literature

Philanthropists by Robert Tressell, which was written while he was working as a sign-painter in England, after he had left Dublin and spent several years in South Africa.

Mick Lynch has come to considerable prominence over the past year, as he has presented the case for his union's railway members as they battle for significant wage increases and against the closure of vital as-

tion and integration, and the organisation of low-paid workers. Among those participating in these seminars is the SIPTU Deputy General Secretary, Ethel Buckley; Ronan Burtenshaw, the co-ordinator the UK cost-of-living campaign Enough is Enough; Heather Wood of Women Against Pit Closures; and Memet Uludag of United Against Racism.

"We hope the festival will evolve into an annual event," said Mary Muldowney, historian-in-residence at Dublin City Council and a member of the Robert Tressell Festival Organising Committee. "We also intend to run a number of other events over the course of the year," she added.

"The festival is intended to promote the objectives and values of trade unionism as well as provide a space for discussion on the challenges facing working people today," said Seamus McDonagh, chairperson of the Robert Tressell Festival Organising Committee.

"Celebrating the life of Tressell, whose work came to exert a consider-



Karan Casey, who is performing with Niamh Dunne and Sean Óg Graham at the Robert Tressell event. (Photo: Liadh Connolly)

pects of the rail network in the UK such as ticket offices.

In particular, Lynch has won plaudits for the manner he has dealt with Tory politicians and journalists who have attempted to push an agenda of belittling RMT members' demands.

Born in London to two Irish parents, Lynch has spoken previously of the influence *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* and its author, had on his political development.

The festival includes a day schedule of seminars, which are free of charge to attend, on various subjects, including the life of Robert Tressell, trade union responses to immigra-

able influence over the Left will also be an important element of the day," he added.

Trade union banners including one featuring Tressell himself and parts of the 1913 Lockout Tapestry will be on display alongside a number of book and other merchandise stalls. The event is supported by ICTU, SIPTU, and number of other Irish and UK unions.

More information on the festival and tickets is available at <https://tresselfestival.ie>

'Hell told by some of the damned'



By Mick Halpenny

'The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists' By Robert Tressell

When the Penguin edition of Robert Tressell's 'Ragged Trousered Philanthropists' was published in 1940, it sold at the rate of more than a copy a minute and the first print run of 50,000 was gone in three weeks.

Its popularity, particularly among British service personnel during the war, was credited with influencing the subsequent election in 1945 of a transformational Labour government which in turn powered in the Welfare State, the NHS, free secondary education, and the nationalisation of railways, mines and other key industries.

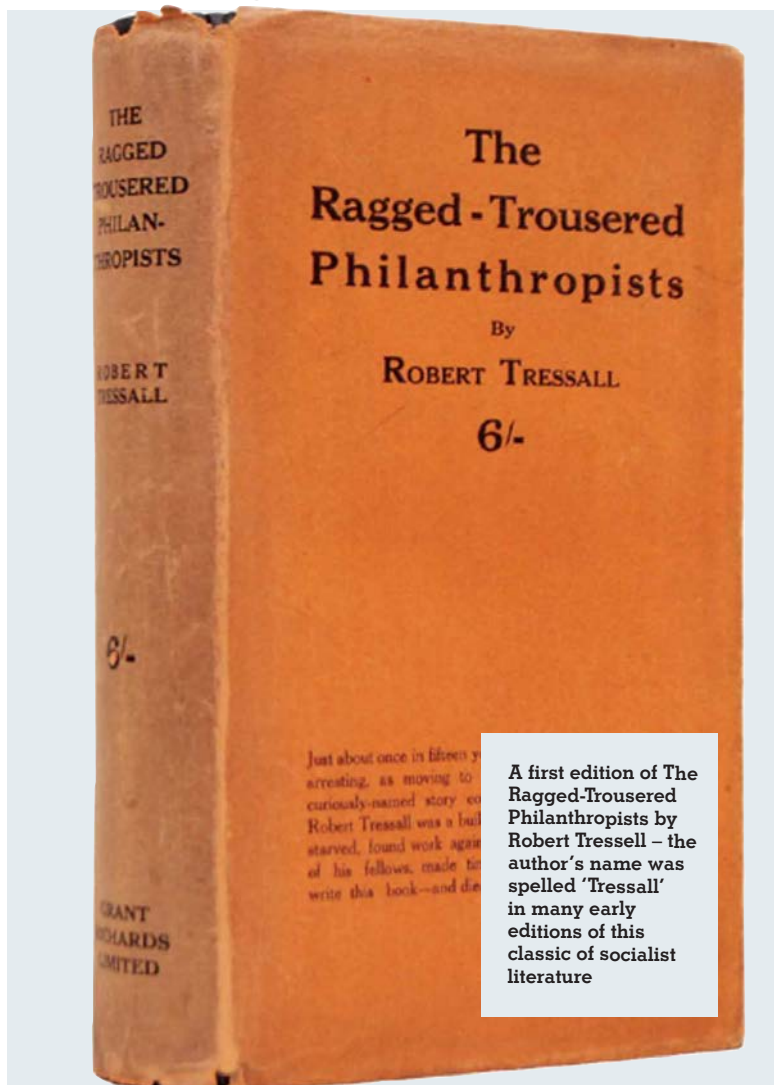
The first ever edition of this socialist classic appeared in 1914, three years after the author's death, and its enduring popularity has ensured its continuous publication ever since. In 2017, a graphic novel version hit the bookshelves and this Dublin-born writer's working class novel was voted second in The Guardian's top 10 books having the greatest influence on 20th century Britain.

There have been television versions (1967 and 1983), a very popular BBC Radio production aired in 2008 and there have also been numerous stage adaptations, including a one-man show in SIPTU's Liberty Hall Theatre a few years ago. The author, whose real name was Robert Noonan, was born in Wexford Street, Dublin, in 1870 where a plaque was unveiled to his memory in 1991 by Dublin trade unionists. It's said he adopted his "nomme de plume" of Tressell as a nod to the painters and decorators trestle table which was so much a part of his chosen trade.

As a young man he emigrated to South Africa, then a British colony, and later became involved there in the centenary commemorations marking Ireland's 1798 rebellion. Later still, he was said to have been involved in supporting the formation of an Irish Brigade to aid the Boers then fighting for independence from the British.

One of the Brigade's commanders was Major John McBride, subsequently executed as one of the 1916 Rising's leaders.

Shortly after, Noonan (Tressell) left South Africa for England and

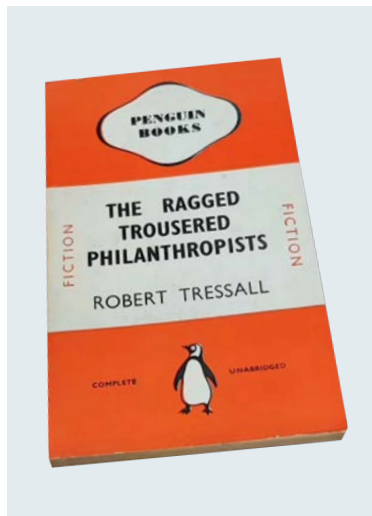


A first edition of The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists by Robert Tressell – the author's name was spelled 'Tressall' in many early editions of this classic of socialist literature

despite a then recession, found work at his trade in the town of Hastings on the south coast. His experience there as an ordinary worker and his interactions with workmates and employers on the job inspired him to write the book, described by himself as the "story

get them to see a vision of a better world than the one they and their families experience daily with redundancies, poverty and hous-

This Dublin-born writer's working class novel was voted second in The Guardian's top 10 books having the greatest influence on 20th century Britain



of 12 months of hell, told by some of the damned".

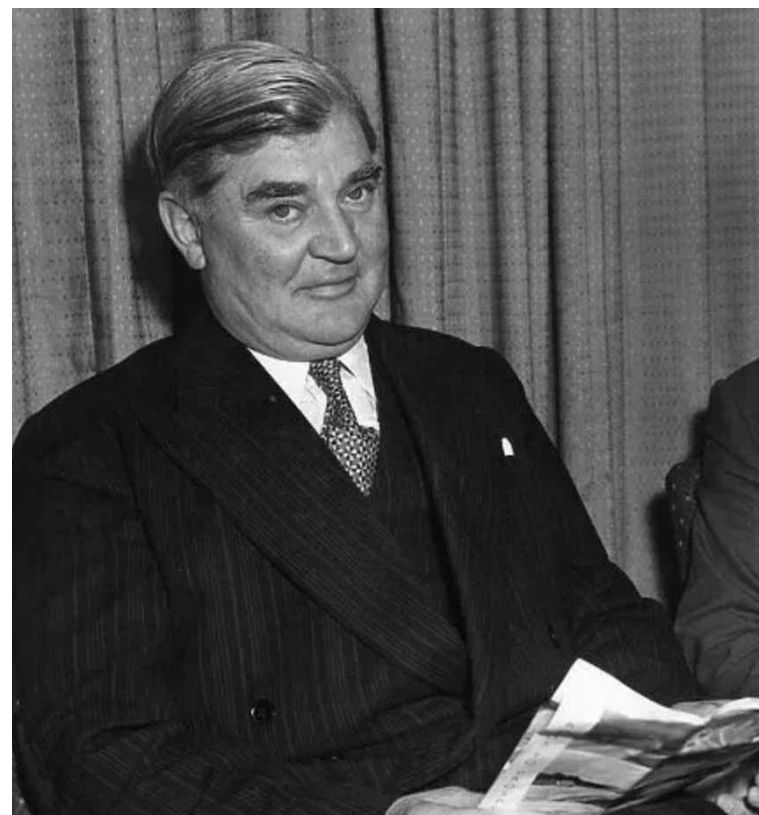
It is set in the town of 'Mugsborough' (Hastings), though in truth could be anywhere, and tells the story of a group of housepainters under the thumb of their employer. The hero, Owen, tries to

ing. However, many are too accepting of the status quo or frightened to confront their employer.

Nevertheless it is Owen's voice that wins through to the reader.

It is the power of that voice in its vision of a socialist future along with the novel's satire, humour and – sometimes – deep despair and sadness that has given it such an enduring popularity for over a century.

Depressingly, many of the issues experienced by Owen and his fellow workers are still prevalent today and his voice needs to be heard still.



Aneurin "Nye" Bevan, was a Welsh Labour Party politician, who served as Minister of Health in Clement Attlee's government and spearheaded the creation of the British National Health Service.



Join the Fintan Lalor Pipe Band

Bagpipe lessons for people of all ages (classes most suitable for children from 9 years to adults of any age)

- Learn to play the bagpipes
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Instructor: Pat Byrne – qualified instructor with Irish Pipe Band Association and Scottish Pipe Band Association.

To register you or your child's interest contact patrickbyrne@gmail.com or smillar@siptu.ie

The Fintan Lalor Pipe Band is one of the oldest existing pipe bands in Ireland. It was founded just prior to the Great Dublin Lockout of 1913 by members of the ITGWU with money provided to them by union leader Jim Larkin to buy its first instruments. For many years, it led the St Patricks Day Parade in Dublin and took part in pipe band competitions throughout Ireland and Scotland.

Launch of the Arise Women's Network

By Eira Gallagher



Arise Advanced Women's Activist Development Programme participants pictured at their first training day with Deputy General Secretary, Ethel Buckley, and Honorary President, Mary O'Sullivan.

The Arise programme is a Leadership Development Programme for women staff and activists in our union. Its purpose is to provide a training and development programme that will assist women to reach their full potential within SIPTU.

The Programme provides participants with an understanding of leadership theory and styles and provides an opportunity to explore their relevance and application within the context of the trade union movement. A key element of the programme was the interaction participants had with role model guest speakers drawn from national leaders in the women's movement, politics and the trade union movement.

Speakers on the day included SIPTU Honorary President Mary O'Sullivan, who outlined the importance of the SIPTU Working Women's Charter, a 10-year policy,

campaigning and organising roadmap for women's equality over the decade 2023 to 2023. Mary noted that much progress has been made



Honorary President Mary O'Sullivan speaking at the launch of the Arise Network on International Women's Day.

in the recent past, "but despite equal pay legislation since the 1970's, women remain severely disadvantaged in the labour market and the workplace".

General Secretary, Joe Cunningham, spoke of how the programme addresses personal development and communications, an aid to women overcoming some of the barriers to communicating in what is still a male dominated trade union movement. Joe went on to recognise the invaluable nature of the relationships that are formed through participation in programmes like Arise, noting "we are most anxious that this element of Arise wouldn't come to an end when the formal programme concludes. Therefore, I am delighted to say that we are establishing an Arise Network for participants who have completed the development programme, allowing the learning and the support to continue and to flourish".

It is envisaged that a series of events will take place during the year to create a space for Network members to continue to discuss issues of importance to women in

The Script

By Lilian O'Flynn

A room full of people,
a meeting of minds in wanting to better themselves,
but mostly wanting to change.
From different background we came to this place,
With faith and trust this group has grown.
From being the person, we came in as,
But leaving each week with more understanding of ourselves and others.
These walls if they could talk would tell stories of anguish and strain,
Tears full of pain and happiness too.
The friendships we have formed around in a circle.
No beginning or ending, this group just one.
A circle of love, laughter and giggles no end.
Supporting each other on their journey.
The cuppa at breaktime is another tale,
No matter the make up old or young, rich, or poor, brainy, or easy.
All here to say I'm here and I have a story to tell.
On our crossroads, junction, or path, one this is for sure.
We are changing the script.

Lilian O'Flynn, a member of the SIPTU Administrative Staff and a participant on the inaugural pilot Arise Women's Development Programme spoke on behalf of the course participants at the launch of the Arise Network on International Women's Day and recited a poem she had written to express the benefits she has gained from attending the programme.

SIPTU Membership drive at UCD

SIPTU featured significantly at this year's University College Dublin Students' Union trade union week.

On 16th February, Lynda Daly and Aoife Ní Shuilleabháin, from the union's Strategic Organising Unit, met with interested staff and students and extolled the virtues of union membership.

In March, the SIPTU Sector Committee reached out to members old and new, by organising a coffee morning in the UCD Clubhouse.

Aware of the fact the Covid restrictions had meant that many new members had not as yet had the opportunity to meet with their local reps, an invite was issued to the membership – the subsequent coffee morning was well attended.

And the Strategic Organising Unit had a message for all those who signed up to 'Get More Involved': "Expect to hear from us soon, as we move forward with our information and recruitment plan."



Coffee morning at the UCD Clubhouse in March



SIPTU stall during UCDSU trade union week in February

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CUBA - Big turn out for election

■ By Frank Connolly

Following nationwide elections in March, the new Cuban national assembly of 470 members was formally opened on 19th April. The new parliament also ratified Miguel Díaz-Canel, first elected in 2018 when he replaced Raul Castro, as president.

The ceremony took place on the anniversary of the Bay of Pigs or Playa Giron invasion in 1961 when Cuban revolutionary forces defeated US backed mercenaries seeking to overthrow the government led by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara.

Almost 76%, or three out of every four of those entitled to vote participated in the elections on 26th March last, according to Cuban ambassador to Ireland, Bernardo Guanche Hernández.



Over 6 million Cubans exercised their right to vote in Sunday's legislative elections. Photo: Miguel Díaz-Canel

Almost 76%, or three out of every four of those entitled to vote participated in the elections on 26th March last, according to Cuban ambassador to Ireland, Bernardo Guanche Hernández

"Although the number of non-voters is higher than in previous national elections, the exceptional circumstances of these votes give extraordinary value to the high participation achieved," he said.

"Along with the severe economic and social damage caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and accentuated inflation, Cuba has had to face the punitive measures adopted by the Trump administration and continued by President Biden against the economy and trade of the Caribbean nation.

"Added to this is the unfair and unjustified declaration of Cuba as a nation that sponsors terrorism, which Trump decreed in the last days of his term and

which has turned the persecution of all Cuban financial transactions into a ferocious hunt, further hitting Cuba's exports and imports country, as well as foreign investment.

"As a consequence, these last three years have been very hard for Cubans: with hardly any inflow of fresh currency due to the precipitous drop in international tourism, with a shortage of locally produced or imported food, with high prices for basic products and services, with long queues to buy food, hygiene, fuel and other necessities, with long blackouts due to the lack of maintenance at electricity generating plants due to the violent financial

These last three years have been very hard for Cubans: with hardly any inflow of fresh currency due to the precipitous drop in international tourism

contraction.

Few governments can face such adverse conditions, and still maintain a high popular support as seen in these elections," Senor Guanche Hernandez said.

He continued: "Added to the precarious socio-economic situation, the fundamental cause of which is the US blockade, are the intense and well-financed campaigns in the media and on social networks aimed at discrediting the transparency and validity of the Cuban electoral process.

An example of this was the circulation of various false news to inhibit and intimidate voters, including the false threat by US government entities to prohibit humanitarian parole for Cubans who wish to emigrate, if they participated in the elections which permeated some sectors that want and seek to emigrate to achieve family reunification."

The 470 elected deputies, who represent all sectors of Cuban society and local powers, were elected as members of parliament by obtaining more than 50% of the valid votes, the ambassador to Ireland said.

The President and Vice-President of the Republic can hold office for a maximum of two consecutive terms and are answerable to the national assembly at all times, he added.

"A new stage of work now begins for the consolidation of the political system and the democratic structures of Cuba. The main challenge for legislators is to advance laws, transformations and decisions that promote the battered national economy and strengthen the socialist State. To achieve these goals, the Cuban

In April, SIPTU has made a detailed submission to the Fourth Cycle of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Human Rights Council regarding Cuba. Since 2007, SIPTU's Solidarity with Cuba Forum has worked to build solidarity with Cuban civic society, with the labour and trade union movement and to support projects in line with these objectives through the provision of financial and material resources for Cuba. The Union's submission derives from five site visits to Cuba from 2009 to 2022 and attendance at the International Judicial Conference for the Cuban 5 in London in March 2014 as well as visits to Ireland by prominent Cuban political leaders and from civil society and cultural organisations.

In the two most recent trips to Cuba, union members engaged in site visits and discussions with representatives of the CTC (Central de Trabajadores de Cuba), the trade union federation in Cuba.

López Obrador and the AMLO effect



By
Vic Duggan

ANDRÉS Manuel López Obrador – AMLO, for short – was elected Mexico's first left-wing president in 2018 at the third time of asking. His campaign slogan was to the point: "For the good of all, the poor come first."

Re-election is constitutionally prohibited in Mexico, so a year from now the campaign to replace him will be well under way and his six-year term is drawing to a close. At this juncture, can we say that he has lived up to progressive promise?

If you read right-wing media, whether in Mexico or internationally, the verdict seems clear. In 2021, The Economist billed him as Mexico's 'false messiah'. The country's elite remain as opposed to his leadership as they were before his election.

In an increasingly polarised polity, staunch opposition filters through much of the middle class. But, apart from a short-lived blip in the early stages of the pandemic, AMLO's base support has been rock solid, his approval rating around 60%.

Unlike in Europe, where austerity became a dirty word on the left since the global financial crisis, AMLO has made it a virtue. At heart, he is a fiscal conservative who wants to avoid repeating Mexico's 1980s debt crisis.

Rather than raising taxes, he has cut civil servants' pay and conditions to finance poverty programmes and infrastructure projects. He calls this 'republican austerity'.



AMLO on the hustings trail in 2014 – he was elected president in 2018 on a 'For the good of all, the poor come first' slogan

Similarly, during the Covid pandemic, spending was re-prioritised to support the health budget but broader economic supports were minimal. Mexico's fiscal response is was one of the smallest in the world.

Initially, AMLO pledged not to increase taxes in the first half of his six-year term but planned revenue-raising tax reform for the second half. With the economy slowly recovering from the pandemic, and having lost ground politically in the 2021 mid-terms, AMLO backed away from any meaningful tax increases at all. Instead, he is doubling down on austerity.

Unlike in some other Latin American countries, Mexico's military has not typically played a central political role. Slowly but surely, this is changing under AMLO.

The military has become increasingly involved in other areas of public policy, such as policing as well as the construction and management of key



Mexican military's role has changed under AMLO

infrastructure. This reduces accountability and increases opportunities for corruption in an institution whose record is far from impeccable.

Another area where AMLO's progressive bona fides are questionable is his treatment of the feminist movement. Mexico has a traditionally macho culture. Gender-based violence and discrimination is rife. Public protests of recent years are more than justified. But, rather than co-opting

this activist energy and accommodating reasonable demands, AMLO adopted an antagonistic approach. He derided the feminist movement as pawns of the conservative elite. He had to be pressured to withdraw backing for a candidate for a governor accused of multiple rapes.

As a general rule, AMLO believes in a strong executive, not so much in independent institutions. This is not a trivial concern in a context where institutional checks and balances are weak, and meaningful democracy not yet three decades old.

After a notoriously closely-contested election in 2006, AMLO and his supporters took to the streets for weeks on end to dispute the result upheld by the National Electoral Institute (INE).

While it is not without fault, the INE is one of the better respected institutions and was crucial to the country's democratic transition in the late 1990s. AMLO recently signed a

law that, many fear, will emasculate the INE through budget cuts.

The President is touting it as another example of 'republican austerity', cutting a bloated bureaucracy down to size and channeling savings to tackling poverty. But, in a country where political corruption is still rife, gutting the body responsible for overseeing elections and sanctioning malfeasance could be a recipe for democratic backsliding.

Ironically, one of the most progressive reforms under AMLO – the introduction of independent trade unions – came about due to pressure from the US (particularly its labour movement) when renegotiating NAFTA at Trump's behest.

In what is still a highly unequal country, and one with a low tax burden even by Latin American standards, the way to ensure "the poor come first" is through progressive taxation and reform, not by destroying the institutions that hold the country together.

Bolivia: chronicle of an economic crisis foretold

BOLIVIA may still be one of the poorest countries in the Western hemisphere but, particularly since Evo Morales became the country's first indigenous president in 2006, his Movement for Socialism (MAS) has overseen immense improvements in living standards.

Though still significant, poverty and inequality have massively reduced. Bolivia has had the lowest inflation rate in the region, so it hasn't borne the full brunt of the cost-of-living crisis of the past two years. In fact, managing the economy has been seen as one of the government's strengths.

Recent weeks have seen some chickens come home to roost, how-



Party rally: Indigenous supporters of Evo Morales' Movement for Socialism

ever, as the country faces a foreign exchange crisis and credit rating downgrades. Some clues lie in the reasons for low inflation. Bolivia has long pegged its currency to the US dollar, which has the advantage of helping to ensure relative price sta-

bility.

Subsidies also keep a lid on prices, but at a cost. The State imports oil and fixes petrol prices at €0.49 per litre. Maintaining energy subsidies costs the government an estimated 3.7% of GDP, not far off half the 8.5%

of GDP budget deficit expected this year.

About a third of that budget deficit is financed by printing money.

Bolivia had used bountiful gas exports to build up foreign reserves amounting to \$15bn by 2014. Essentially, they have run these down to maintain the dollar peg and part-finance the budget deficit without generating inflation.

Running dangerously low on dollars, liquidating their remaining gold reserves can only buy time.

Unless it can quickly tap its massive lithium deposits to export for hard currency, Bolivia will either have to reduce its budget deficit and stop printing money or else end its currency peg and let inflation rip.

In one fell swoop, they could likely

end the current crisis by ending the petrol subsidy. Of course, this would feed through to inflation, but not to the same extent as would a chaotic end to the currency peg.

Moreover, in a country that has long been intensely politically polarised, and even more so since the contested elections and alleged coup in 2019, there is a risk that such a move disrupts Bolivia's fragile political economy.

But, not only are fossil fuel subsidies environmentally detrimental, they are also regressive, providing more benefit to the better-off who consume most.

There is no easy solution, but axing them seems to be the path of least resistance.

Vic Duggan

Ukrainians find new friends in Ireland

By Polina Afanasyeva

The Ukrainian army is preparing to make counter-offensives across the country, but the danger still continues.

Millions of Ukrainians abroad still worry about their own safety and that of their children, while the same time cherishing a desire to return home – to return home when the terrible sounds of explosions and rockets will not be heard.

24th February 2022 – now everyone knows this date [the day when Russia invaded], but few people knew about Ukraine before then. It seems like one date in time, but literally everything has changed...

Despite the terrible battles, the

Millions of Ukrainians abroad still worry about their own safety and that of their children, while the same time cherishing a desire to return home

bloodshed and thousands of deaths, estimated by the UN at over 8000 civilians in Ukraine and many thousands more injured, throughout 2022 the whole world found out about the real Ukraine.

According to Russian calculations, Kyiv was supposed to be captured in 72 hours, followed by the overthrow of the government, and the Russian dictator's gathering in of "his" people in Kyiv.

Today, more than 400 days have passed since the beginning of the Russian invasion, but Ukraine remains steadfast in defending itself. Before the war, everyone was afraid and held one illusion: that the Russian military was the strongest in the world. After several days of battle, however, this myth was debunked.

Despite the financial difficulties, which have affected anyone, Ukrainian people donate [to buy] military equipment or to rehabili-



Anya and Nastya



Lera



Alonya

tate wounded civilians and soldiers. But we would not have such strong spirit without the powerful help provided by our foreign friends.

On the very first day of the Russian military invasion, Europe opened its borders to Ukrainians, allowing our citizens to stay under temporary protection in the countries of the Schengen zone longer than the 90 days normally provided [for residents of countries not party to the zone].

Moreover, for a long time Ukrainian citizens were allowed to cross the EU border even without passports and with animals without [the necessary] documentation. Additionally, all the restrictions put in place because of the Covid pandemic were immediately cancelled.

Thousands of hotels opened their doors to our citizens with the desire to provide a safe shelter during the war.

Each of us, wherever we are, has our own story to tell, so we would suggest you listen to some of them...

Lera, a girl from Kyiv who dreams of acting. Before the war, she, like thousands of students, went to university and studied her specialty.

A year has passed. Everything has changed, starting with the country and ending with a change of university. But one thing remains unchanged. She also dreams of becoming an actress and helping creatively to make Ukraine famous not only because of the terrible war, but also to promote Ukrainian cinema, which is already of a high standard. Lera has been in Ireland for almost a year, and has faced various situations here.

She did not come alone, but with her mother and grandmother. "Everything is brilliant, we found

wonderful Irish people who had provided us with housing and help when something is needed," she said.

Alyona, a girl from Dnipro. She says: "The most normal life for me and my boyfriend can be found only in Ukraine, but here we can

On the very first day of the Russian military invasion, Europe opened its borders to Ukrainians, allowing our citizens to stay under temporary protection

work and receive help from people." Alyona and her boyfriend were in Western Ukraine on the first day of the war, which made it much easier to leave the country.

They stayed in Germany for the first two weeks of the bloody battle

for freedom, but the frantic bureaucracy and language problems forced the couple to move on.

Friends advised them about Ireland, where they were told there were good salaries, lots of jobs and, importantly, the English language.

Alyona at once fell in love with Irish people, despite seeing rallies of some Irish people who were not very happy to see Ukrainians here.

When she arrived here, she fell in love with this country, but still feels herself in a foreign land: "I still can't get used to the question 'How

Friends advised them about Ireland, where they were told there were good salaries, lots of jobs and, importantly, the English language

are you?' that there is no need to answer!"

She says she feels at home in Ukraine, among her own people, but adds: "I am so grateful to this country for my life and work experience."

Alyona hopes to return home soon, but Ireland will be at the top of the list of countries she would like to visit again.

Anya is a mother of little four-year-old Nastya. They came here with Nastya's grandmother. According to Anya, they have never met such kind people as the Irish.

"We were lucky to meet a family who offered their home and help at any time. It would seem so far from home, but we can't live without Ireland. We managed to normalise our lives here, despite the daily memories of home – to which we will definitely return," she said.

Anya's daughter has recently started attending kindergarten, and she is learning English.

Polina Afanasyeva is a Ukrainian refugee living in Dublin.

OBITUARY

Brendan Byrne 6th January 1942 – 16th March 2023

A union man of many passions and much respected by those who knew him

ON Friday, 24th March friends and comrades gathered in Richmond Barracks, Inchicore, to celebrate the life of Brendan Byrne. As a young boy Brendan had attended the nearby primary school.

At a beautiful and moving humanist service, hundreds of mourners listened to heartfelt tributes from family and friends.

His children Shonagh, Greg, James and Elizabeth shared a poem and memories of their Dad, and his sister Gabrielle and nephew Gerard recalled wonderful incidents and events from a life well-lived.

The abiding image was of a generous and caring man. A man of endless curiosity and an insatiable book reader. The picture of Brendan in red suit and hat (the beard was authentic) out santy-ing Santa every Christmas to the delight of his adoring grandchildren will remain for years to come.

Musical tributes were rendered by his great friend and piper, Noel Pocock, and by his friends in the People's College choir.

I was honoured to be asked by Brendan's wife Colette to say a few words. I recalled a man of many interests and passions, union activist and full-time official, committed member of the Labour Party, student of history and longstanding member and former chairperson of the Labour History Society and member of the People's College choir.

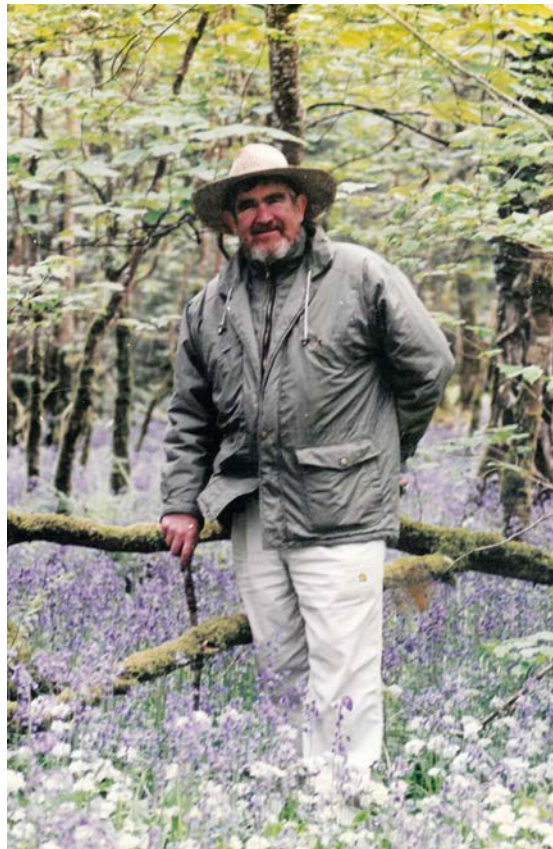
One of his greatest passions was in keeping alive the memory of the Irishmen – of whom his late uncle Eugene Downing was one – who fought in the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War.

Notwithstanding 30 years plus of working together in the ITGWU and SIPTU and our many encounters on demonstrations and marches, we didn't fully get to know each other until both of us were in retirement and the pressure was off.

This was particularly so after Brendan was persuaded to join the SIPTU hillwalkers on their annual trips to the mountains of Europe.

I remembered his first trip when our destination was the Sierra Nevada range in South East Spain.

Brendan came through the door of Dublin Airport departures lounge resplendent in fedora hat and pastel-coloured union jacket, lugging an enormous suitcase.



The suitcase, full of books was 20kg above the permitted weight. We tried to help by distributing some of the books between the rest of us but he still had to pay a hefty fine.

When someone reminded to him that we were only going for a week and that he could not possibly read all those books in that time, he replied calmly, "I know but I haven't decided which ones I want to read yet!" That was Brendan. He loved the little towns and villages tucked away in the

foldes of Europe's great mountain ranges. One of a small (but growing) band who thought that 'excessive' hillwalking was bad for the soul, Brendan was often content to remain behind on the terrace of some well-appointed café, glass of claret or Moretti in hand and watch the world go by.

After a time, he and a few of his erstwhile comrades would stir themselves and stroll through the town seeking out the best seller of artisan cheeses and charcuterie, vintage port or fine sherries. Of

course, if Brendan could also find a little book shop or local museum he was in seventh heaven.

On one occasion in Slovakia we tracked him and a colleague to a beautiful old world hotel where they were enjoying afternoon tea from the silver service and listening to a tuxedo-clad waiter recounting that apart from themselves, the other dignitaries he had the pleasure to serve were Fidel Castro and Pope John XXIII. The two were unfazed by this piece of information.

On these trips, evenings would find us either in the middle of a loud music session or an even louder political argument. Brendan could hold his own in both, always ready to sing a song or play his harmonica or indeed to fight his corner in defence of some political point.

In arguments that frequently became heated, Brendan never played the man, always ball and among comrades not renowned for their reticence or reserve, he was never offered a personal insult. He just naturally commanded respect.

He would want me to say that he was a committed social democrat. He believed that social democracy provided the best means for a peaceful and prosperous life. He was not doctrinaire insisting that the system should face constant challenge and reform.

He believed also that when democracy itself was threatened, whether on the banks of the Ebro or the Dnieper, it should be defended.

Brendan had a long career of service in the ITGWU, later SIPTU. He began work with the union in the ITGWU Number 3 Branch which organised food and drink workers in the Dublin area. By the mid-1980s, he had been appointed the Secretary of the Number 14 Branch which organised workers in the engineering and manufacturing sectors in Dublin. In this role, he led workers in a high profile strike six week strike at Packard Electric in 1987. He also served as a Labour Party councillor on Dublin City Council.

In retirement, Brendan was a member of the People's College Choir and a stalwart of the Irish Labour History Society serving as its President for five years between 2007 and 2013. During this time, he was project manager with the creation of the 1913-1916 Lockout Tapestry.

Above all, Brendan was a warm and generous optimist who will be missed by all who had the good fortune to encounter him.

After the service, Brendan's remains were interred in the close by Golden Bridge cemetery.

Ní bhéidh a léitheid arís ann.

Noel Dowling

Reds na hÉireann

People are the forces that make history

Reds na hÉireann, a forthcoming TG4 documentary on the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) directed by Liberty contributor, Kevin Brannigan, delves into the history and lives of a plethora of Irish students, workers, working-class revolutionaries and political misfits.

These were among those who drew inspiration from Lenin,

Marx and Engels and flew the red, five-pointed star when it was genuinely dangerous and deeply unpopular and who kept the candle of communism burning down the years for a marginal but respected political outfit on the Left in Ireland.

The film opens to a chorus of Soviet marching songs under a stunning single overhead shot peering over the back gardens of the Northside where the viewer is taken on an alluring journey that lands at the feet of a bust of Lenin sitting in the Dublin sunshine.

Ultimately, Reds na hÉireann weaves a powerful, profound, and poignant tapestry of socialism, splits and the struggle for a better world by demonstrating that it is everyday people who are the forces behind all history.

It will air on TG4 on Wednesday 24th May at 9.30 p.m.

Paddy Cole



Fighting Times in the US car industry

Fighting Times: Organizing on the Front Lines of the Class War
By Jon Melrod
Published by PM Press

This autobiography covers in detail 13 years of Jon Melrod's life as a trade union activist. It charts a time of great hope and innovation by socialists in the US which brought thousands of former members of the radical anti-Vietnam War organisation, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), directly into workplace struggles.

Born into a middle-class Jewish family in Washington DC, Melrod joined SDS in 1968, in the University of Wisconsin. Cutting his activist teeth in protests against racism, the war and in support of the Black Panthers, on graduation, Melrod, in common with thousands of other student radicals took their fight for change to the factory floor, deciding to take up jobs in blue-collar workplaces in order to better organise working class struggle.

Fighting Times is focused on the thirteen years Melrod spent as an employee of the American Motors Corporation (AMC) in Wisconsin. His aim was to transform Local 72

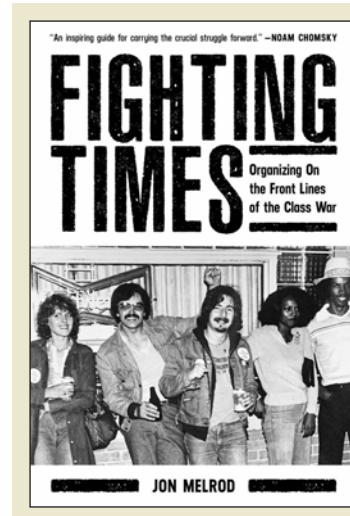
of the United Auto Workers (UAW) "into a model of union militancy, rank-and-file democracy, and progressive political action". A major part of this work was organising a caucus of radical union

Most of Melrod's industrial life was spent at AMC plants in Milwaukee and Kenosha. He also spent periods attempting to organise workers in non-union employments, finding them much more difficult to influence towards radicalism. "I needed to be in a workplace with a union — even a lousy union — where people had a sense of organisation," he wrote.

During his years at AMC, Melrod was involved in a number of wildcat and major strikes commencing with shorter stoppages, slowdowns, diffusion of information, flyers and t-shirts.

The Fighting Times caucus also participated in the struggle against racism outside the workplace, including organising a contingent of workers to join a freedom march against the Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi. In one telling reference Melrod states, of the Tupelo Police Department, "The police were the KKK and the KKK were the police".

At thirty-five years of age, in June 1985, Melrod left AMC to study law in San Francisco. He would go on to have an important career as a human rights lawyer. This may be the subject of a second book but as it stands Fighting Times is both an engaging and informative account



members from across the racial and gender divides who produced a workplace newsletter, the eponymous Fighting Times, which would build up a readership of several thousand among the massive AMC workforce. In print and campaigns the caucus took on both management and, in their view, the conservative all-white, all-male union hierarchy.

Letter to the Editor

A half century of research into Irish Labour history

Dear Editor,

The Irish Labour History Society (ILHS) has partnered with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and its Northern Ireland Committee to organise its third international conference, in Dublin between 14th and 17th September 2023.

The four-day event will feature national and international expert speakers and labour movement practitioners in over 30 events in four venues: the Trinity College Long Room, Liberty Hall, Fórsa head office, and the Teachers' Club.

It will encompass 10 plenary sessions, at least 20 ordinary sessions, an oral history presentation and a voice of experience engagement with expert input from Irish,



British and European academics, trade unionists, employer representatives, worker educationalists, migrant workers' representatives, lay activists, and representatives of trades councils from both traditions on the island of Ireland.

Highlights will include the 47th Countess Markievicz Lecture (courtesy of the Irish Association of Industrial Relations) and discursive studies reviewing social partnership, the peace process, Good Friday Agreement

and Brexit, and social dialogue.

Edited by John Cunningham, Francis Devine and Sonja Tiernan of Otago University, the ILHS's 50th anniversary book, Labour History in Irish History, will be launched as part of the conference.

There will also be labour history tours of Dublin as well as various social events.

More information is available on our website at: www.irishlabourhistorysociety.com

Jack McGinley

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Football's tilted playing-pitch in Europe



By Oz
Russell

The beautiful game is sullied by commodification. Regulation should empower the fans at its heart.



The famous 'yellow wall' of Dortmund supporters embodies the Bundesliga requirement of majority fan ownership of clubs

It was a rotten spectacle. Last year's World Cup in Qatar was built on the bodies of thousands of migrant workers and flew in the face of half-hearted attempts by football's global governing body, FIFA, to include LGBTQ+ fans.

This was, however, the logical endpoint of a process that has seen football depart from its social-democratic roots in favour of pure commodification. Clubs across Europe are increasingly controlled by hedge funds, instrumentalised as soft-power tools by state actors or treated by oligarchs as personal playthings.

Limited attempts at regulation by national and European football associations have been drowned by this sluice of cash. In Spain, clubs have responded to the requirement to include buyout clauses in players' contracts by setting these at ludicrous levels—in some cases over €1 billion. In Germany, RB Leipzig has made a mockery of the 50 per cent +1 rule, requiring (with few exceptions) that Bundesliga clubs be subject to majority fan ownership—charging €1,000 for membership. It has also invented the near-nonsensical name RasenBallsport (Rasen means grass/field) for itself, having being prohibited from calling itself RedBull Leipzig (after the controlling drinks company) by the Deutscher Fußball Bund.

But it is in England where this

process is most advanced. In 1992, the old Division One was replaced by the Premier League, by which the top clubs seceded from accountability to the Football League and the Football Association in favour of 'commercial independence'. A deal with the private broadcaster Sky brought soaring television revenues, concentrated increasingly in the hands of the richest clubs—coinciding with soaring ticket prices for most fans and games timed to favour broadcasting schedules instead of their needs.

Sop to moneyed interests

Nor is this regulation deficit confined to the national federations. The European governing body, UEFA, seems too to be unable to enforce its 'financial fair play' rules—which in any event control only how much debt clubs can accrue, not how much cash their owners can inject to buy trophies. The Qatar sovereign-wealth fund's de facto ownership of Paris Saint-Germain has in effect ensured all other clubs in Ligue 1 compete only for the remaining European qualification places. The expansion of the UEFA Champions League to 36 teams from next year is a sop to moneyed interests within the sport at the expense of player fatigue and fan budgets.

With the publication in February of a government white paper, however, England is set to become

the first federation to have its own football regulator. The envisaged body has laudable aims: to clamp down on the financial mismanagement of clubs, prevent teams from joining breakaway leagues, such as the abortive European Super League, and give fans some say in preventing changes to club colours or crests.

The proposed remit of the regulator is fairly conservative,

Clubs across Europe are increasingly controlled by hedge funds, instrumentalised as soft-power tools by state actors or treated by oligarchs as personal playthings

however. It would do nothing to reverse commodification but rather freeze it in place. The regulator might stop new owners attempting to instrumentalise clubs or prevent some smaller clubs from collapsing through poor bookkeeping and planning. But the fundamental

power balance of English football would still be tilted firmly against fans.

Collective-action dilemma

At the heart of these failures of regulation is a collective-action dilemma: no federation wants to limit its own clubs' competitiveness. It is no coincidence that in Germany the loudest voices pushing against fan-ownership rules have been the board of (majority-fan-owned) Bayern Munich—who worry about falling behind English clubs whose wage and transfer budgets dwarf their own—alongside Red Bull and the former Hannover president Martin Kind. Preventing individuals from having full control over the decisions of a club limits their desire to pump money in.

This is not just a problem between leagues but within them. In England, in the rare case where a club has been fan-owned, fans themselves have generally sought to sell their stake, to compete financially with private enterprises. One has to go down to League 2—the fourth tier—to find the most successful fan-owned club in England, AFC Wimbledon.

Extreme concentration

The root cause of instability is not financial mismanagement but the extreme concentration of wealth at the top of the pyramid

among mostly self-regulating Premier League sides. Even they are threatened with collapse when purchasers use leveraged buyouts to saddle a club with debt, as with Manchester United under the Glazer family, or the personal

This is not just a problem between leagues but within them

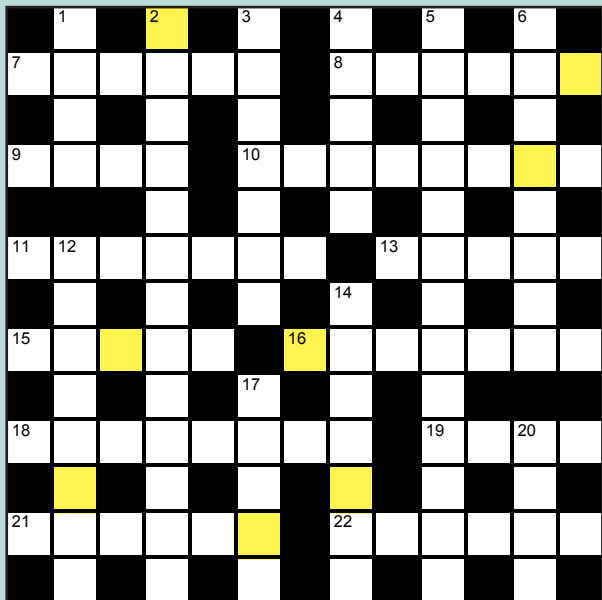
fortunes of an individual or company on whose success a club depends evaporate, as with Chelsea under the sanctioned Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich.

The solution is twofold. Other countries should follow the model of England's football regulator: instead of a race to the bottom, federations should move in tandem to create new enforcement powers on matters such as club ownership and ticket prices, in addition to prudent financial management. And these regulators should vest true power with fan groups, club members and supporters' associations, if not move towards a model of outright fan ownership similar to the 50 per cent +1 rule in Germany.

Liberty Crossword

PRIZE DRAW

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(see back cover)



ACROSS

- 7 Irish, Scottish and Welsh culture (6)
- 8 Papal diplomat (6)
- 9 Sign from above (4)
- 10 With violent force (8)
- 11 Older than the minors (7)
- 13 French fries in the US (5)
- 15 Body of water (5)
- 16 Capital of Ontario (7)
- 18 Exhaust (8)
- 19 Family member (4)
- 21 Often-unpaid worker (6)
- 22 To open (6)

DOWN

- 1 School session (4)
- 2 Instruction for a bank to pay a regular set amount (8,5)
- 3 Shipping hazard (7)
- 4 Full-length (5)
- 5 No longer in demand (13)
- 6 Discovered by Gulliver (8)
- 12 Develop gradually (8)
- 14 Person on watch (7)
- 17 A unit of currency (5)
- 20 Riviera city (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 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 February issue was Ruth Colegate.

The answer was **volunteer**.

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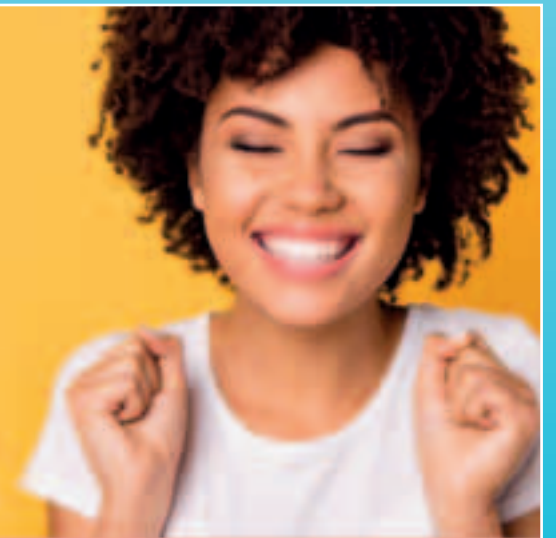
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