

MANDATE TRADE UNION

SEPTEMBER 2014

SHOPFLOOR

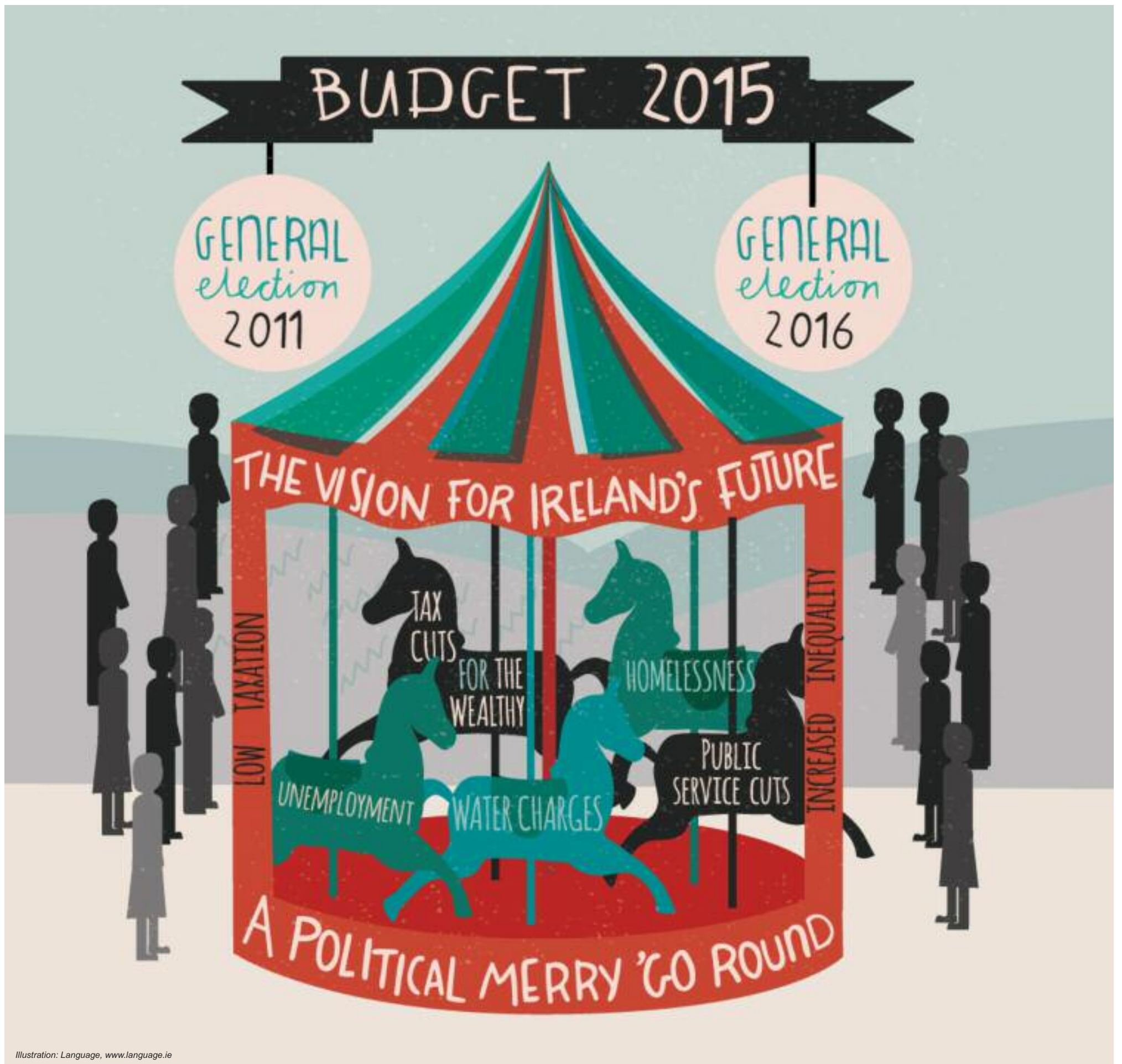


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PLUS UPDATES ON DUNNES, TESCO, BOOTS, ARGOS, BROWN THOMAS & MORE...

Mandate refers Dunnes claim to Lab Court

MANDATE has referred a claim on behalf of members in Dunnes Stores to the Labour Court after the retailer refused to go to a Labour Relations Commission conciliation hearing.

Dunnes Stores employs about 10,000 workers in 112 stores across the Republic. Mandate launched their Decency for Dunnes Workers Campaign in May (2014) with four key issues identified by members: decent hours and earnings; job security; fair pay; as well as representation and the right to dignity at work.

The union has written to the company several times setting out their members' concerns as well as seeking a meeting with management. So far the firm has declined to meet with the union. One of the principal demands is for banded hour contracts which would provide secure hours and earnings. Members at Dunnes have also called for a 3% wage hike, reviews of pay scales/rates and temporary contracts as well as trade union representation rights.

Mandate was highly critical of Dunnes Stores in their letter of referral for a Labour Court hearing and underlined how the union had been "continuously frustrated" in trying to effectively represent members.

General Secretary John Douglas said the union did not want to waste time in "an endless tennis match of correspondence between the parties" and pointed out the the issues facing retail workers at Dunnes were "far too serious for this approach".

He explained that the actions of Dunnes management had shown a "blatant disregard for the living standards of ordinary hard working retail employees".

"I have made it abundantly clear to senior management in Dunnes Stores that we are available to discuss the issues affecting our members at their earliest convenience."

He added: "Our union has given Dunnes Stores a direct line of communications, yet they continue to stick their heads in the sand in the hope that this will all just go away. Let me be clear – our members are not prepared to tolerate this approach."

Dunnes Stores has never attended an I.R. forum unless compelled to do so by legislation, and in the absence of compelling legislation the retailer has engaged in endless and useless correspondence in a bid to frustrate their workers' chosen representatives – Mandate. Mr Douglas concluded by stating his hope that Dunnes Stores would have enough respect for their own workforce – and indeed the Labour Court – to attend a hearing in the near future.

Smyths Toys workers flock to Mandate

MANDATE can report a big increase in Smyths workers joining the union during the past six months. Smyths has 17 stores spread out across the country and Organiser John Callan claims the workers clearly see the value in joining their union.

"We've seen a huge increase in the number of applications from Smyths Toys coming in to Mandate over the past number of months," Mr Callan told *Shopfloor*.

"It appears there are a whole range of issues that workers in Smyths are unhappy about including pay rates, contracts and the unilateral termination of the summer bonus incentive."

He added: "The workers know that on their own, they cannot address these issues but by all joining Mandate we can have a much stronger voice and affect positive change for all workers in Smyths Toys."



Mr Callan urged all Smyths Toys workers not already in the union to fight back and improve their working lives by joining their union.

He added: "Mandate has won

banded hour contracts across most of the organised retail sector. Our members who have joined and stood together as a collective have won pay increases of up to 6% in less than two years. It's clear that there is value in joining a union and what we're saying is very, very simple. If you want a better life working in the retail sector, join the retail union and get your colleagues to join too. Together we're much stronger."

Budget 2015 The merry-go-round keeps turning but we need to talk about tax, pay, equality & social justice

By David Gibney
Mandate communications officer

MANY Irish people are starving. Poverty rates are soaring. Deprivation continues to rise. Ireland has a homelessness crisis with 40 families losing their home every month.

Suicide continues to scourge every town in the country. Unemployment remains unacceptably high. We have the largest class sizes in Europe. All linked with inequality. A perfect time to begin discussions about tax breaks for the wealthy.

And so it goes on, the political merry-go-round continues with no vision for our country's future. We jump from election to election with political parties prioritising their re-election over the welfare of the people they're supposed to represent.

Unfortunately, most groups, including parts of the trade union movement, have failed to articulate their vision of the type of society they want Ireland to become.

Inequality kills

Even fewer political parties have shown their vision for a fairer Ireland – one that embraces and cares for the most vulnerable. Employers, NGOs, some trade unions, political parties, and activist groups all campaign to protect their own patch, largely ignoring the challenge of our time – inequality.

Inequality kills more people in Ireland every year than suicide and motor accidents. In fact, according to the Institute for Public Health in Ireland, it kills about TEN times as many as both combined – at 6,500 people.

Yet inequality goes on unabated with our political parties exacerbating the problem (see *Water charges – helping the wealthy become wealthier* on pages 4 and 5).

Budget 2015 provides – for the first time – some so-called wriggle room for the Cabinet.

Rather than address inequality, rather than focus on building houses instead of subsidising landlords, rather than creating real, decent

jobs for our young people, rather than addressing any of the issues related to poverty, political parties play a crude game with our future. Justifying regressive decisions by insisting there is no alternative – when there clearly is.

The establishment just don't want to debate it. They perpetuate the myth that we (they mean themselves) are overtaxed – when they know full well that Ireland is a low-tax economy.

But let's look at tax. It costs money to run a country. We need schools, roads and

hospitals. We need teachers, nurses and gardai. We want clean streets and we want running water. That all has a cost and somebody has to pay for it; the question is who?

When corporations pay ultra-low corporation tax, and employers pay ultra-low social security (PRSI), somebody has to make up the difference – either in tax payments or in personal sacrifice. Yet still our income taxation is around the EU average and it's certainly not at the Scandinavian levels that some vested interests would have you believe.

So we make up the shortfall with regressive consumption taxes such as VAT and other charges. Of course, these affect those in the lowest income categories most.

High taxation isn't the only myth perpetuated by the establishment.

We're also constantly being told

that we're paid too much. Some of us may be, but certainly not all. In fact, Ireland is one of the lowest paying countries in the EU when you take into account the full employee compensation (pensions, PRSI etc).

This is mostly due to the fact that Irish employers pay about 50% less in social welfare contributions than their EU counterparts. At the same time they hide behind headline figures of an €8.65 minimum wage making European comparisons while refusing to debate total employee compensation.

In recent weeks, you could see all the usual suspects in full flow when new Minister Gerald Nash said he believed Irish workers needed a pay rise. He was immediately castigated by journalists and media outlets with a vested interest.

They instead argued for tax cuts along the lines of what Minister Noonan is proposing (turn to our report on page 10).

The employers' bodies wouldn't be left behind in the debate either and ISME's Mark Fielding threw a few digs in saying Minister Nash's comments would have a negative impact on job prospects.

He even went as far as to say the Taoiseach should "rein in the perpetrators" who called for pay increases.

It's no wonder so few politicians profess a different vision for society.

They're afraid of attacks from employers and the media.

Neither the media nor the employers' bodies, however, allow facts to get in the way of their agenda. Well, here are a few that all of us can use:

1. If employers in Ireland paid the same PRSI rates as their counterparts in Europe do, it would raise an extra €6 billion for the economy.

2. If Corporations paid the same rates as the average across the EU, we'd raise another €5 billion.

That's €11 billion or, to put it in context, it's 14 times what the water charges will take out of ordinary workers' pockets. But I suppose it's about values, choices and political power really.

Broken promises

Rather than have these debates, though, we go back to the political merry-go-round where we elect a government that breaks almost all of its promises, and in the final year or two before an election, they throw us the odd bone – such as tax cuts for their constituents or public sector pay restoration, while ignoring the inequality crisis and all the other crises.

We're foolish enough to jump on that merry-go-round and continue down this path of little or no vision for our future.

In Mandate, we have a vision. We want more equality. We want a real debate – not squabbles on the radio or TV where one sector is pitched against another because it brings in the ratings. Let's talk about taxation, pay, equality, social justice.

What we need are political champions for working people. Strong enough and brave enough to withstand the attacks from an establishment with a vested interest whenever they articulate a progressive vision for our country. When they do, they won't be left wanting by Mandate or our members. Until then, the merry-go-round will continue and inequality will deepen.



'Inequality kills more people in Ireland every year than suicide and motor accidents. In fact, according to the Institute for Public Health in Ireland, it kills about TEN times as many as both combined – at 6,500'

Budget 2015

Budget 2015 provides some opportunities for the Irish government and some very important choices. Mandate has produced a number of progressive proposals that can be implemented leading to a fairer and more equal society.

Mandate's Budget recommendations include:

- Implement refundable tax credits.
- Abolish water charges.
- Reduce VAT from 23%.
- Invest in social housing.
- No increase in the €32,900 income tax threshold.
- Introduction of a 6% minimum floor on corporation tax.
- Restore social welfare rates for young workers (Cut in previous Budgets).
- Introduce universal healthcare.
- Introduce a wealth tax.



John Douglas General Secretary Mandate Trade Union

STRAIGHT TALKING

Injustice must be fought by all means at our disposal...

MORE than 16 weeks ago workers at the Greyhound Waste Disposal Facility in Clondalkin, Dublin turned up to work to be met by their employer at the gate. Their employer gave them a stark choice: either sign new contracts reducing their weekly earnings by 35% or go home.

To their credit, all 70 men refused to sign the new contracts and as a result have been locked out of their jobs since then. In the meantime, their employer, Greyhound, has taken on temporary agency workers (scabs) to perform the work of the locked-out crews and has engaged in a high-profile media campaign designed to discredit the locked-out workers.

It has also resorted to the High Court to curtail the workers' peaceful protest outside the facility and has obtained High Court injunctions preventing local communities around Dublin taking action in support of the locked-out workers.

This Greyhound Lockout is systematic of everything that is wrong in Ireland today – an Ireland where wealthy businesses that have resources can employ the full weight of the legal system to suppress workers' rights and entitlements and where workers are constrained from fighting back.

This is an Ireland where unions are restricted from taking effective action to protect their members and where local communities are prevented from fighting injustice.

This is an Ireland which knows the price of everything but the value of nothing, an Ireland of shady deals, nods and winks, where employers can go on the public airwaves and berate workers for defending their wages and their families' wellbeing.

This is an Ireland which believes that €15 an hour is a well-paid wage for doing one of the dirtiest jobs in the country – an Ireland which believes that workers are lucky to have jobs.

Well, this is not our Ireland, it is not the vision that workers and their families and their unions have for themselves and their children – we believe in dignity and respect, in a decent living wage and a future for all – not just the elite class. Every time we see an injustice we must fight it by whatever means at our disposal.

All workers are entitled to a decent job and a decent living wage. The Greyhound Lockout seeks to create the very opposite. It is a race to the bottom, it is the attitude of, 'you're lucky to have a job', 'if you don't like, it then leave or emigrate' – and it's the view of an ever increasing number of influential employers, politicians and commentators.

This poisonous view must never be allowed to prevail, for if it does, Ireland will become a country of gated mansions for the few while the majority struggle to provide food and shelter.

Greyhound-type employers must never win – we must fight back using all means at our disposal. Visit www.facebook.com/greyhoundworkers



Shopfloor is published bi-monthly by Mandate Trade Union. Mandate Head Office, O'Lehane House, 9 Cavendish Row, Dublin 1
T: 01-8746321/2/3 F: 01-8729581 W: www.mandate.ie
Design & Editing: Brazier Media E: braziermedia@btinternet.com
Shopfloor is edited, produced and printed by trade union labour

Mandate wins landmark sick pay recommendation for Tesco workers

THE Labour Court has recommended Tesco Ireland accept Mandate's position over the treatment of social welfare illness benefit payments by the company.

The Court's Recommendation, which covers some 15,000 Tesco workers, is the first since the Government made changes to social welfare payments in Budget 2013.

The changes meant that social welfare payments ceased for the first six days of any period of illness.

The Recommendation follows a referral by both Mandate and SIPTU after Tesco Ireland unilaterally deducted illness benefit payments of employees that had not been received for their fourth, fifth and sixth day of sick leave.

It means that members who had monies deducted from their pay while absent for more than three days should have it fully refunded – providing the retailer accepts the Recommendation.

No further deductions should be made to the pay of employees who find themselves in a similar situa-

tion in future. Welcoming the decision, Divisional Organiser Brendan O'Hanlon told *Shopfloor*: "Our members will be delighted that the company's actions have been deemed to be in breach of the existing agreed sick pay schemes that operate in the company.

Standardised

"It means they will not be forced to suffer additional financial hardships if they are unfortunately absent from work due to illness."

The Court also recommended that sick pay schemes across Tesco be standardised.

The dispute began in January when local representatives informed union officials that the company intended to deduct social welfare payments from sick pay after the fourth, fifth and sixth day of any period of illness.

This was despite the fact most Mandate and Tesco sick pay agreements clearly state that there is no payment only for the first three days of an absence. Employees during

that three-day period then receive their net pay less social welfare.

According to the union, this is the second time in recent years that Tesco Ireland has attempted to water down the terms of the sick pay agreements through how it deals with social welfare payments.

Following the first time this happened, a significant number of individual cases were successfully pursued by Mandate at the Rights Commissioners Service.

In April, the issue was referred to the Labour Relations Commission. However, the company refused to reverse its decision and claimed they were only interested in reviewing the matter within the context of an overall renegotiation of the various

'Our members will be delighted [by Labour Court recommendation]... it means they will not be forced to suffer additional financial hardships if they are off work due to illness'

sick pay schemes. The issue then went before the Labour Court.

Expressing the union's frustration at the actions of the company, Brendan O'Hanlon said: "It is totally unacceptable that employers – with whom we have comprehensive procedural agreements – should not only try to exploit situations which results in hardship for our members, but do so in a manner which shows little or no regard for good industrial relations and our existing agreements, which are designed to ensure compliance from both parties."

Mandate and SIPTU have called on the company to implement the Labour Court Recommendation and to make good any monies due to



Brendan O'Hanlon: 'hardship for our members'

members without delay. However, and in a clear breach of the Recommendation, Tesco Ireland initially responded by stating that it would only address the issue of monies owed after talks on the standardisation of all the sick pay schemes.

Both unions rejected this position and sought to call a national meeting of shop stewards to discuss the company's position. However, in a letter sent to the unions, the company has agreed to pay all outstanding monies and to treat social welfare payments in accordance with the agreed sick pay schemes going forward. On this basis both unions have agreed to enter discussions regarding the potential standardisation of sick pay schemes.

● Sick pay appeal upheld by Rights Commissioner – Page 28

NEW CAMPAIGN

Mandate launches Right2Water drive

By David Gibney
Mandate communications officer

"WATER is a human right and your access to it should not depend on your income," Mandate General Secretary John Douglas said at the launch of a new campaign calling for the abolition of water charges.

The campaign, which is a citizens' campaign run in conjunction with the CPSU, Unite the Union and a whole range of political parties and Independent representatives as well as community groups, has two simple elements:

1. We're calling on all political parties to recognise that water is a human right; and

2. We're calling for the abolition of the recently-introduced water charges.

Mr Douglas explained: "Water charges will be an exceptionally regressive tax on all citizens of this country and will not take into account your ability to pay.

"We know that tens of thousands of families are already struggling to get by and with one in five people living in poverty actually having a job, the implementation of water charges will only make matters worse."

It was initially estimated that the average family would pay a bill of €248 per year but it seems it could cost much more.

"The way in which water charges will be implemented will impact most on

the lowest paid and the most vulnerable in our society. The unemployed, those with disabilities or illnesses and those with only part-time contracts will obviously use more water because they'll probably spend more time in their homes.

"This means that despite having less income, they'll probably pay higher bills," said Mr Douglas.

Mandate has some real concerns about the impact water charges will have on the domestic economy and the retail sector in particular.

Mr Douglas said: "Some economists are estimating that more than 3,000 jobs will be lost as a result of taking €350 million out of people's pockets. That's money that would be spent in shops, restaurants and local businesses.

"We need more people at work, not less and that's why paying for water should come from a progressive taxation system which ensures those that have the most, pay the most.

"This will be better in terms of equality, in terms of our society and in terms of protecting our domestic economy."

He added: "Of course we also recognise that establishing Irish Water and turning water into a commodity will make it much easier in the future to privatise the whole industry. You cannot privatise and turn a human right into a market. It's morally and ethically wrong."



Helping wealthy become wealthier

FROM January 2015, every single household in the country will be expected to pay water charges. The Government indicates that this will raise more than €350 million for the full year.

Contributing to this massive pot will be low-paid workers, the unemployed, the underemployed, those living in poverty, the disabled and pensioners.

Also contributing of course will be the very wealthy but they'll pay the very same for a litre of water as any-

body else. So we're all hit with the same charge. Sound fair? Well it isn't!

As you know, we already pay for water through our general taxation system which make is progressive – meaning the wealthiest pay most and the poorest and most vulnerable pay very little.

There was never any debate about whether we wanted to change that system or not. Instead, our government hid behind the Troika shouting, "They made us do it", despite the



'Important' Lab Court decision is welcomed

MANDATE has welcomed the Labour Court ruling (AD1435) issued after the union appealed an earlier Rights Commissioner's recommendation over the taking of breaks at Tesco.

The earlier decision could have potentially changed the status of a number of members employed by the supermarket retailer.

The issue before the Rights Commissioner was into the implementation of S.I. 57/1998 and the requirement for shop workers to take a one-hour break if they work the hours of 11.30am to 2.30pm.

The Rights Commissioner also considered whether this would apply to chefs at Tesco alone and not to other grades within the company.

The Rights Commissioner's recommendation found that all members who had received a pay increase under the 2006 Certainty of Costs and Certainty of Earnings agreement had de facto accepted

re-grading to a sales assistants.

This decision could have had serious repercussions for a number of members at Tesco had it been allowed to stand.

Fortunately the Labour Court overturned that recommendation and found that the employee should not only receive a contract of employment that reflects his role as a chef, but that the only legislation that he had to comply with regarding breaks was the *Organisation of Working Time Act* and not S.I. 57/98.

Welcoming the decision, Mandate Divisional Organiser Dave Moran said: "This was an important issue for Mandate and its members in Tesco as had the Rights Commissioner's decision been allowed to stand, it could have had a knock-on effect for a significant number of other members employed in various roles throughout the company."

Troika not being prescriptive about how water was to be paid for.

Away from the water charges debate, Minister Michael Noonan (and the employer's organisations including IBEC) is talking about cutting taxes for the "squeezed middle".

The Minister has indicated that his preferred method of putting money into the back-pockets of the "squeezed middle" is by increasing the threshold at which a person pays the high rate of income tax (41%) from €32,800 to about €36,000 for a single person (double that for a couple).

Although, according to the Minister himself, only 17% of workers in Ireland paid the high rate of income tax last year – so by increasing the threshold, we can assume that only the top 17% of earners will benefit from this cut in tax.

Coincidentally, the cut in taxes, as proposed by the Minister, is set to cost the exchequer about €450 million – in the same ball park as the total revenue raised by water charges for 2015.

If you were cynical, you'd think that the implementation of water charges was being used to offset those cuts in taxes that the Minister is harping on about. Surely not?

Surely our Minister wouldn't be taking money from the low-paid, unemployed, the underemployed, those living in poverty, the disabled and pensioners – only to gift it to the top 17% of earners in the country.

Mandate members know only too well what's going on here. We expect our Government to redistribute wealth in a fair manner in order to



Picture: Richard Smith (CC BY 2.0)

help create a more equal society – which brings enormous benefits to all of us. Instead, what we're experiencing is a massive redistribution of wealth from the poorest in our society to the wealthiest. That's not good enough and we'll remember it come election time.

Mandate in High Court appeal over EAT decision

MANDATE has appealed to the High Court after the Employment Appeals Tribunal overturned a series of Rights Commissioner decisions.

These relate to claims that B&Q unilaterally deducted allowances and bonuses – representing up to 10% of salaries – from workers' pay.

Mandate fears the move – in particular the Tribunal's interpretation of the *Payment of Wages Act 1991* – could have a knock-on impact on workers across the country.

In 2012, Mandate lodged a number of claims for the deduction of a zone allowance and later the winter/summer bonus. The zone allowance was paid to B&Q staff in three Dublin stores – Liffey Valley, Tallaght and Swords.

The first case was heard in July 2012. Later that year, on November 5, the Rights Commissioner recommended in favour of the claimant.

Meanwhile, in mid-2012 and throughout 2013, a number of claims were processed by Mandate for deductions made relating both the zone allowance and the winter/summer bonus. (The bonus applied to all staff nationwide).

The bonus was paid twice a year (i.e. 3% of salary in June and 3% of salary in November).

In favour

On July 1, 2013 five cases from the Liffey Valley store were heard by the Rights Commissioner in relation to the zone allowance only. The Rights Commissioner recommended in favour of all five claimants on November 20, 2013.

The following day, three cases from the Naas store were heard by the Rights Commissioner over the bonus claim.

At the hearing both Mandate and the company/IBEC agreed that a number of additional cases would be selected randomly from the rest of the claims so that they would be more representative.

It was further agreed that at the end of the process, both parties would consider the issue of Test Cases being appealed to the Tribunal.

Only one more case was heard on October 29, 2013 at the Rights Commissioner for a member in the Swords store. This case was the only claim that went before the Rights Commissioner, which dealt with the zone allowance and the bonus issue together. This Rights Commissioner decision was also in favour of the claimant.

On April 17, 2014 an Employment Appeals Tribunal hearing heard all 10 cases that had gone before the Rights Commissioner.

However, the EAT overturned all the Rights Commissioner decisions. This meant that B&Q was allowed



make massive deductions from members' wages.

In relation to the Zone Allowance, which was introduced in 2003 as part of a salary review, the Tribunal stated: "...the case has striking similarities to the *Michael McKenzie and Permanent Defence Force Other Ranks Representative Association V Minister for Finance, Minister for Defence, Ireland and Attorney General* [2011] 22 E.L.R 109... The removal of the allowance amounts to a reduction in the allowance, albeit a 100% reduction and is not a deduction from the wages payable."

Commenting on the development, Mandate Industrial Officer Jonathan Hogan told *Shopfloor*: "The Tribunal's decision and its application of the *Payment of Wages Act 1991* will have the consequence of leaving all workers, within all sectors vulnerable to unilateral

attacks to their wages, if this decision is not challenged.

"The Tribunal's determination and reliance on a previous High Court case has raised serious concerns about the protection many workers in this country have depended on to protect their wages/salaries."

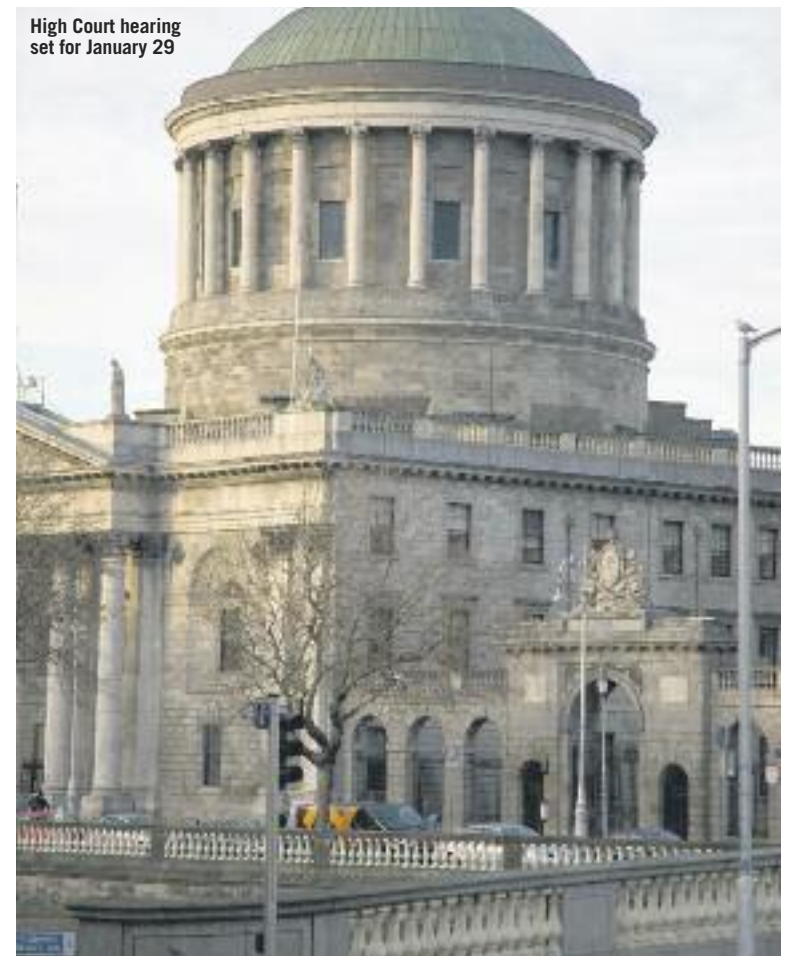
Without the protection of the *Payment of Wages Act* – which intended to outlaw unilateral deductions to workers' wages – Mr Hogan pointed out that the only way of vindicating workers' rights would be to revert to industrial action.

Vindicating rights

"If the circumstances do not improve and the decisions of the Tribunal follow the same course, it's inevitable that workers will be asked to defend their rights and protect their wages through collective action."

Mr Hogan added: "In a society where the demand for workers has decreased and the competition for jobs has increased, workers in general are vulnerable to attacks of this nature, unless they join a trade union, mobilise and organise themselves into a collective force that tries to balance the power between the worker and the employer"

A High Court hearing has been scheduled for January 29, 2015.



High Court hearing set for January 29

Picture: informatique (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Members in Brown Thomas endorse pay rise

MANDATE members in Brown Thomas have voted by a margin of 85% in favour of a 2% pay increase at the Irish retailer.

Brown Thomas, which employs more than 1,200 in four stores across Ireland, will pay a 1% increase in basic pay effective from September 1, 2014 and another 1% from February 1, 2015.

The pay increase is the second in close succession with the Brown Thomas members winning a 2% pay increase in June 2013.

Mandate's Divisional Organiser David Moran told *Shopfloor* that he was delighted with the outcome.

He said: "Our members in Brown Thomas work exceptionally hard and it's fitting that they receive their second pay increase in less than two years."

Mr Moran added: "Again it shows that you're better off in a trade union and we're urging all workers in Brown Thomas, and indeed the retail sector in Ireland as whole, to join the retail union and improve their terms and conditions at work."



Mandate members donate €2,500 to locked out Greyhound workers



Presentation of cheque to Greyhound workers

Pictures: Mandate

'Shows of solidarity helps us stay strong in our battle for justice' Jesse Hughes, SIPTU shop steward at Greyhound

MANDATE members presented a €2,500 cheque to locked-out Greyhound workers on July 25.

Addressing a meeting of Greyhound workers, Mandate General Treasurer Margaret O'Dwyer said: "On behalf of the 45,000 members in Mandate, I want to assure the Greyhound workers of our union's commitment to their struggle."

"I would also like to express our sincere solidarity as they seek to protect pay and conditions, not only for themselves, but for their families too."

"As a retail worker in Dublin, I am appalled at how the Greyhound workers have been treated by their employer. I know many of my colleagues and friends across the retail sector in Dublin are also disgusted by the actions of Greyhound."

"This is not how you treat your



Mandate General Secretary John Douglas showed support by joining the Greyhound workers picket line

loyal workers in 2014," she added.

Assistant General Secretary Gerry Light said: "Our members on the National Executive made the decision to make this donation because they see this dispute for what it is – an attempt to drive down living conditions for ordinary workers who have been loyal, dedicated and have helped to

make Greyhound one of the leading waste disposal companies in Ireland."

"Our members – who are predominantly low-paid workers in the retail sector – have sent a very strong message to Greyhound management with this donation. You cannot and will not starve these workers into sub-

mission; not while they have the support of the trade union movement and local communities across Dublin and the rest of Ireland.

He added: "We will not allow this race to the bottom to go uncontested. The bravery of these workers and the solidarity from ordinary workers and trade unions is testament to that fact."

'Solidarity'

Jesse Hughes, a SIPTU shop steward at Greyhound, said: "The solidarity that trade union members across the country are showing to the locked-out Greyhound workers is helping us stay strong in our battle for justice."

"Being locked out is incredibly difficult. Most of us have young families and mortgage payments to make."

"However this generous donation from Mandate, as well as the many others we are receiving from other unions and ordinary workers, means that we will be able to survive until the company realises it cannot treat workers as if it was 1913."

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USI chief: 'don't price students out of a future'

THE Union of Students in Ireland, launching its pre-budget submission on September 3, issued an open invitation to members of the Oireachtas to push for an improvement in the lives of students.

Central to the USI submission is the need to maintain the level of the student maintenance grant, which has come under severe pres-

sure in recent years. Speaking ahead of the launch, USI President Laura Harmon told *Shopfloor*: "Education is too expensive. Too many students and prospective students are worrying about whether they can afford to go to college.

"The level of the grant as it stands today gives an opportunity to the least well-off candidates in the

country to attend third level education and to develop the skills they need for life.

"Cutting the grant or shifting the thresholds downwards would certainly price even more students out of education – and that means pricing students out of a future."

On hardships currently faced by students, Ms Harmon added: "Edu-

cation is the key to skilling people and unlocking the potential of the whole country – but right now too many people are locked out of education.

"The cost of sending a student to college tops €13,000, according to a recent study by the Bank of Ireland, while the average grant comes to €3,025.

"That's despite rent increases of 17.2% in Dublin and 10% across the country. More than 64% of families say they're finding it harder to cope. We need to resource students – because education is the key to the future."

The USI also confirmed the date for a national rally for education on October 8 in Dublin.

GENERAL NEWS

Jobless figures positive but 'jobs at any cost' policy won't work...

MANDATE has welcomed the positive trend in the latest Live Register figures, which show a reduction in unemployment to a five-year low of 11.2%.

But the union also urged caution over the data as well as querying the quality of many of the new jobs that have been created.

In 2008, there were 92,000 under-employed (or involuntary part-time) workers in Ireland.

That figure has now risen to 147,000, which means that in six short years, there has been a 60% increase in part-time workers who want to work extra hours but cannot access them.

General Secretary John Douglas said: "With a consistently increasing underemployment rate and a steadily growing poverty rate – including among those who are at work – government must face up to the fact that the quality of jobs in the Irish economy is deteriorating significantly.

"Our government must begin to focus policy on the creation of decent work which provides a living wage for all workers in our society.

"Nobody should be experiencing poverty or suffering deprivation – especially those who are already at work – but with almost one in five of those at work living in poor households, there is clearly something



Picture: Tax Credits (CC BY 2.0)

wrong with the type of employment and the pay rates on offer."

Mr Douglas said: "We cannot continue the 'jobs-at-any-cost' approach which is currently being pursued by government. We need real jobs instead of questionable internship schemes and we need full-time work, where available, so that families can begin to lift themselves out of the poverty traps they now find them-

selves in." He added: "Two areas where government can facilitate the improvement of labour market conditions is to legislate to enable part-time workers to avail of more hours as they become available.

"And also to implement effective collective bargaining legislation with a right to access for trade unions so that workers can negotiate fairer terms and conditions of employment."

Got a story? Email us at news@mandate.ie

Mandate trainer joins probe into banking

By David Gibney
Mandate communications officer

SHOPFLOOR contributor and Mandate trainer Dr Conor McCabe has joined the expert panel on the Banking Inquiry Advisory Group.

Dr McCabe, who has helped to run a number of training events and workshops for Mandate mem-

bers joins a group that includes economists and banking experts from universities, the civil service and the private sector.

Conor McCabe is a lecturer at UCD School of Social Justice and author of the economic history of Ireland, *Sins of the Father*.

In an exclusive interview with

Shopfloor, Dr McCabe said: "My role was to guide the Inquiry going forward and to establish the terms of reference.

He added: "The Inquiry will provide huge opportunities for progressives, particularly those in political parties and it's vital that they make use of it."



SKILLS FOR WORK

Interested in a computer training course?



Do you have a desire to improve your communication through computer skills but never got around to it?

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Starting from scratch this course helps you to use a computer and builds confidence for communicating on-line.

Mandate Trade Union in conjunction with Skills for Work is offering free training.

The courses are to encourage members back into learning and training whilst aiming towards a FETAC level 3 Award.

If you are interested in doing a Communications through Computers course, contact:

Mandate Training Centre
Distillery House
Distillery Road
Dublin 3

Phone: 01- 8369699

Email: mandateotc@mandate.ie

Courses are free and open to members who have not achieved Leaving Certificate or who have an out of date Leaving Certificate. You can also achieve a FETAC Level 3 Award. Skills for Work is funded by the Department of Education & Skills.

Picture: European Parliament

● Walgreens: 'unions don't add to bottom line' ● Boots merger finalised next year



Concern over anti-union commentary

IN AUGUST, Alliance Boots announced that Walgreens had "exercised its option to complete the second step of its strategic transaction with Alliance Boots".

The combined enterprise will be known as Walgreens Boots Alliance, with the transaction expected to complete early next year.

Commenting on the merger, Divisional Organiser Brendan O'Hanlon told *Shopfloor*: "While both companies will certainly want to present the best picture from a global business perspective and we wish it every success in that regard, there are undoubtedly very justifiable reasons for Boots union members to have cause for concern when it comes to the Walgreens approach to collective bargaining and union recognition.

"Mandate Trade Union has concluded numerous collective agreements with Boots Retail Ireland Limited and continues to engage with the company in a positive constructive manner on issues of interest to its membership.

"Walgreens' refusal to recognise



trade unions for collective bargaining purposes poses a potential serious threat to future relations and we will be seeking a meeting with the company to get assurances that no such threat exists."

A close look at how the subject of unions is dealt with in Walgreen's internal communications to its employees in the United States is instructive. It is clear concerns being expressed on this side of the Atlantic are not without foundation.

Walgreens actively encourages its workers to "say no to unions".

Describing its views on the issue, Walgreens states that it "feels very strongly that labour unions do not serve the best interests of individual employees or the company as a whole". The company goes on to put

forward 10 reasons why employees should support this view.

Some of the reasons offered by the company are Interesting, to say the least:

- "Unions don't add anything to the company's bottom line..."
- "Unionisation is not in the best interests of the company..."
- "With a union all current wages, benefits and terms and conditions are subject to negotiations, employees could end up with more..."

With reasons like those listed, it would appear that Walgreens' message might actually have the opposite effect to that intended.

Brendan O'Hanlon added: "There is some irony when one of the employers who have just merged with another company to make it 'a new global leader' sees fit to advise its employees on the merits of being an individual and how coming together doesn't give you strength to get a better deal.

"Hopefully Boots workers will be wise to the tactics their new owners could employ and continue to organise and be organised."

By now most households have received an 'application pack' from Irish Water. From October 1st, we will be charged for the water we already fund through our taxes. The first bills will hit our letterboxes in January.

RIGHT2WATER: WHO ARE WE?

Right2Water is a citizens' campaign. We believe that water is a human right, and we are seeking the abolition of domestic water charges.

Water charges: hitting the poorest, hardest

Water is a basic human need. But almost all households will now have to pay for water – regardless of whether they can afford it. As with all service charges, low-income households will pay proportionately more.

Water charges: we can't afford them

Irish households cannot afford water charges. And neither can the economy, since water charges will suck more money out of people's pockets, leaving them with less to spend in local shops and businesses.

Irish Water – or private water?

Water should be a public good rather than a private commodity. The formation of Irish Water opens the door to future privatisation of our water supply and an inevitable increase in charges – as has been the case with bin services.

What you can do?

Whether or not you decide to complete the Irish Water application form - If you believe that water is a human right and the charges should be abolished, join with us in the Right2Water campaign.

Visit www.right2water.ie for information on how you can get involved.



Education grants for members

MANDATE members can now apply for our education grant. The union's National Executive Council has decided to provide financial assistance under certain conditions to members who wish to attend evening courses or classes in the academic year 2014/2015. The conditions are as follows:

- Preference will be given to applicants with a record of union involvement at the various committee levels and who have enrolled in courses covering trade union or business studies.
- Applications for grants for courses or classes on leisure activities will not be considered.
- All or any payment made will

be at the discretion of the National Executive Council.

● To ensure the continued participation by members who are awarded grants in the courses selected, the National Executive Council reserve the right to pay any grant sanctioned in two or more instalments or as may be decided

● Consideration of applications will be confined to those with receipts for fees paid which are received at Head Office by the closing date Friday, November 7, 2014. Applications received after that date will not be considered.

● The decision of the National Executive Council on all matters re-

lating to this scheme will be final.

● Applications must be made on the specified form. The applications should be returned to your local official who should detail the applicant's union involvement as appropriate to the National Executive Council.

● Fees for the courses in question must be paid and the receipt attached.

Please ensure that this is brought to the notice of members in your place of employment as soon as possible.

Download your application form at <http://bit.ly/1nGuDnJ>



MEDIA MONITOR...

No Downton Frances is right!

TUC chief Frances O'Grady's keynote address to the annual TUC Congress in Liverpool earlier this month was being televised live by the BBC when the broadcast was interrupted by a news flash announcing that the Duchess of Cambridge was expecting her second child.

Viewers had just watched Ms O'Grady, left, tell delegates: "Are we going to settle for a nastier and poorer Britain – a Downton Abbey-style society, in which the living standards of the vast majority are sacrificed to protect the high living of the well-to-do?" You couldn't make it up...

Picture: TUC (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Dundalk FC fined €18K after fan waved Palestinian flag at fixture

By David Gibney
Mandate communications officer

DUNDALK FC have been fined €18,000 by UEFA for a fan waving a Palestinian flag at a recent Europa League qualifying game at home to Hajduk Split.

The club released this statement after being issued with the fine: "Dundalk FC can confirm that the club has been charged by the UEFA Control, Ethics and Disciplinary Committee. These charges relate to Article 16 (2) of the Disciplinary Rules (relating to flags that have been deemed by UEFA to be inappropriate) and Article 45 UEFA Stadium Infrastructure (relating to the prohibition of standing supporters).

"The total fine is €18,000 for these charges. Dundalk FC have requested further information from UEFA on these charges before beginning any appeals process. Dundalk FC will be making no further comment on this issue until it is fully resolved." If you were to compare the revenue of Dundalk to the revenue of Manchester United, it would be the same as United being fined around €7 million for this. €18,000 is a lot of money to an Irish club. Teams have gone out of business for less in Ireland.

This has some other fans worried with one blogger stating: "[I'm] really worried that my club (Sligo Rovers) have the same if not a bigger fine coming. There was at least a

half dozen Palestinian flags around our ground when we played Rosenborg a few weeks ago. We are in a tough spot financially at the minute after a poor season. We can't afford

a ridiculous fine like this and it could seriously damage the club long term."

UEFA's Control, Ethics and Disciplinary Committee has deemed

Palestine's national flag to be "a political symbol" and flying it at their games to be an infringement of the association's regulations.

In stark contrast, Ajax fans regu-

larly wave Israeli flags at games but the club has not received any reprimands from UEFA leading to claims of bias against the European football governing body.

...but UEFA have no problem with Ajax fans doing this:



TTIP is bad for Ireland and bad for workers

By David Gibney
Mandate communications officer

MANDATE has joined calls for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) to be scrapped warning that the agreement would be bad for Ireland and bad for workers.

The TTIP is being negotiated behind closed doors and with very little information being disclosed to the public. It is a clear affront to transparency and the democratic process.

Mandate General Secretary, speaking at the launch of an information booklet published by the People's Movement said: "While TTIP is being referred to as a free trade agreement – its key objective is to remove regulations in areas such as finance, food safety, environmental standards, privacy laws and, importantly, labour rights."

He added: "As with all free trade agreements, the focus will be on competition. Workers in Ireland and across the EU will be forced to compete with workers in the US. This is something the Irish and European trade unions should be very weary of."

Explaining why workers should be very concerned, Mr Douglas said: "Workers across the EU enjoy superior terms and conditions of em-

ployment than their counterparts in the US. For instance, workers in the US are not entitled to any statutory annual leave whereas workers in the EU enjoy a minimum of 20 days. These entitlements – that were fought for and won by the trade union movement across the EU – should not be lost due to 'competition' under the guise of a free trade agreement that liberalises markets and regulations.

'Downward'

"We cannot be under any illusions. Free trade agreements will ensure any competition on workers' rights will be downward for those in the EU rather than upwards for those in the US.

Evidence also shows that the TTIP will cost jobs. Free trade agreements often promise potential in terms of jobs and growth but very seldom deliver on those promises. In fact, in many cases they lead to job losses and a growth in inequality. The EU Commission's own Centre for Economic Policy Research suggests that TTIP would cost the EU 1.3 million jobs.

And the probable inclusion of the "investor-state dispute settlement" (ISDS) would allow a company to sue a sovereign state for loss of profits is of particular concern. It

will make it far more difficult for governments to protect and enhance their citizens' rights in health, education, housing and other public services. It may also challenge a state's ability to protect their own natural resources and energy choices – including oil, gas and water.

In his speech, Mr Douglas also outlined a number of examples of what free trade agreements do.

He said: "The French multinational Veolia (which runs the Luas in Dublin) is currently taking the Egyptian government to court for recently increasing the minimum wage.

"Earlier in June, the Swedish company Vattenfall brought a case against the German government for restricting the use of nuclear power." In one of the most illustrative cases, Mr Douglas explained

how tobacco giant Philip Morris transferred Philip Morris Australia's offices to Hong Kong in order to avail of clauses contained in a bilateral investment treaty. This treaty, similar to what's likely to be contained in the TTIP, allowed the tobacco giant to sue the Australian

government for loss of profits as a result of the introduction of plain packaging legislation.

Mandate is asking why business is being prioritised over the rights of workers

While talks have been kept secret, there is no doubt there has been a lot of private lobbying between big business and the EU and US negotiators.

It appears, however, that trade unions across Europe – who represent more than 60 million workers – have never been consulted on the parameters or content of these secret talks. It is a legitimate question

to ask why capital and big business is being prioritised ahead of workers and organised labour. Liberalisation and privatisation has not served Irish workers well in the past

The TTIP will cement liberalisation and privatisation. You only need to look at the ongoing dispute in Greyhound Waste and the overall waste disposal industry to see the full effects of privatisation. Many workers in the industry are working for the minimum wage while those earning a Living Wage are being forced to accept a 35% pay cut.

The TTIP will speed up that agenda. Mandate has called on all trade unions across Ireland, the European Union and the United States to campaign to put a stop to the TTIP.

Trade unions must take a lead role and call on their members to lobby local politicians and MEPs. Workers should also lobby their own trade unions asking them to take action.

Mr Douglas warned: "TTIP poses a clear and present danger to jobs, to workers, to the environment, to the Global South – and to democracy in Europe and in Ireland. It must be stopped."

● More TTIP coverage and analysis on pages 11 & 36



Noonan warned: tax changes won't fool Mandate members



Picture: Don Moloney/Press 22 (CC BY 2.0)

MANDATE General Secretary John Douglas has warned Minister for Finance Michael Noonan, above right, that plans to widen the income tax bands in the forthcoming Budget – which are being trailed as beneficial to low and middle income earners – won't fool Mandate members.

And he claimed such a measure would do nothing to benefit the average worker in Ireland but would in fact be counterproductive for low-paid workers.

Workers currently begin paying the high rate of income tax (41%) at €32,800, but the Minister has indicated that he wants to “take people out of the higher tax bracket”, which means moving the band up to an estimated €36,000.

It is likely such a move would only benefit the top 20% to 30% of earners.

Mr Douglas told *Shopfloor*: “More than 50% of workers in Ireland are paid less than €32,800, so any increase in the tax band will not be

beneficial to them.” Mandate believe the introduction of water charges in January, which will have the most impact on the lowest earners and those dependent on social welfare, will be used to supplement tax cuts for the highest earners leading to greater levels of inequality.

Describing this as “totally unfair”, Mr Douglas continued: “Even if a worker earns €36,000 now and they see a slight reduction in their income tax returns, the Government will take it back through the introduction of the water charges.

“In all likelihood, they’ll also see a reduction in public services. However, the real beneficiary of this policy will be those on very high incomes who don’t rely on public services and social transfers.”

He added: “Our members depend on public services, they depend on social welfare transfers and they depend on a decent public education and healthcare system. These are all funded by the exchequer so when you give tax breaks to the top 30% of

earners, somebody else will have to pay or else we’ll see depleted public services.

“Our public services are already stretched to breaking point. Some 39 families in Dublin lost their homes last month and yet funding is being cut for homelessness services. Our healthcare and education systems are underfunded. Reducing the tax burden for high earners is not the right option – and our members know it.”

Concluding by issuing a challenge to Minister Noonan, John Douglas said: “If the Minister really wants to get the domestic economy going again; he should focus on increasing the spending power of low-paid workers who spend all of their income in local shops, restaurants and local businesses.

“This can be done by increasing the minimum wage, introducing refundable tax credits and/or facilitating real collective bargaining through trade unions.”

REPORT

EU pensions gap highlighted at UNI Global women’s committee

By Joan Gaffney
Mandate President

MANDATE Coordinator Aileen Morrissey and I attended a UNI women’s committee meeting in London on July 7.

UNI Global Union is the voice of 20 million service sector workers. Through 900 affiliated unions, it represents workers in 150 countries across the world.

These workers are drawn from a wide range of sectors – Cleaning and Security, Commerce including Retail, Finance, Gaming, Graphical Packing, Hair/Beauty, Post and Logistics, Temps and Agency workers as well as Tourism.

UNI’s mission is to grow and strengthen affiliated unions, to improve the working conditions and the lives of workers in the service and al-

lied sectors. Mandate is very proud to be part of this pro-active organisation. The agenda for the London meeting included reports on the mentoring program which has had great success among affiliated unions, including Mandate.

This mentoring programme has allowed the mentee to gain first-hand knowledge of trade union work and to focus on what aims and objectives they have for themselves and their future work in the union movement.

Aileen Morrissey gave a comprehensive report on Mandate’s progress with the mentoring programme within our union. Pensions for women was a very important item on the agenda. A report was given to the meeting highlighting the gender pension gap across the EU. This gap, it was stated, stands at 39%

and the UNI Women’s committee will be campaigning against this pension gap and drawing the attention of politicians and unions to this inequality. I will keep members updated on future developments in this area.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to give members an insight into these issues discussed in the global unions arena which affect our working lives.

Working with UNI Global is a positive development because it shows that unions from around the world have one goal – the protection of workers’ rights.



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Notes on the Front

Commentary on Irish Political Economy by
UNITE research officer Michael Taft
www.notesonthefront.typepad.com

By Frank Keoghan
The People's Movement

THE MAIN goal of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) being negotiated in secret between the EU and US is to remove regulatory 'barriers' which restrict the potential profits to be made by transnational corporations on both sides of the Atlantic.

Yet these 'barriers' are in reality some of our most prized social standards and environmental regulations. However, there is scant information available to the public regarding the provisions of the treaty other than the claim that it will create many jobs.

But is there any evidence that it will? The Oireachtas Joint Committee on European Union Affairs submitted a political contribution on TTIP to Minister Bruton in July of this year, which, while broadly supportive of TTIP, warned that it may pose significant challenges for recession-weakened EU economies and recognised that TTIP may lead to job displacement and loss of employment, as well as new trade and employment opportunities.

Minister Bruton, who secured formal agreement among the 28 EU member states to enter talks with the US last year as part of Ireland's presidency of the EU Council, maintained that Ireland "stood to benefit disproportionately" from the deal.

Elsewhere, the *Irish Times* has cited a study by Copenhagen Economics which found that TTIP could lead to a 2.7% increase in Irish exports, a 1.4% rise in wages, and a 1.6% rise in investment – though it didn't specify over what time period.

Economic output

So what are others saying, particularly at Commission level?

The Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR) carried out a study paid for by the European Commission, which suggested that the EU's economic output could rise by 0.5% by the year 2027 as a result of an EU-US deal. This forecast relied on deregulation across all sectors of the EU member states' economies. But this has already been ruled out as implausible by EU negotiators.

The chemicals sector was the second most important contributor of gains in the CEPR's calculations, but the Commission has admitted there is no prospect of regulatory harmonisation in that sector, given the huge differences between the legislative frameworks in the EU and US.

CEPR claims that the projected benefits from TTIP could translate into an extra €545 a year for the average family – just about enough to pay water charges – but it is very unlikely that corporate gains would be passed on to the population at large.

The Centre was also commissioned by the British government to conduct a similar study into the possible impacts of TTIP on their economy. This resulted in a figure of £10 billion for the possible annual gains to Britain by the year 2027.

But this would require the elimination of 75% of all actionable non-



The Yanks are coming: Freight containers stacked on high in the port of Hamburg. The city is a key trading gateway to Europe. Picture: www.glynlowe.com (CC BY 2.0)

WHAT SECRET JUMBO TRADE DEAL WILL MEAN FOR JOBS...



Anti-NAFTA demo – it is estimated over a million workers lost their jobs in the US as a result. Picture: jimw (CC BY 2.0)

tariff barriers in the chemicals, automotive and business/ICT sectors – well beyond anything planned in the current TTIP negotiations.

Even the British minister responsible for TTIP, Ken Clarke, confirmed to trade unions and NGOs that he does not consider the £10 billion figure used by the government to be

'The CEPR report for European Commission ... did recognise that at least 1.3 million EU workers would lose their jobs as a result of labour displacement arising from TTIP under Commission's preferred outcome'

credible. The CEPR report for the European Commission was unable to predict any net impact on employment levels from TTIP, but did recognise that at least 1.3 million EU workers would lose their jobs as a result of the labour displacement arising from TTIP under the Commission's preferred outcome.

Whatever the new employment opportunities foreseen by the Oireachtas Committee, the CEPR calculates that TTIP will cause at least a million people to lose their jobs in the EU and US combined.

Based on these findings, the Commission's own internal impact assessment acknowledged that there would be "prolonged and substantial" adjustment costs as a result of the displacement of labour caused by TTIP.

At a time when unemployment rates in Europe already stand at record levels, the Commission further recognised that there are "legitimate concerns" that those workers who lose their jobs as a result of TTIP

will not be able to find other employment.

In order to assist the large number of additional unemployed expected from TTIP, the Commission has advised EU member states to draw on structural support funds such as the European Globalisation Fund and the European Social Fund, which has been assigned €70 billion to distribute over the seven years 2014-2020.

Predicted increase

The only other study to have predicted a net increase in jobs from TTIP comes from the IFO Institut at the University of Munich. Politicians, including Minister Bruton have regularly misquoted the findings of this report to the effect that TTIP could bring 400,000 new jobs to the EU over time.

Yet this figure was presented not as a possible result from TTIP but as a hypothetical estimate of what might happen were the US to be fully integrated into the EU's internal market. The report's lead author has publicly criticised the Commission

for misrepresenting its findings.

It should be noted that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which came into force in January 1994 between the US, Canada and Mexico promised of hundreds of thousands of extra jobs for the US, but has, according to the Economic Policy Institute's 2006 analysis, caused the net loss of over a million US jobs and a significant decline in the value of wages for millions more workers.

The benefits of TTIP are illusory, while the threats are all too real. As with other trade agreements in the past, ordinary working people stand to lose out significantly as yet more powers are handed over to transnational corporations – continuing the redistribution of wealth from labour to capital that has been a defining characteristic of both the EU and US economies over the last four decades.

What you can do...

- Download and read the pamphlet *Stop the TTIP* at www.people.ie
- Sign the petition calling on ICTU to begin a public awareness campaign and call for the scrapping of TTIP at: <http://bit.ly/1Bi324o>
- Look out for TTIP-related activities in your area.

It was hard fought for – now we have to fight for it again...

By Peter Bunting
ICTU Assistant General Secretary

NORTHERN Ireland, like many parts of Europe, has begun a series of commemorations to remember the sacrifice made by the generations who fought in the First and Second World Wars. Mindful of the suffering endured by those men and women, we would be failing their memory if we neglected the peaceful legacies of those wars.

When they returned from the front, they built the Welfare State, the complex and interwoven thread of social protections that make up the safety net.

It assumed that citizens had rights to basic social goods, such as health, education, housing and a living income for those who were unemployed or who could not work.

All of those entitlements were fought for – the rich and the elites always opposed their introduction and they are now trying to roll back those entitlements, using austerity as the excuse and welfare reform as the method.

At the same time, the present elites are standing at memorials to the fallen and pledging to remember their sacrifice, while defiling their legacy. It is a dishonest disgrace.

There is a deliberate attempt to confuse the electorate between deliberate cuts in government spending. For example, the £78 million cut in this year's block grant to Stormont does not have anything to do with welfare reform; it is merely the latest instalment of the same Tory cuts we have had to endure for the last four years.

A conscious effort is being made to conflate those cuts with the £87 million that could be levied if we do not impose welfare reform. There is a further effort to paint this as a choice between reforms or a fine, let's be clear both options will suck money out of an economy that is barely in recovery.

It is a hit one way or the other. The choice is whether we take a further hit across government departments or whether we swipe it from the pockets of some of the poorest and most vulnerable members of

our society. Moreover we would lose multiples of these amounts from our block grant if the Northern Ireland Executive follow through with cutting corporation tax in the North.

Our political masters tell us welfare reform is about making the hard choice and taking tough decisions.

Ask yourself where is the nobility in withdrawing benefits from the severely disabled? Where is the morality in cutting basic reliefs for the working poor? Standing up for the Welfare State is the hard choice. Resisting injustices and defending the defenceless is the tough decision, and one the trade union movement has never shirked from.

The reforms as they exist in Great

'All those entitlements – health, education, housing and a living income – were fought for. The rich and the elites always opposed their introduction and they are now trying to roll back those entitlements using austerity as the excuse and welfare reform as the method'

Britain have been an unmitigated disaster, and wasteful of taxpayer resources, according to the National Audit Office. They will inflict a multitude of pain, with no gain for the exchequer.

What an appalling legacy, in contrast to the brave generations who built a land fit for heroes in the aftermath of those wars we now commemorate.

As for those political parties who plan to run for election based on their achievements of misery and impoverishment by tearing up the Welfare State—we will remember them.

WAGE REPRESSION ...the new orthodoxy

WAGES have been falling since 2009 in the Republic of Ireland. This deterioration has been accompanied by (i) an erosion in purchasing power as the prices of most goods and services rise and (ii) less money in people's pockets as taxes and public charges have risen and many social payments have been cut (or have not kept pace with inflation).

The surprising story – perhaps – is that the fall in wages has continued into 2014 even though employment and output have been picking up since at least 2013.

Wage moderation, if not wage cuts, is seen by some economists, politicians and business spokespersons as essential for maintaining competitiveness, containing costs and boosting employment especially in a small open economy or economic region such as in Ireland.

This is one side of the equation only. The other is the demand for goods and services in the local economy which is highly dependent on how much money consumers have in their pockets.

Wages still account for just under one half of total income in the economy. It accounts for the bulk of household income and is related to most of personal consumption expenditure which is the main prop of domestic demand.

As well, there is broad agreement with the principle that wages should be a level appropriate to the norms, expectations and living requirements of a given society at a given point in time. The idea of a living wage is culturally and time specific as well as evidence based.

If you take a look at some recent data for movement in wages in the Republic of Ireland using the results of the most recent Central Statistics Office *Earnings, Hours and Employment Costs* (EHECS) as well as international comparative data published earlier this month in *Employment Outlook* by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) external link, the story seems not dissimilar to that of the UK.

Incomplete at times, dated and always subject to measurement challenges, what the statistical evidence suggests is the following few points:

1. Wages are still falling

Average weekly earnings (before adjustment for price changes) have been trending downwards since the end of 2008. When inflation is taken into account and because prices fell, on average, in 2009 [See Chart 1] the real value of earnings rose initially after the shock of 2008/09 even though the nominal amounts were trending downwards. However, the pattern since about the end of 2009 is clear – average real wages have been falling.



By Tom Healy

These numbers apply to the average for all employees in all branches of the economy (some sectors such as information and communications sector have seen increases in average real earnings).

2. Wages have fallen for industrial and service workers more than manager employees

Over the last four years manager employees have seen some increase in average earnings. This is equivalent to a real increase of 4.9% between the middle of 2010 and the beginning of 2014 (comparable time series data linking before and after 2010 for these broad occupational groups are not available).

While this is not a huge increase and it has probably been more than cancelled out by increases in taxes and charges the situation for other employees is different. Industrial workers lost 11.2% in real terms since 2010 while clerical/service workers lost 4.4%.

While the overall drop in living standards may not be much different as between these three broad occupational categories of employees due to the impact of progressive income tax changes especially in the 2010 budget, it is clear that, on average, intermediate and manual occupations have lost the most in terms of gross wages. Some of this will be due to changes in the structure of employment and the shakeout in retail and construction especially in the earlier part of the period in question.

3. Low pay is still widespread and possibly growing

In a recent blog on the NERI website [www.neriinstitute.net] I explored the incidence and distribution of low pay. This shows a high concentration of low pay in sectors such as hotels, catering and retail. In total there were an estimated 320,000 workers in 2009 below the 'Eurostat threshold' for low pay which is two-thirds of median earnings.

4. And wages are falling in Ireland while they are rising elsewhere

Wages as measured by annual average real earnings fell by 3.3% in 2013 – the second highest in the OECD group of countries [See Chart 4]. Source: OECD *Employment Outlook*.

5. Republic of Ireland home to low pay

Recent international data published by the OECD shows that the incidence of low pay in Ireland (percentage of workers at or below two thirds of median earnings) was among the highest in OECD countries and has increased since 2003 [See Chart 5].

The OECD has warned in its most recent *Outlook* that: "Further downward adjustments in wages in the hardest-hit countries risk being counterproductive: especially in a context of near-zero inflation, it may be difficult to achieve in the first place; or it may do little to create jobs while increasing the risk of poverty and depressing aggregate demand. Other policy measures are required."

The editorial in *Employment Outlook* went on to state that: "Policies such as minimum wages, progressive taxation and in-work benefits can help to share more fairly the costs of economic adjustment."

... So what's going on?

Behind the trends the obvious question is: Why? This is proving more difficult than normal because we are not living through normal times:

- Real wages are down;
- Employment is up;
- Price inflation is down;
- Personal consumption is up; and
- Personal and public debt is as high as it has been in many decades.

It's a strange recession and an even stranger recovery still. It is possible that those who spoke loosely about 'new economy' at the turn of the millennium were right after all. It is in the absence of any discernible productivity growth in many of the recovering economies.

As stated by the OECD last week, countries need to invest in human capital and create the conditions for quality jobs and not just jobs welcome as that is. A single pony approach under the heading of monetary policy is not an adequate response to the European job crisis of which Ireland continues to be afflicted. Creating jobs, boosting aggregate demand and improving the supply of skilled labour is key. A European wage-led recovery is needed along with other measures.

Tom Healy is Director of the Nevin Economic Research Institute

Chart 1 Earnings and Prices



Chart 2 Average Weekly Earnings (2008 prices)

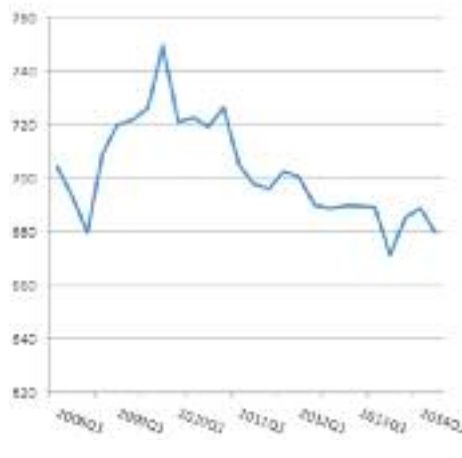


Chart 3 Average Weekly Earnings (Nominal) for Broad Categories of Employees



Chart 4 Annual Average Real Wage Change 2013

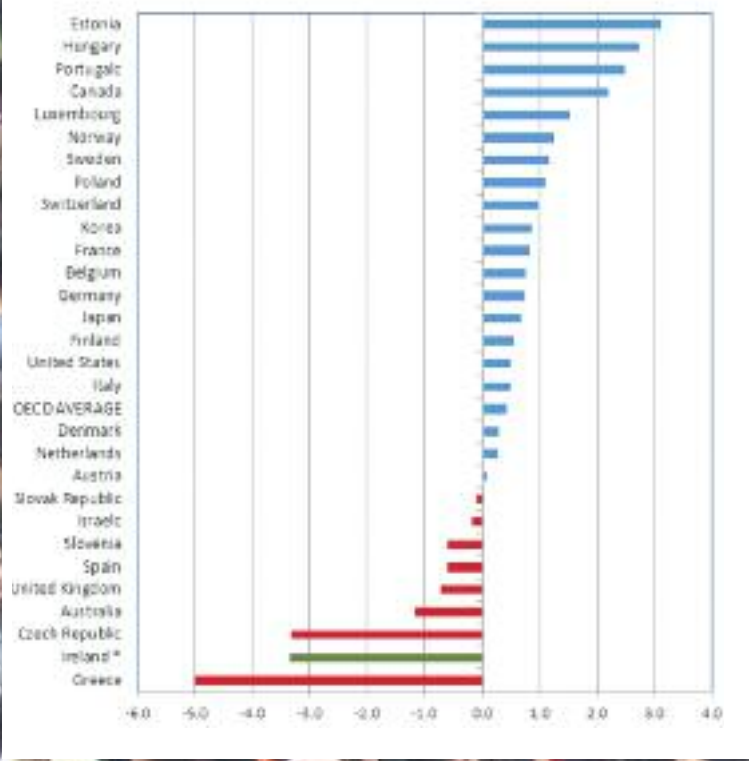
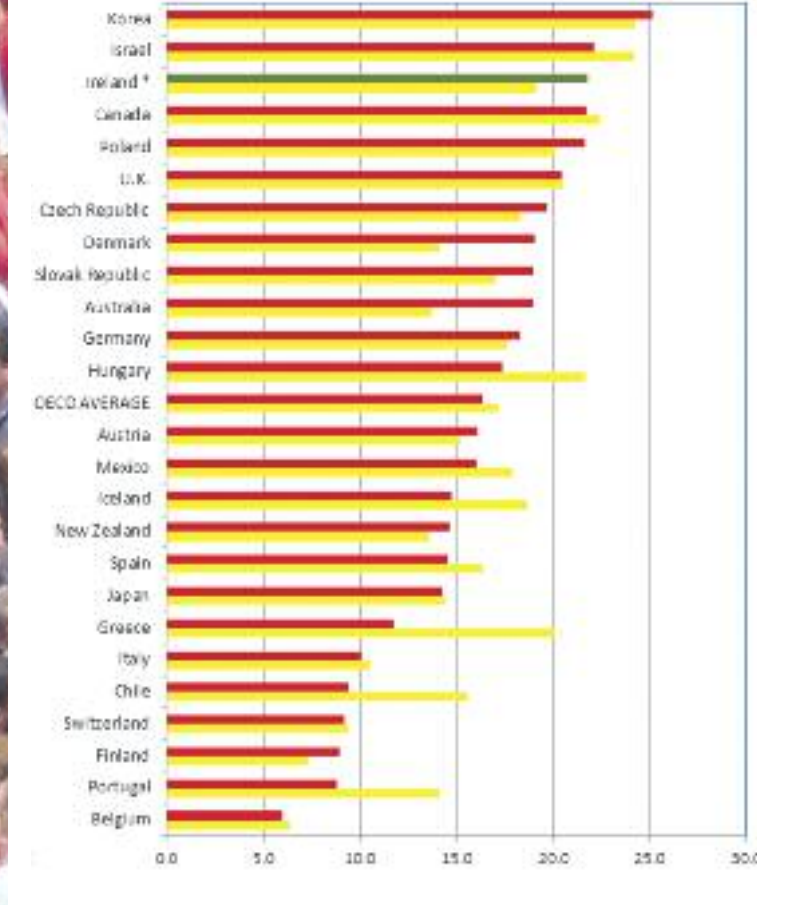


Chart 5 Incidence of Low Pay







Union Representative Advanced Senior Course

The Union Representative Advanced Senior Training Course is for union representatives who have completed the Introductory and Advanced course and who have experience as a union representative in their workplace

Course content

-  **The history of trade unionism**
-  **The emergence and development of the market system**
-  **The impact of globalisation**
-  **Free trade and open markets in a modern society**

Certification and Progression: Members who successfully complete this training course will obtain a Mandate certificate. They may progress to the FETAC level 5 Certificate in Trade Union studies or other relevant training courses offered by Mandate.

If you are interested in this course, please contact your Mandate Official or Mandate's Training Centre at 01-8369699. Email: mandateotc@mandate.ie

AGENDA FAT CATS' PAY



In a recent referendum, more than a third of Swiss voters wanted to see top execs' pay limited to 12 times the average worker's wage. Picture: JUSO Schweiz (CC BY 2.0)

Ireland is suffering the price of inequality

IN MY VIEW...

By Niall Crowley
Claiming Our Future

SAM Pizzigati does not yet have a big profile in Ireland. That could change though. He will be here in September to talk about a topic we tend to shy away from in our debates on income equality.

This is the topic of a maximum wage and setting a cap on what any individual can earn. He says this idea has been around since the time of Plato. Funny it has taken so long to get here.

Pizzigati is a labour journalist and edits *Too Much*, a global weekly on excess and inequality that is published by the Washington DC-based Institute for Policy Studies.

He wrote *The Rich Don't Always Win: The forgotten triumph over plutocracy that created the American middle class 1900-1970* that tracks the development and influence of advocacy for income caps.

Pizzigati made the case for a ceiling on annual income in *Greed and Good: Understanding and Overcoming the Inequality that Limits our Lives* and explored strategies that could advance the imposition of such a ceiling.

Claiming Our Future has been engaged with the topic of income inequality since its establishment and has invited Sam Pizzigati to give a public lecture in The Ark, Eustace Street, Temple Bar, Dublin from 6pm to 8pm on September 16.

He is going to explore whether a maximum wage could become politically viable. Pizzigati will talk about work being done in Canada and the US that is making progress on this issue. This should be a chance to mobilise advocacy in Ireland for a maximum wage.

Claiming Our Future organised a deliberation in Galway back in 2011 on income equality. More than 300 people from trade unions, community groups, environmental groups and global justice groups took part. This event explored both low incomes and high incomes. The debates highlighted the link between high incomes and disproportionate power, influence and status.

There was a strong concern for some form of 'cultural shift' in our attitudes to high incomes and wealth. The need for alternative symbols and rewards to mark success was promoted.

There was interest in establishing some form of range for low and high incomes. This was approached in terms of a ratio between low and high incomes, proposals ranged from 1:4 to 1:14.

Taxation

It was also approached in terms of putting a cap on high incomes, proposals ranged from €75,000 to €190,000 after tax. Taxation was seen as the most appropriate mechanism for securing change in relation to high incomes.

The recommendations made from the deliberation in Galway might usefully be revisited. They included the need for a High Pay Commission to be set up, the inclusion of a reference to income equality in the Constitution, and a campaign to get every company/public body to include a statement of wage differentials in their annual reports/accounts.

More recently Claiming Our Future has been inspired by the campaign in Switzerland for an amendment to the Swiss Constitution.

The proposal was that a manager in a company would not be allowed to earn more in a month than another employee earns in a year (12

months). This 1:12 campaign was presented at a Claiming Our Future meeting this year by Fabian Molina and Guilhem Kokot from JUSO (Young Swiss Socialists).

JUSO organised the campaign and secured a referendum on the issue in Switzerland last year. While the referendum was lost, a very significant 35% voted in favour of the amendment.

This was despite almost universal official opposition to the campaign, the campaign having little funding available to it, and business pouring millions into a campaign to oppose the referendum.

Fabian Molina and Guilhem Kokot highlighted that the initiative's goals were largely about deepening discussion within the Left about wealth distribution and to strengthen advocacy for income equality. In this, while the referendum did not succeed, the campaign did.

They had little money and the tools they deployed included education initiatives, data development and presentation, activist actions and social media. They got a large yes vote out on very limited resources and developed a new discourse on income inequality in Switzerland.

Nat O'Connor from Tasc set out a useful spectrum of actions at the meeting that could be taken to address high incomes. These included pay caps or company pay ratios, higher rates of income tax for high incomes, wealth taxes including gift and inheritance tax, and legislation for transparency in companies and trusts.

Income inequality is bad for Irish society. Low incomes need to be addressed and a living wage needs to be paid. But income equality will also require a focus on high incomes. Find out more at www.claimingourfuture.ie

M&S section managers OK new proposals

MANDATE members at Marks & Spencer have voted by a majority of 90% in favour of proposals to realign the section manager function at the high street retailer.

The management plan reflects the challenges currently faced by M&S in Ireland.

Mandate Industrial Officer Jonathan Hogan told *Shopfloor*: "The company put forward a position whereby declining turnover and the existing ratio of section manager grades to sales advisor grades were the two main realities facing the Irish business."

A voluntary option of redundancy will be offered to section managers in the first instance.

It is understood those applying for redundancy will be considered and granted on a first in, first out basis.

But if there are no volunteers for this option, the union has brokered an agreement setting out selection criteria for redundancy.

In a bid to cut the number of compulsory redundancies, the union has also secured a voluntary re-assignment option to the position of a sales advisor grade where €15.31 an hour is being made available, as well as a buyout of 1.5 times the annual

loss. Mr Hogan added: "As always, it is our intention to protect jobs and to protect terms and conditions of employment and we believe together with the members we have achieved the best possible outcome."

"A number of stores – Athlone,



Jonathan Hogan: 'best possible outcome'

Blackrock, Clarion Quay, Drogheda, Killarney and Letterkenny – were not impacted by the cuts. However, in the stores affected, and after successful and intense negotiations between management and the Mandate National Negotiating Team, the headcount required was reduced to a minimum."

Mandate also got agreement that there will be no detrimental consequences for sales advisors as a result of the acceptance of these proposals.

Pay deal averaging 3% is agreed at Calor Gas

MANDATE, along with UNITE and SIPTU, submitted a claim for a pay increase for all grades to Calor Gas management in late 2012.

Throughout the slump, the gas suppliers remained a highly-profitable company.

Following a number of meetings with Calor Gas management, difficulties arose over their insistence on linking any pay increase to the introduction of a new remuneration policy within the firm.

Mandate Divisional Organiser Dave Moran told *Shopfloor*: "They made it clear that they did not see any merit in offering a pay increase to staff who they believed were already above what they considered the 'market rate for their role'."

The company issued a final document, titled Remuneration Pay Policy - Calor Gas, in November 2013 and this was considered – and rejected – by the membership of the three unions at a general meeting in

December 2013. Both sides referred the matter to the Conciliation Service of the Labour Relations Commission in line with the agreed procedures. Conciliation conferences took place in February and March 2014.

A document was agreed at the March conciliation conference which gives all members increases ranging from 2% to 4% depending on their position on the pay scale.

Dave Moran said: "As part of that agreement both sides have committed to discussing the introduction of a new remuneration policy but the unions have been successful in that all employees – no matter where they are on the pay scale – will receive a pay increase."

The 18-month pay deal, with an option to renew it for a further 18 months on the exact same terms, was accepted overwhelmingly by the members of all three unions following a ballot in April.



Union Representatives Introductory Course

The Union Representative Introductory Training Course is for new shop stewards/union representatives. The course aims to provide information, skills and knowledge to our shop stewards/union representatives to assist them in their role in the workplace.

Course content:

- Background to Mandate.
- The role and responsibilities of a Shop Steward/Union Representative.
 - Examining disciplinary/grievance procedures.
 - Developing negotiating skills.
 - Representing members at local level.
- Communication skills/solving members' problems.
 - Organising, Recruitment and Campaigns.
 - Induction presentations.

Certification and Progression:

Members who successfully complete this course will obtain a Mandate certificate. They may progress to a Union Representative Advanced Course and to other relevant training courses offered by Mandate.

If you are interested in this course, please contact your Mandate official or Mandate's Training Centre at **01-8369699**. Email: mandateotc@mandate.ie

GIVE NOW SAVE LIVES

GAZA CRISIS APPEAL

Give life-saving clean water to families in Gaza



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www.oxfamireland.org/gaza

“Education is a political act and a social act, an act of liberation and an act of self-liberation.”

Paulo Freire

ORIEL WORKERS' EDUCATION CIRCLE

Venue: Unite Offices,
Francis Street, Dundalk,
Co. Louth.

studygroupd@outlook.ie
087 7525051

This is an invitation to everyone interested in gaining a better knowledge of Irish history, politics, economics, or feminism; those who feel they need to know more about the world of politics, economics, and culture; those who feel that our society is falling apart, that the powers that control our lives don't care about us, our communities, or our country.

The Oriel Workers' Education Circle is about people coming together to discuss and share experience and knowledge. It is open to everyone in the Louth, south Down and south Armagh area.

James Connolly We will be looking at the writings and ideas of James Connolly. Are his ideas still important, or is he out of date? Have the left and republicans left Connolly behind? Can we learn from him for today's Ireland?

Karl Marx His insights and his theory about capitalism: are they still relevant in today's world? Does economics matter? How is wealth created? Is an “economy for the common good” possible?

One half of the world We will look at feminist writers who pioneered the struggle for women's rights and equality: Mary Wollstonecraft, Rosa Luxemburg, Constance Markievicz. What can we learn from them? What is the basis of men's attitudes to women? What is machismo?

The Study Circle will begin with a gathering once a month, which may become more frequent if people themselves decide. We hope also to have films and other media that will help inform our understanding of Ireland and the wider world.

The circle is aimed at working people, trade unionists, and people active in community politics, cultural work, or the environment. It is non-party and is open to socialists, republicans, communists, feminists, and people simply concerned about what is happening to our country and the wider world.



BUDGET COMMENT

Budget set to widen income inequality...

By **Aine Mannion**
We're Not Leaving campaign

In the run up to Budget 2015, government ministers have been preparing the ground work for tax cuts. Minister for Finance, Michael Noonan TD, has said that the proposed tax cuts will be aimed at improving the lot of middle-earners, a group he has defined as those making above €32,800 (point where single tax payers start paying higher rate of tax).

However, Minister Noonan's insistence that the proposed tax cuts will help middle earners has already been rubbished by his own response to a parliamentary question. In July, he said: “I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that they estimate that just over 17% of income earners were liable to income tax at the 41% rate in 2013”. This means that just one in six income earners pay any tax at the higher rate – not exactly the “squeezed middle”.

While the top one in six income earners in the country get a rise in take-home pay from the Minister, it is the low- and middle-earners who will actually be paying for it. These tax cuts will not only further income inequality but will also have consequences for health services, education, and social protection, widening the already huge gap between rich and poor in our society.

As Mandate members are only too aware, it is female, migrant, and young workers that are over-represented in low paid work in Ireland.

What's more, divesting from low- and middle-earners in favour of high-earners delivers a further blow to the high street and delays any possible recovery in the domestic economy. This is because, while high earners save, the least well off spend the vast bulk of their income locally and any increase in that income has ramifications for the local economy.

Recent events have shown that the current Fine Gael/ Labour government cannot be said to look out for the rights

of women or migrants. This government does, however, try to present itself as helping young people. They have attempted to create this image through general references to accepting austerity now so that the future generations can reap the benefits. More specifically, they talk up the Youth Guarantee and the disgraced JobBridge scheme.

The most recently released figures (Quarter 2, 2014) put the unemployment rate for those aged 15 – 24 at 26.9%. On top of this, young people experience discrimination based on their age when they apply for social welfare: new applicants for Jobseeker's Allowance now receive €100/week up to the age of 24; €144/week at 25; and can only get the full allowance at 26 years of age.

Precarious work

At €3.75 an hour or €150 a week, under-25s on JobBridge are being paid approximately 56% below the “at risk of poverty rate”. Under the Youth Guarantee, those who do not engage with JobBridge offers can face cuts to their social welfare. For those who do find work, it is often low-paid, insecure, and precarious.

It is unsurprising then that the CSO estimates 158,400 people aged 15 – 24 emigrated from Ireland between 2009 and April 2014. Minister Noonan, however, does not see these figures as a problem: “There is a lot of success now but the success is directly due to the programmes followed in the last three years. The success now is not an accident of nature or an act of God. It is a direct consequence of the policies pursued.”

Unemployment, low or no wages, cuts to public services, and emigration are not normally considered as successes. Yet they are the problems of Ireland's low- and middle-earners, of women, migrants, and young people, and so are at a lower level of concern to Ministers than tax cuts for the wealthiest 17% of earners.



SKILLS FOR WORK



Interested in doing a Communications course?

Do you have a desire to improve your communications skills, but never got around to it?

Communication skills

Starting from scratch this course helps you to improve your communications skills. Mandate Trade Union in conjunction with Skills for Work are offering members the opportunity to attend training. The courses are to encourage members back into learning and training while aiming towards a FETAC level 3 Award.

If you are interested in attending this training contact:

Mandate Training Centre, Distillery House, Distillery Road, Dublin 3

Phone: 01-8369699 Email: mandateotc@mandate.ie

Courses are free and open to members who have not achieved Leaving Certificate or who have an out of date Leaving Certificate. You can also achieve a FETAC Level 3 Award. Skills for Work is funded by the Department of Education and Skills.

A blow to the system

By Dr Rory Hearne

THERE needs to be support for – and the organising of – social resistance, struggle, protest, and campaigns.

It would be more productive for civil society organisations to look beyond their individualised silos and compartmentalised lobbying and let go of their fear of upsetting their civil servant and government partners and build and support movements based on popular protest and alternatives.

Movements such as those opposed to water charges, household charges, community cuts, Were Not leaving, the radical left, environmental campaigns require civil society organisation support in order to scale up their influence and succeed.

Why do we support such movements in Latin America but not when they are here? Is radicalism OK for the Global South but not for us here in Ireland?

Even if we are not exactly in agreement with the particular issue (this is obviously not applicable in racist or xenophobic issues) we should support grassroots resistance because that is where radical transformation comes from – the bottom up. That is where the potential for radical change and transformation comes from.

Taking action

People and workers in communities and neighbourhoods in cities, towns and villages taking action themselves.

It is good to see trade unions supporting and organising workers like the Marks and Spencers workers and the Greyhound bin workers as well as NGOs such as MRCI supporting the Paris Bakery occupation.

These should be continued and intensified. The lessons of their victories and defeats circulated and publicised.

The urban context of cities and large towns is central for this. The Right to the City literature highlights the importance of going beyond single issue campaigns to form broader grassroots alliances between environmentalists, the urban dispossessed, trade unions, and radical Left activists – to define a new type of non-capitalist, non-commodified urban life. And to engage in radical political action to challenge the system.

This also needs to be based on a new politics of diversity that respects different traditions, ideologies and approaches.

It is clear that we need a new approach to revolution. We must theorise and think through how will an alternative society come about? We do not want more authoritarian dystopias. We cannot wait for capitalism to combust from its own contradictions. Indeed, capitalism has proven its ability to survive, mould, transform and sustain itself.

We have to create new mecha-



Picture: Infomatique (CC BY-SA 2.0)

nisms for transformation and it is most likely a combination of various diverse approaches – from alternative autonomist communities to co-operative societies to mass resistance and local community action.

Multiple failures

What is clear from new social movements is that it cannot not be one singular act, one singular organisation and one ideology. We have seen the multiple failures that that leads to.

Radical inequality and injustice legitimises and necessitates radical popular mobilisation with the aim of transformation. We must ask our-

selves, what are we afraid of? Social upheaval?

What would be wrong with people waking up and taking control through mass protest and community action?

Why did civil society organisations not organise mass resistance when we were bailing out the banks by the billions, when we entered the Troika bailout programme, when the ECB told us we couldn't burn bondholders, when the population wanted to resist the household charge?

They were moments which could have fractured Irish politics and society permanently. Senior trade union officials have described that had they did not want to do that for fear of collapsing the system, for fear of frightening foreign investors, for fear of losing, for fear of worse alternatives.

This highlights that the approach of civil society leadership has not been about radically changing the system but about mitigation.

And the question has to be asked is

this what radicalism is about? Does this serve the interests of the poor, workers, the discriminated and marginalised? If we think this system is fundamentally wrong – then why not try making it collapse and develop alternatives?

A European and global dimension is also important. Unless resistance is linked regionally, e.g. at a European level and internationally, it will be very difficult to sustain a longer term challenge and alternative power to international markets as one country.

International solidarity requires facilitating social movements to scale up by supporting the European anti-austerity movements, the global justice movement in World Social Forum, and Climate Justice Events.

The neoliberal capitalist system and elite privilege holds on to its power on the basis of the consent of the population and of that population not realising its collective power.

Support the silenced

The elite have no desire or belief in real democracy and actively try to stop it emerging. Thus until we support the silenced, help them find their voice and become empowered to take radical political and social action themselves, nothing will change fundamentally toward a world of equality, social justice and sustainability.

We must not be afraid of unleashing popular resistance – of really facilitating the working class and marginalised to tear apart the existing institutions and recreate the world in an anti-capitalist manner.

● This is an excerpt from *Debating Directions for a New Republic* which originally appeared in the *Irish Left Review*. Check out the full article on <http://bit.ly/Z5NRXT>

Anti-austerity protest organised by ICTU in Cork last February

Picture: Daragh McSweeney/Photocall



Health & Safety FETAC Level 5

This course is aimed at Health and Safety representatives

Topic covered on course:

- Health and Safety Legislation
- Role of Health and Safety Representative
- Safety statements
- Role of Health & Safety Authority
- Occupational health
- Identification of hazards and risk assessment
- Accident investigation
- Fire safety
- Effective communications
- Health and safety promotion



Certification and Progression: Members who successfully complete this course receive a Fetac Level 5 component award certificate and may progress to other courses offered by Mandate. If you are interested in this course, please contact your Mandate official or Mandate's Training Centre at 01-8369699. Email: mandateotc@mandate.ie

Merger for workplace relations bodies

NEW reforms will see the five existing State workplace relations bodies merged into two.

The move is part of a broader reform programme within the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation with the number of agencies under the responsibility of the Department being reduced by 41 by the end of this year.

The new workplace relations system will comprise two bodies – the Workplace Relations Commission which will deal with complaints in the first instance, and the Labour Court which will deal with appeals.

The various responsibilities of the Labour Relations Commission (LRC), the

National Employment Rights Authority (NERA), the Equality Tribunal, Employment Appeals Tribunal (EAT) and the Labour Court, which have built up over time, will be subsumed into the two new bodies with one entry point for all complaints.

A complaint will be heard first by an adjudicator, similar to a Rights Commissioner and appeals will be sent to the Labour Court. Currently there is significant overlap between the various functions of the Rights Commissioners, The Employment Appeals Tribunal and Equality Tribunal with a complex process depending on the nature of the complaint.

As part of the reforms, an instrument



known as a compliance notice will be introduced that can order an employer who has broken the law in respect of their workers

to comply with an order or face penalties. Awards that are not paid by employers can now be enforced at the District Court.

Mandate Industrial Officer David Miskell told *Shopfloor*: “While an updated process allowing for members’ issues to be dealt with in a timely and thorough way is to be welcomed, the dispute at the Paris Bakery and the situation at Connolly Shoes is a stark reminder to us all of the many loopholes that exist for employers who break the law and don’t face up to their responsibilities.”

He added: “We will continue to fight for reforms to ensure that these injustices are stamped out.”

Christy benefit gig for Gaza kids

CHRISTY Moore will play a benefit concert for the children of Gaza in Vicar Street in Dublin on Sunday, October 12. Proceeds will go directly to the Middle East Children’s Alliance (MECA) which helps children to overcome the trauma they have experienced from the successive military assaults and occupation of Gaza by Israeli forces over recent years.

For over 20 years, MECA (www.mecaforpeace.org) has provided direct support for treatment clinics for traumatised children as well as medical aid, counselling programmes, play centres and libraries.

Christy Moore will be joined by Declan Sinnott at the ‘Gig for the Children of Gaza’ in Vicar Street. Tickets at €40 are available from Ticketmaster www.ticketmaster.ie. For more info contact: 01 858 8217



During a brief 12-hour cessation of hostilities on July 27, families returned to Shujaiya in eastern Gaza, scene of some of the heaviest Israeli bombing. During that short lull, about 150 bodies were uncovered from beneath the rubble. Picture: Iyad al Baba/Oxfam (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

Mandate in cut trade links call after Gaza onslaught

MANDATE has written to major retail employers across Ireland calling on them to desist from “trading, investment or other commercial links with companies operating in, providing services to, or sourcing goods from [the illegal] settlements” in the region of Israel.

In the letter, dated July 25, Mandate Assistant General Secretary Gerry Light wrote: “Irish people are appalled by scenes from Gaza. We are asking retail employers to take whatever steps they can to positively impact on the current conflict in order to protect lives and prevent further alleged human rights abuses.”

He continued: “Adopting such a course of action will without doubt greatly help the most vulnerable caught up in the conflict but also assist your many customers and staff who on an increasing basis are faced with a dilemma of conscience in dealing with products which they see as tainted by association.”

The union pointed out that since the IDF operation, dubbed ‘Protective Edge’ by Is-

rael, began in early July a large number of their members had received complaints from the public about the stocking of Israeli goods in their stores.

Mr Light added: “The calls from the public to boycott Israeli goods are intensifying and we believe it is unfair that ordinary retail workers, who have no say in the sourcing of products, are confronted with these complaints.

“We believe major retail employers can protect their workers from these complaints and can assist their customers in their attempts to avoid purchasing products deemed associated with the conflict in Gaza.”

Retail employers Mandate have written to include: Marks & Spencer; Shaws; Tesco Ireland; Musgrave Operating Partners Irealnd ltd (SUPER VALU); Dunnes Stores; Penneys; Heaton’s; Debenhams Retail (Ireland) Ltd; Boots Retail (Ireland Ltd/Alliance Boots; Brown Thomas; Arnotts; Musgrave Group; Arcadia Group Ltd; Aldi; Lidl; TK Maxx; BWG Foods; Smyths Toys; Londis Group; PC World; and Lloyds Pharmacy.

Do your bit for Palestine... call on your boss to boycott Israeli goods

By Mandy La Combre

Member of the National Executive Council

THERE has been much coverage on social media recently about the boycott of Israeli goods. I specify social media because the mainstream media doesn’t appear to be covering the issue with the same fervor.

It is a positive step to promote the idea that individual consumers can show their support for the people of Palestine by participating in a consumer boycott of Israeli goods, and by now I’m sure we are all well aware that Mandate have written to all the major retailers in the country asking them not to stock goods sourced from Israel in their stores. But we as Man-

date members, (but more importantly employees of retailers), can go a step further and write to our employers ourselves urging them to take action.

As employees we need to investigate what possible brands our employers are selling that may be linked to Israeli occupation and apartheid, and make the decision to be assertive when it comes to how we want this dealt with.

I, for one, do not want to be put in the position of handling Israeli goods that I know to be directly linked to bloodshed and misery.

By taking the initiative to write to our employers ourselves, we are showing retailers we categorically

find it unacceptable as employees to be put in the position of supporting Israel while they ruthlessly bombard the Palestinian people with occupation, war crimes, massacres and indiscriminate torture.

We know boycotts do work. We at Mandate know first hand the impact our own members had on the boycott of South African goods. And a recent survey conducted in the UK for *The Jewish Chronicle* illustrated that 47% of the public support the Palestinian position and only 22% support the Israeli line.

Although no similar survey has been carried out in Ireland we know from social media and by the numbers

of people who come out in support of Palestine through marches and other demos that a boycott in this country could also have a significant impact. We also know that after Israel’s attack on Gaza in 2008-2009, ‘Operation Cast Lead’, the Israeli Union of Industrialists revealed that one in five Israeli exporters were having difficulty selling abroad due to boycotts.

At that time, Yair Rotoi, chairman of the association’s foreign-trade committee, revealed: “21% of local exporters report that they are facing problems in selling Israeli goods because of an anti-Israeli boycott.”

This was mainly due to boycotts from the UK and Scandinavian coun-

tries. This forced 66% of Israeli export companies at the time to slash their prices. If we are successful with the current BDS campaign, I have no doubt we can cause more hardship to the Israeli export business and illustrate to Israel that we find their behaviour towards the Palestinian people intolerable and have no need nor desire to access any of their goods.

Therefore, I strongly urge all Mandate members to contact their employers directly and, if they do stock any Israeli goods, be persistent in applying pressure on these employers to no longer continue trading in these goods.

For more information on companies with alleged business connections with the Occupation, check out the links on <http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/boycotts/boycottlist/israel.aspx>



Even the Bundesbank (!) backs push for pay rises

GERMANY'S Bundesbank, Europe's largest central bank, has changed its tune and is now backing the push for higher wages to boost the Eurozone economy.

The bank's Chief Economist Jens Ulbrich made the comments to *Der Spiegel* magazine in July warmly welcoming recently agreed pay rises of more than 3% for German workers.

UNI General Secretary Philip Jennings, who last year coined the phrase "the world needs a pay rise" at the World Economic Forum in Davos, commented: "The Bundesbank has joined a growing list of the great and the good calling for a pay rise for workers."

"All of these institutions, from the Pope to the US President, recognise that if employees' pockets are empty they are not in a position to spend to pick up the economy."

"It's time for the Federal Reserve, the Bank of

England and the European Central Bank to heed this message. The world needs a pay rise if we want to see our way out of the shadow of the crisis and into the light of sustainable growth. After all, it is clear that stock market CEOs around the world have been giving themselves double-digit salary increases."

The groundswell of support for higher wages follows a raft of recent reports pinpointing economic inequality as a key threat to the global economy.

In July, the OECD released its predictions for the world economy until 2060. It warned that growth will slow to around two-thirds of its current rate and that inequality will increase massively. And a recent IMF study echoed what unions have been saying for years – that inequality is damaging to economic growth. The report also dismissed outdated ideas that redistributing wealth could make matters worse.

Research shift work danger call

SIPTU has called on the Government to commission and fund research into the health risks associated with shift work.

Sylvester Cronin, who is the union's health and safety advisor, told *Shopfloor*: "There is growing evidence from international research that erratic work schedules can lead to serious health issues for workers. Rotating shifts are the cause of greatest concern, with women on long-term shift work being particularly affected."

He added: "We have very good research

facilities in this country but we are very poor at doing studies into workplace health and safety. As much of the health costs for treating illness falls on the State, it would be worthwhile for the Government to fund badly-needed research into the health impact of shift work in Ireland.

"This research could also be utilised by the Health and Safety Authority when conducting inspections to assist employers to carry out an assessment of the increased health risks to staff where they operate shift work schedules."

2.3m die each year due to work-related illnesses or accidents



A WORLD without fatal or serious occupational accidents is possible, the organisers of the 20th World Congress on Safety and Health at Work, held over three days in Frankfurt, Germany, last month, have claimed.

Nearly 4,000 occupational safety experts, politicians and scientists from 139 countries took part in three days of debates on August 24 - 27 focussing on how to make work safer and healthier.

According to the ILO, 2.3 million people worldwide die each year as a result of occupational illnesses and accidents at work. In addition, there are 860,000 occupational accidents every day, with consequences in terms of injuries. The direct or indirect cost of occupa-

tional illness and accidents at work is estimated at \$2.8 trillion worldwide.

"These figures are unacceptable and yet these daily tragedies often fail to show up on the global radar. Clearly, there is still much to be done. Serious occupational accidents are, firstly, human tragedies but economies and society also pay a high price," said ILO Director-General Guy Ryder, pictured above right.

"The right to a safe and healthy workplace is a basic human right – a right to be respected at every level of development and in different economic conditions. Respecting this human right is an obligation – as well as a condition for sustainable economic development. Prevention is possible, it is necessary and it pays."

Gerry Light Assistant General Secretary
Mandate Trade Union

VIEW *from the* SHOPFLOOR

Job only half done

FOLLOWING the most recent round of pay increases achieved for our members employed in the retail sector, it is safe to assume that the combined value of the same is somewhere in the region of €30 million plus.

Significantly, this figure only relates to the percentage increases which have been applied to basic hourly rates of pay.

When one factors in the additional benefits which have accrued through the introduction of guaranteed enhanced weekly hours by way of banded contracts, the headline figure becomes more impressive, which possibly could exceed €50 million.

Apart from the obvious benefits that these developments give to individual workers and their dependents, the injection of this amount of cash into the domestic economy provides vital economic activity at a time when it is badly needed.

This type of increased domestic demand leads to bigger and stronger businesses which employ more workers who, in turn, return greater tax revenues leading to a more buoyant economy. This is what is commonly referred to as the "Virtuous Cycle" model.

Sadly, the reality is that many workers do not get the opportunity to fully and meaningfully participate in this cycle of economic activity because the real value of the increases which have been won for them by the union is significantly eroded through the imposition of many direct and indirect taxes.

The extent of the tax net shows no signs of reducing for working families, in fact it will increase dramatically in the coming year with the full impact of

the property tax and water charges. One also needs to consider the negative effect of increasing rents which are exacerbated by a lack of social housing, the cost of childcare for many working families and the expenses associated with basic medical services and medicines.

Progressive and fair taxation systems are not only essential but indeed are the cornerstone of any modern society espousing egalitarian values. As it is currently structured, the Irish model of taxation falls far short of the basic requirements from both a fairness and equality perspective.

The disproportionate tax take from ordinary workers is something that must be tackled as a matter of priority and is a true test of the current government's commitment to alleviate the devastating impact of their austerity policies imposed over the last number of years.

Much debate has rightfully focused in recent times on the need for an adequate "Living Wage".

Preserving the maximum value of a decent rate of pay requires us to look beyond the traditional struggle with employers in our effort to extract the best return for our members.

We must conserve sufficient energies for what some would consider to be the more difficult and important aspect any "Living Wage" campaign. The power of the collective which won the pay increases in the workplace in the first instance must be brought to bear in a constructive and determined fashion to ensure that the State does not grab these hard-won increases before they even hit our pockets.

For those who believe that political agitation is unimportant, it means that this passivity will be taken at the very least as acceptance of the status quo with the likelihood of things getting worse instead of better.

There is much talk at the moment of the forthcoming budget and its likely impact on working people and indeed those who are unemployed. For obvious reasons any concessions coming our way are likely to be geared towards next year's budget which coincidentally happens to be the last before the next general election in 2016.

If we strive to effectively combine the industrial agitation we have shown we are capable of in the workplace with broader social and political agitation, then we have a chance of shaping a society which delivers to the benefit of all with not one person left behind. Our job is only half done, now let's complete our task.



EDUCATE! AGITATE!

DISCOVER your confidence, feel secure in your role as a shop steward with new capabilities that will enable you and your colleagues to flourish as people and as workers, Mandate Training can do that for you.

A newly-developed **SENIOR SHOP STEWARDS COURSE** delivered by Trademark is proving to be very popular. The course has energised shop stewards both within their union and also in their workplaces.

Members attending this course are taking on a journey back through time to when trade unions formed. Course participants learn the history of trade unionism, the emergence and development of the market system and how this affects workers as well as the impact of globalisation, free trade and open markets in a modern society.

Also examined is how workers can gain rights and have political persuasion using the power of collectivism.

Members examine the many ways that workers can actively engage in their union and learn how to have their voices heard. The interaction on the course allows a shop steward to build on their trade union experience while developing a greater understanding of their role as a leader in Mandate, their union.



Participants in the Senior Advanced Course



FEEDBACK...

“I think the course is a fantastic opportunity for all members. It gives an insight into how important it is for us to keep tightening the screw on capitalism and never give up the fight as members of any union.”

– David Beattie, Shop Steward

“I found the advanced senior reps course to be very educational, informative, beneficial and interesting and very well presented.”

– Paddy Ward, Shop Steward

“I would suggest more of this type of training, at least yearly, it keeps us abreast of changes in dynamics in the overall workplace.”

– Joseph Ateb, Shop Steward

“There was a lot of information, I thoroughly enjoyed it. These guys know their stuff I would highly recommend it to fellow members.”

– Marion Dillon, Shop Steward.



Lorraine Malone: positive experience

If you put the work in, you reap the rewards

SOME members are apprehensive when starting their training course. However, they soon settle in and enjoy the experience. They often speak about the skills they learn and how the training raises their awareness of their role as a union member. They also comment on how the friendships they make help support each other during the course. Finally, participants always express their desire to attend other courses in the future. Shop steward **Lorraine Malone**, who attended the **TRAIN THE TRAINER** course, shares her thoughts:

“IT WAS a Monday morning and I was en route to Mandate’s Training Centre. I was having doubts about giving up five days of my holidays to participate and complete the Train the Trainer course which was being run by Mandate.

It turned out to be a great experience, hard work at times but we had some fun as well and all 11 of us enjoyed the challenge. We were eager to get our presentations right, put together a training session and deliver it with confidence. We realised that if you put the work into a

course, you will reap the rewards. We all felt that the knowledge and skills will help us in our personal, our everyday working lives and our roles as union shop stewards.

Looking back now it was a great experience and worthy of my five days holidays. We all learned a lot from each other. I enjoyed the comradeship and support I received from my fellow students, tutor and the Training Centre. I would encourage other people to do courses in the Mandate Training Centre.

THROUGHOUT the country Mandate’s **SHOP STEWARDS COURSES** are held in several locations. These courses are designed to help shop stewards develop their skills and expertise. Having well-trained shop stewards in the workplace ensures that members have representatives who can advise and assist them. Learners can achieve the *Trade Union Representative FETAC level 5 Award*. Shop steward **Nigel Bishop** speaks about his experiences...

Courses are a must for shop stewards and members

“IMAGINE a place where you can go, where you can talk and discuss with people like you, your issues in work. Where they don’t just listen, but they help you learn where to find the answers and they teach you the ability to deal with real live issues in the work place.

Each course you do is helping to develop you and strengthen your knowledge and confidence and your ability. But you don’t have to imagine, Mandate’s Training Centre offers this and much more, whatever you think your level of ability is at.

As someone who has done all the Shop Stewards courses, I think our representatives should attend these courses. It is not just about learning and meeting like-minded people or the great people that run the training, but it also gives you strength and confidence and helps broaden your ability. I got a chance to not just learn workers’ rights, but the skills to use that knowledge, to better

myself and my fellow colleagues in the work place. Each step in the course enhances what I learned, gave me a better skill-set to deal with bigger and challenging issues more confidently, to see and anticipate problems.

Each course is so well done from the Beginners right up to the Advanced that you just can’t wait for the next course to begin. It’s a must for shop stewards and members regardless of what you think your level is at, because just when you think there is nothing else you can learn, you find that there always is more.

It is always comforting to know that when you go on a course you know you will be well cared for and supported by all the staff at the training centre.



Mandate Members who attended a recent computer course



Mandate Members receive their FETAC Awards in Newbridge

ATE! ORGANISE!



Graphics: Tim Morgan (CC BY 2.0)

Courses & tutors are the best

THE **COMMUNICATION COURSE, FETAC LEVEL 4**, takes the learners into the areas of understanding media, the power of advertising, better personal communications, group communications, presentations and modern day social communications for example Facebook and Twitter. Following a Communications course, shop steward **Dave Reid** wrote:

IN 2007 I was elected shop steward in Superquinn. I attended my first training course and it was the Mandate Introductory Shop Steward course. It has to be the most up-to-date Training Centre. The training itself is so informal. The room of strangers on that first morning soon became a close-knit bunch that helped each other through the course and also enjoyed each other's company. We learned from each other too. This first course gave me the confidence to go out and represent the members and to be actively involved in my union. I went on to do five or six more courses.

One was the Communications course which gave me the confidence to speak in public, something I thought I could never do. I now think outside the box when listening to Media reports.

I also completed the Train the Trainer course for which I received a Distinction at Fetac Level 6.

Mandate has given me confidence in myself that I don't think I would ever have got without them. My training experiences have been the highlight of my career and to think it has all been free.

I would recommend these courses to every Mandate member as it will bring out the real you. The courses and tutors are the best of the best.



Health & Safety reps play vital role

SAFETY, HEALTH AND WELFARE AT WORK COURSES FETAC LEVEL 5, are available for elected Health and Safety Representatives. This course gives Mandate's Health and Safety Reps the competencies in order that they can carry out the duties of a workplace safety representative and protect their fellow members in the workplace.

Mandate Health and Safety Representative **Eugene Brady** and ICTU Health and Safety Committee member shares his experience:

IN 2011, I was elected the Health and Safety representative for my store. I subsequently attended the Mandate Health and Safety representative training course (Fetac Level 5).

I found the courses detailed and very well structured, giving me the resources, knowledge and confidence to deal with a wide variety of issues at shop floor involving, i.e. poor lighting levels, inadequate equipment, heating, general maintenance problems, training, ensuring proper rest periods for staff...

In 2012, I was honoured to be nominated to go on the ICTU Health and Safety Committee representing Mandate. During my time on the committee I have become aware of the bigger picture around health and safety. I have been involved in discussions and provide input on a wide range of topics including Asbestos removal, Radon Gas, reportable accidents, precarious work, stress and many more issues.

I have championed the role of Health and safety representatives whenever possible.

My belief is that Mandate's Health and Safety Representatives have a vital role in ensuring Health and Safety standards are maintained and improved, in all our work places, for all our Members.

I would seriously recommend to any member to get elected as the Staff Health and Safety Rep and then attend the Health and safety Representative training Course"

The course was very helpful

MANDATE Training Centre offers a wide range of relevant, diverse courses, on a national basis, to members and staff. Many courses are delivered at times and in patterns that suit our members' working lives and members' availability.

However, some members cannot attend the full shop stewards training course as they may not get release or it is too far to travel.

In order to address this, Mandate offers a short one evening course which is delivered to House Committees in their own local area.

This course gives guidance and advice regarding representing members at meetings with management how to have good communication skills when dealing with members and management and how to recruit new members into the union.

Shop steward **Margaret O'Reilly** explains how the **HOUSE COMMITTEE TRAINING COURSE** assisted in her workplace:

AS A member of the union I know how important it is to have the support of my other fellow union members. We have a very active House Committee who, from time to time, would represent staff at grievance and disciplinary meetings. Over the years, being a member of the union has been a real advantage to me working in Dunnes Stores and I have remained an active House Committee member.

Mandate held an evening training course recently which I found very helpful. The course covered topics such as how to represent staff at grievances and disciplinary meetings, how to recruit members into the union and how to communicate information to members. It is so important that staff is asked to join the union. Your employer is more likely to listen to you if you have the backing of other union members.



Picture: Bamshad Houshyan (CC BY 2.0)

New ways of learning...

WITH the advancement of technology members have availed of **COMPUTER COURSES** in their own time. This development of their IT skills allows Mandate communicate effectively directly with members using email, Facebook and Twitter.

Another advantage of the technological era is the provision of e-learning. Mandate is developing a Shop Stewards training module which will allow representatives access from their laptops or PCs in the comfort of their own homes. This module would assist new shop stewards and house committees who are waiting to attend a training course.

Several Mandate members have completed a number of courses and are on their way to achieving a major award. Some of these members may not have attended training since leaving school. It is an honour to be present when these members receive their FETAC certificates.



Congratulations to all Mandate members and staff, who have attended training as you have taken time out to invest in yourself and in doing so you are strengthening Mandate Trade Union. If you are interested in attending a course phone Mandate's training centre at 01-8369699.

Aileen Morrissey

Mandate National Co-ordinator of Training and Development

Don't be fooled by data on sales, most buyers are just getting into debt...

"NEW 142 car plates drive retail sales up 8.2% in July" was a recent headline in the *Irish Times* – sending out some badly needed positive news for the retail industry.

CSO numbers, however, show when motor trades are excluded overall sales dropped.

Retail sales jumped by 8.2% in July, the second largest monthly rise this year, on the back of strong car sales, which benefitted from the introduction of new 142 registration plates.

However, when motor trades are excluded, retail sales fell by 0.7% on the previous month, suggesting recovery in the sector is still weak. This would indicate that disposable income continues to stagnate – partly through the introduction of new charges such as the property tax.

Mandate has warned that the in-

crease in retail sales due to a large growth in motor sales is not in itself a positive development.

Mandate communications officer David Gibney said: "There are two key components to motor sales that we need to be conscious of. One is that our motor industry, which is solely based on the retail side of things because we have no car manufacturing industry, is not labour intensive. Therefore the number of jobs supported by positive retail sales is limited.

"The second concern is that most people do not buy new cars with cash. They'll either take out a loan from a credit union or use the dealers' finance facility.

"This generally means that many thousands of people are getting into large debt, which is a false indication for the positivity or otherwise of the retail industry."

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Unions must avoid feeding notion of a public-private workers divide

PAGE 24

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TRAINING



Retail students visit MTC

PICTURED above are students taking the FETAC Level 4 Retail Skills Course in North Wall Community Centre.

On the course participants learn about customer service and consumer rights as well as the rights and responsibilities both of employees and employers.

Retail Class student Stephen Mahoney told *Shopfloor*: "In order to put the learning into context, we got to visit the Mandate Training Centre

and complete a programme that included real-life and real-time situations covering all of the modules we had learned.

"We were also able to use our work placement practice that we have already completed as 'case studies' which brought home some important points on diversity and stress management. There is no doubt effective communication and awareness are very important in retail as well as in being able to access support when challenges arise."

He added: "I would definitely think about joining Mandate to help me out with any problems that might occur in the workplace in future. We would like to thank Aileen Morrissey and Brendan O'Hanlon for their time and hope to meet them in our future careers in retail."

Back row, from left: Stephen Mahoney, Catalin Dumitru, Alanna Harford and Sarah Genockey. Front Row, from left: Chelsea Spain, Amie Hevey and Orla Lennon.

Mandate Shop Stewards' Autumn Training Programme

Course Title	Dates	Course Location
Union Representative Introductory	15/16/17 September	OTC
Union Representative Introductory	29/30 Sept; 1 Oct	Cork
Union Representative Advanced Senior	6/7/8 October	Waterford
Union Representative Advanced FETAC 5	13/14/15 October	OTC
Union Representative Advanced Senior	3/4/5 November	OTC
Union Representative Introductory	10/11/12 November	OTC
Health and Safety Elected Reps FETAC 5	17/18/19/20/21 November	OTC

If you are a Shop Steward or Health and Safety Rep and wish to attend a course please, contact your official or Mandate Training Centre Tel: 01 8369699. *OTC = Mandate Organising and Training Centre, Venue dates and times may vary.

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Fasten your seat-belts!

IN early August, public expenditure minister Brendan Howlin told the *Irish Independent* he expects to be negotiating the beginning of pay restoration with public service unions next year. The political response was pretty muted, but that was mainly because the Dáil is in recess. Now that Howlin has spoken, public service pay will be a major political issue over the coming months and into the general election campaign.

The business response was measured too. IBEC resisted dismissing the idea out of hand. Instead it emphasised its preference for tax cuts over pay rises and said the so-called 'pension levy' should remain in place. Expect to hear more.

The initial media response wasn't exactly overwhelming either. IMPACT's analysis featured strongly on RTÉ and Newstalk radio – and across the national print media – in the days following Howlin's statement. But that was more or less it, except for



Brendan Howlin: hints about pay talks

the *Independent's* titles, which milked the Howlin interview for well over a week.

This will also change. The rest of a powerful and largely hostile press corps will argue hard against public service pay restoration once there's clear blue water between the issue and the *Indo's* scoop. The closer we come to a negotiation, the louder they will be.

Unsurprisingly, the August 17 edition of the *Sunday Independent* was the exception to the relative media quiet. It published at least six articles on the issue, mainly fact-free rants from the likes of Eddie Hobbs, Marc Coleman and Colm McCarthy.

Its front page piece was a strong indication of where the PR battle lines will be drawn. The public-private pay gap and, by implication, the 'divide' between workers in the public and private sectors, was its central theme.

IMPACT will continue to engage on the public-private pay issue with the facts. These are that economists disagree on the size and significance of the pay gap, but the most balanced and comprehensive study of recent years (by the CSO in 2012) concluded that, depending on how it's meas-



By Bernard Harbor

Unions must argue the case for public service pay restoration in the broader context of recovery for all



ured, it could be as little as zero or as much as 12% once the pension levy is factored in. A bigger challenge for unions will be to avoid feeding the notion of a public-private workers' divide, which our detractors have rightly identified as the most effective political lever in their toolbox.

Back in 2009, we spectacularly failed in this regard. In the shock and hurt of public service pay cuts, we allowed ourselves to repeatedly come across as ignorant or dismissive of the hardships – particularly unemployment – being experienced in the rest of the economy.

Even today, some seem reluctant to acknowledge, let alone promote, the most important benefit of the Croke Park and Haddington Road agreements – the protection against compulsory redundancy (which has been a feature of the public service in all the other Troika programme countries) at a time when 382,000 people are still stuck on the live register.

Unions must argue the case for

'The public-private pay gap and, by implication, the 'divide' between workers in the public and private sectors, was [Sindo article's] central theme'

public service pay restoration in the broader context of recovery for all. Virtually everyone is worse off now than they were a few years ago, but it has happened in different ways depending on where you work and what your personal circumstances are.

IMPACT's strategy for pay restoration reflects this by highlighting the need for continued action on unemployment, along with pay restoration in the public, private and community sectors – including the restoration of effective statutory wage-setting mechanisms for the lowest paid workers in the private sector.

In 2009, a media-orchestrated backlash against public servants made it relatively easy for politicians to cut pay. Times and austerity-weary attitudes have changed and Brendan Howlin's statement two weeks ago has not provoked a similar backlash. Our detractors will move heaven and earth to change that.

Public servants and their unions will have to work hard – in words and deeds – to win and maintain public support. And that means working and arguing for income restoration across the economy.

Bernard Harbor is IMPACT's head of communications

Pictures: Irish Labour Party; Alomosa County Public Health (CC BY 2.0)

By David Gibney
Mandate communications officer

THOUSANDS of low-income working families have been excluded from receiving the back-to-school clothing and footwear allowance after falling outside the payment's income threshold.

The reduced economic circumstances of many families has resulted in tens of thousands of people applying for the payment.

Latest figures from the Department of Social Protection show that the applications of 4,000 families for the allowance have been rejected so far.

Campaign groups such as Barnardos say families who are struggling to make ends meet find they are falling outside strict means-test rules by as little as €5 a week.

The eligibility rules – which do not take into account expenses such as rent or mortgage costs – mean working families in particular are unable to avail of the allowance.

'Despair'

"We frequently hear the frustration and despair of those who exceed the threshold by just a few euro," a Barnardos spokeswoman told *Shopfloor*. "Some are now ending up resorting to taking out loans because they can't afford to cover the costs."

The Department of Social Protection, however, has pointed out that payments to more than 160,000 families have been issued in recent weeks to help with back-to-school costs.

It claimed these payments are aimed at assisting with these costs for the most vulnerable and will cost more than €40 million this year.

To qualify, a family's total household income must be below a certain threshold, which depends on the number of children and parents in a family.

But many who receive family income supplement – a welfare support aimed at low-income working families – have found they are ineligible for the payment because it uses different means-test rules.

Mandate General Secretary John Douglas said: "The government and the department need to review the manner in which these applications are reviewed. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of working families who will find the coming months even more difficult as a result of being denied this allowance.

Mr Douglas continued: "Many

Survey reveals thousands of families 'ineligible' for school allowances

Mandate members are dependent on allowances like this and we're fearful that it may push some of them over the edge or force others into debt."

Under Family Income Supplement rules, for example, a couple or lone parent with three children must have an income below €703 to receive the payment. A couple with three children must have an income at or below €623 to avail of the back-to-school allowance; for lone parents, the limit is set even lower at €467.

'We frequently hear the frustration and despair of those who exceed the threshold by just a few euro. Some are now ending up resorting to taking out loans as they can't afford to cover [back-to-school] costs'

Barnardos has called for these eligibility rules to be widened to ensure as many families who need assistance can get it. The clothing and footwear allowance provides €200 for secondary school students and €100 for primary students.

A survey by Barnardos earlier this year found average full costs for secondary school students were €735, while they were up to €380 for primary students.

One parent told researchers: "Free education is what we are meant to have in Ireland. It's a disgrace. I have twins starting in first year in September and it's costing over €1,200. We are not entitled to the back-to-school allowance as my husband earns €20 over the required amount."

Figures from the Department of Social Protection show that payments were issued automatically to the majority of recipients – almost

130,000 people – with their normal weekly social welfare payment last July. As of *Shopfloor* going to press, a further 53,000 applications had been received by the department.

Of these, over 35,000 received a payment, while 4,000 have been disallowed. It is understood a further 13,000 people are waiting for their applications to be processed.

Picture: avlyxz (CC BY-SA 2.0)

The clothing and footwear allowance provides €200 for secondary school students and €100 for primary students. A survey by Barnardos earlier this year found average full costs for secondary school students were €735, while they were up to €380 for primary students.



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JLT2014-022

John Douglas: eligibility review for back to school allowances is needed



Sacked Dunnes worker awarded €13.5k by Tribunal

A MANDATE member sacked by Dunnes Stores two-and-a-half years ago for selling alcohol to an underage teenager has been awarded €13,500 for unfair dismissal at an Employment Appeals Tribunal.

Lorraine Fitzpatrick, from Drogheda, was also awarded a further €1,623 because Dunnes Store had not given her the minimum notice to which she was entitled. The mum of two – who had worked as a

part-time sales assistant at the retailer for 12 years and had an “exemplary record” – claimed at the Tribunal that she had been made a “sacrificial lamb” by her former employer ahead of the first prosecution for selling alcohol to minors using teenage test purchasers in December 2011.

Outlining the background to the case, Mandate Divisional Organiser Willie Hamilton said Ms Fitzpatrick

had been sacked following a “sting operation” by Gardai.

He pointed out that a more senior member had been in the “vicinity of the till” but that no action had been taken against them.

Mr Hamilton, who represented Ms Fitzpatrick, told Shopfloor: “Lorraine had doubts after the sale over the age of the customer but it was too late to do anything about it because at this stage the Garda had

arrived. I wrote to the company seeking a meeting to appeal the decision which was refused by the company. Our member also requested a meeting to appeal the dismissal which was ignored by management.

“The company claimed that appeals are always conducted in writing. However, the disciplinary procedure states that appeals will be heard by an appropriate mem-

ber of management.” He added: “Our member accepted that she had sold alcohol to a minor but the Tribunal found that her dismissal had been unfair as fair procedures were not given to her. The Tribunal also concluded that there had been a lack of proportionality with the decision to dismiss given the circumstances and the personal background of our member who had 12 years of service with the company.”



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Whistleblowers' law now in force

THE Protected Disclosures Act 2014 will, for the first time, offer legal protections for workers who report concerns about wrongdoing in the public, private and non-profit sectors.

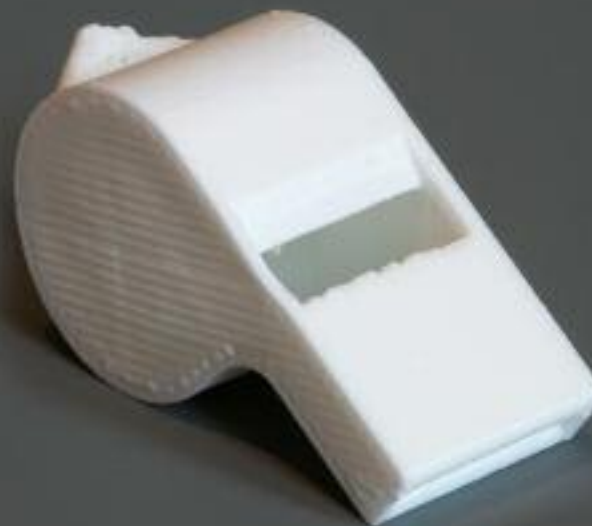
The legislation will cover all employees, contractors, agency workers, members of An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces.

It draws on best-practice guidelines and takes a more comprehensive approach similar to that adopted in the UK, New Zealand and South Africa. Key provisions

include a prohibition on penalising workers who make protected disclosures and a wide definition of “worker”.

It also includes a broad range of “relevant wrongdoings” that can be reported including criminal offences, breaches of legal obligations, threats to health and safety or the environment, miscarriages of justice, improper use of public funds or any attempt to conceal information in relation to such wrongdoings.

At all times proper advice should be taken before making any disclosures.



Picture: Andrew Craigie (CC BY 2.0)

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worldwide

Building recovery

WHILE it certainly won't feel that way for most households, the Irish economy is now starting to recover. Employment has grown by more than 2% since early 2013 and it is clear that the long decline in Ireland's economic output has started to reverse.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) estimates that GDP grew 2.7% on a seasonally adjusted basis in the first quarter of 2014. But we are not yet out of the woods and a number of concerns remain including the still high level of household and corporate indebtedness, weak credit conditions and the very high levels of long-term unemployment and youth unemployment.

There are a number of external threats to recovery – for example, the potential for deflation in the Eurozone and the risk of geopolitical tensions in Eastern Europe causing a spike in energy costs.

The CSO's recent revision to the national accounts to take account of investment in research and development (R&D) and certain illegal activities (such as drug dealing and prostitution) has made Ireland's task of hitting its budget deficit targets much easier.

Deficit target

It is becoming increasingly evident that the Irish Government will not need to implement anything like €2 billion of austerity measures in Budget 2015 in order to hit its 3% deficit target in 2015.

Indeed the balance of evidence now suggests that the structural deficit in Ireland's public finances is close to zero. This means that economic recovery will, by itself, eliminate the deficit without much need for additional budgetary consolidation.

However, Ireland's debt-to-GDP ratio is still dangerously high and it is still too early to claim that the public finances are repaired. A negative growth shock in Europe could easily push us back into an unsustainable position.

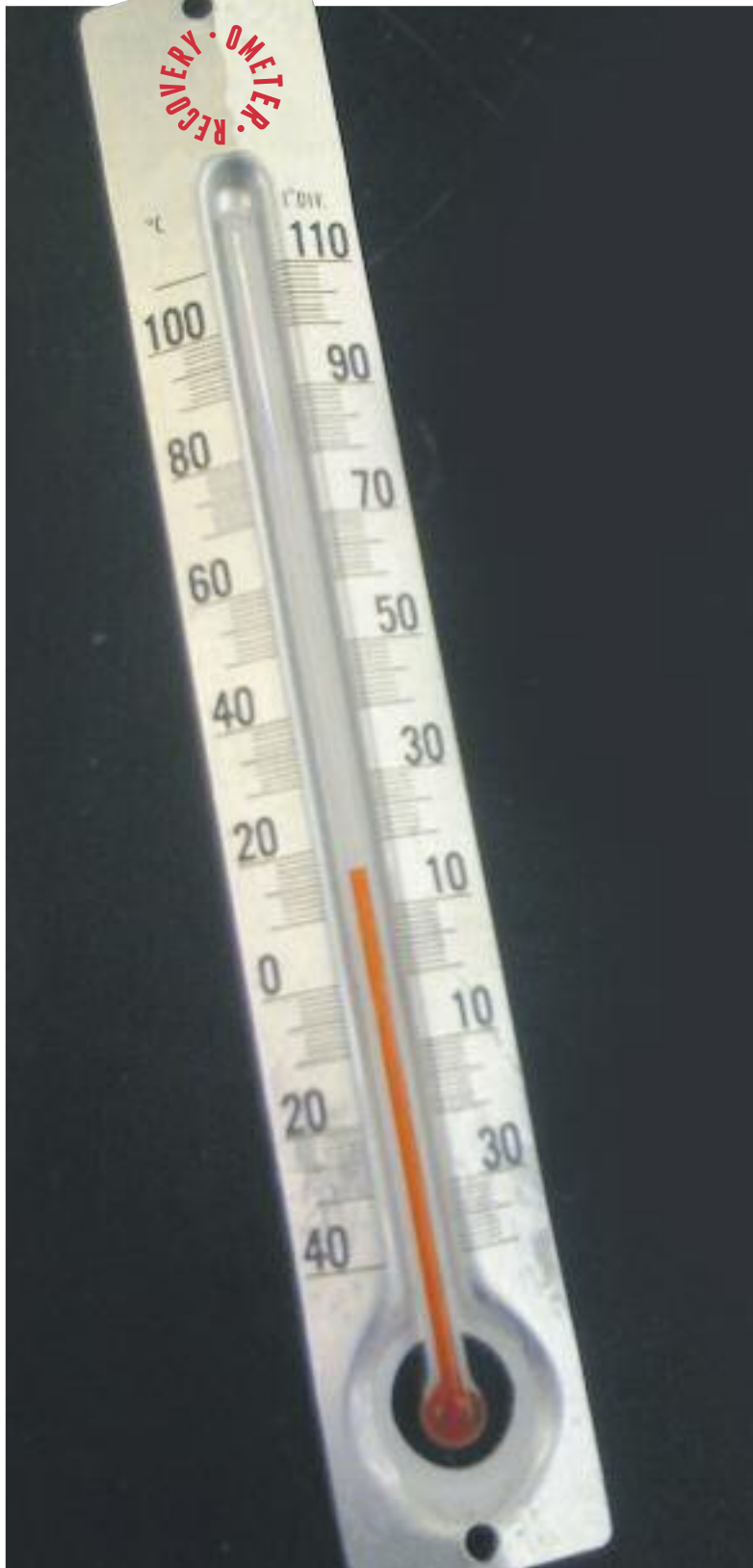
A small additional adjustment is needed in Budget 2015 to ensure that Ireland's public finances are firmly placed on a sustainable path. There is certainly no room for tax cuts in Budget 2015.

Government revenue is already very low compared to the rest of Europe and it not possible to maintain European levels of public services and social payments unless we are willing and able to pay for it.

When we exclude the interest payments on our national debt, we find that public spending is already very low by European standards. Public spending is scheduled to reach historically low levels as a percentage of GDP over the next few years and further cuts to public



By Tom McDonnell



Picture: Bern+Sam (CC BY-SA 2.0)

spending will put immense pressure on public services, public investment and social transfers.

Tension between these demands can only be averted if the state's revenue/GDP ratio is increased. Even a 'no change' policy with regard to public spending will actually mean a cut in real terms over the next few years as inflation eats away at the value of social payments and the real incomes of public sector workers. Public capital investment is already just two-thirds of the EU average.

The budget is about choices. Too much austerity will hinder the economy's recovery and will help embed a higher rate of structural unemployment in the economy.

The NERI's most recent *Quarterly*

● The third prong is an accompanying 'off-book' investment package that restores public investment in the Republic to the EU average in 2015. The investment package can be funded through the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund. Crucially, this off-book stimulus would not increase the Government's borrowing requirement.

We estimate that the more growth friendly budget choices under the NERI plan, coupled with the proposed off-book programme of public investment will deliver better outcomes in terms of economic growth, employment, and the unemployment rate than the Government's proposed €2 billion adjustment focused on cuts to pub-

Picture: publicstock.net (CC BY 2.0)



There are external threats to Ireland's recovery such as the danger of deflation in the Eurozone

Economic Observer described an alternative approach to achieving the required deficit target of less than 3% of GDP in 2015.

We found that a better outcome can be achieved in terms of equity, growth and employment by pursuing a three-pronged strategy based on:

● A net budgetary adjustment of €800m composed mainly of increases in government revenue. We identify revenue measures that are mutually supportive of growth and equity objectives. These measures include reforms to tax expenditures and Capital Acquisitions Tax as well as the introduction of a Net Wealth Tax.

● Our proposed adjustment includes a modest increase in social spending as part of a social emergency fund targeted at the most vulnerable individuals and communities. Part of this fund would be reserved for spending on social housing.

lic spending. In addition, the NERI plan will protect the most vulnerable in communities and individuals in Irish society.

Better choices are possible in Budget 2015. Fiscal policy is more than just deficit reduction. Ireland's extremely low level of public investment is a drag on employment and the economy's potential output.

An 'off-the-books' investment stimulus funded from the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund would go some way to addressing this problem.

The next edition of the NERI's quarterly commentary on the Irish economy, the autumn 2014 issue of *Quarterly Economic Observer*, will be released on September 24.

The current edition can be found on the NERI website at www.nerinstitute.net

Tom McDonnell is an economist at the NERI specialising in growth theory, the economics of innovation, the Irish economy, and macroeconomics and banking policy.

Mandate's Olympians



MANDATE wishes to congratulate Tesco workers from the Dundalk store including Peadar McArdle and Noel Langtry who won medals at the Special Olympics which took place in Limerick recently. Peadar won gold in bowling and Noel won gold in the shot putt. Pictured with them is Mary O'Donnell, shop steward from the Tesco Dundalk store. General Secretary John Douglas told *Shopfloor*: "The union is very proud of their achievements and wishes them more success in the years to come."

Rights Commissioner recommends Tesco pay worker sick pay

A TESCO worker who pursued her case to the Rights Commissioners Service following Tesco Ireland's decision to withhold her sick pay has had her appeal upheld.

The worker had been sent home by the assistant store manager one evening in August 2013 as it was obvious that she was unfit to work.

She informed the store the following morning that she was still unwell and would be going to her GP.

Despite fully complying with the agreed absence reporting procedures and submitting a medical certificate to cover her period of absence, the store manager decided to unilaterally withhold her sick pay.

The worker only found this out when she went to her bank to make a withdrawal. Subsequently, the employee lodged a formal grievance on the matter.

However, it was the store manager who carried out an investigation into the complaint. Not surprisingly he didn't overturn his own decision to withhold the sick pay, relying on that fact that the worker didn't ring him directly on the day in question, even though he was on annual leave at the time. The worker then appealed the company's decision through her union representative. Despite the obvious

injustice that had taken place, Tesco fully supported the store manager's decision, leaving the employee with no choice but to refer her case to the Rights Commissioners Service.

In the recommendation, issued in July, the Rights Commissioner found that the company's actions had offended "against every concept of fair procedure and natural justice".

'Olympian objectivity'

The recommendation continued: "... no one should be an investigator and judge in a complaint against their decision, and as the Employment Appeals Tribunal have noted in that respect it would require Olympian objectivity that it is not reasonable to expect any person to have.

"This is a most serious breach of fair procedures and on that basis alone the claimant's complaint/claim must be upheld."

Although welcoming the recommendation, Divisional Organiser Brendan O'Hanlon expressed concern that the worker had been required to pursue the case in the first instance.

He said: "Clearly there was a serious injustice in this case which was obvious from the outset and the decision is a serious indictment on the company."

Union Representatives Advanced Course

The Union Representative Advanced Training Course is for shop stewards/union representatives who have completed the introductory course or who have relevant experience.

Course content:

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- Overview of Mandate's rules
- Industrial Relations institutions and mechanisms
- Mandate's Organising Model
- Negotiations & Collective Bargaining
- Understanding Equality and Diversity
- Developing induction presentation skills
- Introduction to Employment Law
- Identifying issues and using procedures

Certification and Progression: Members who successfully complete this training course will obtain a Mandate certificate. They may progress to the FETAC level 5 Certificate in Trade Union studies or other relevant training courses offered by Mandate.

If you are interested in this course, please contact your Mandate official or Mandate's Training Centre at 01-8369699. Email: mandateotc@mandate.ie



Last phase of pay rise paid as new talks draw near

THE Argos National Negotiating Committee are to begin talks shortly with Argos bosses over the introduction of a new procedural agreement.

Late last year, members at Argos secured a 3% pay increase and a guarantee of increased minimum hours. It is understood additional hours are being made available locally at first both at peak and non-peak trading times.

A register of staff who wish to work extra hours at peak trading times is also being kept.

Some changes were introduced to the payment for "out of hours" working and the long service incre-

ment. The final phase of this pay increase was paid in July to all members. Mandate Industrial Officer David Miskell told *Shopfloor*: "We intend to commence talks with



Argos management in the next few weeks on the introduction of an updated collective agreement that, among other things, improves the way issues are dealt with and ensures that our

activists are trained." He added: "Any updates on these discussions will be sent to all. It is important to remember any improvements in terms and conditions only come about by joining and becoming active in the union."

Middle class do gooder is back to sort wheat from the chaff

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Got a story? Email us at news@mandate.ie

Dunnes Stores workers are campaigning for decency at work. Our demands are simple:


- decent hours and earnings
- job security
- fair pay
- the right to trade union representation



**DECENCY
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For more information email us at:
dunnesworkers@mandate.ie

IKEA at a crossroads in USA

MANDATE members will be more than familiar with IKEA. Before the company opened its first store in the Republic of Ireland, there were stories of hired vans being driven from Cork to Belfast to purchase a sofa named after a Swedish village. Now IKEA's Dublin store is one of the most successful IKEA outlets in the world.

IKEA concept

The IKEA concept is plain for all to see. The furniture design is sleek, minimalist and undeniably Scandinavian.

Upon entering an IKEA store, a customer is more or less forced to walk a designated path in order to maximise the opportunity to purchase something other than the one pillow that the customer may have been initially seeking. At the end of the customer's gruelling journey, there is a perfectly positioned restaurant so that a reward for all the hard work shopping may come in the form of well-earned Swedish meatballs and a caramel cake.

And the size of the store itself is such that a change in Irish planning laws was required just to enable the Dublin store to be built.

And there is something else about IKEA – a certain intangible feel-good factor that envelops you as you shop there: the Swedish flags, the meatballs and the sense that you are experiencing a small slice of the Swedish social model – a socio-economic system that some economists refer to as “cuddly capitalism” which embraces innovation, tolerance, high income equality and a generous welfare state.

Sweden also boasts high union density – almost 70% according to the OECD, a Paris-based think-tank. The country utilises a “social dialogue” model of industrial relations based on mutual respect and the freedom to form and join unions and the constructive relationship between IKEA and the Swedish retail unions is based on this foundation.

IKEA certainly promotes the Swedish image worldwide, in part because it makes commercial sense. IKEA has 345 stores which in 2013 racked up 775 million store visits generating almost €30 billion in revenue.

Swedish values?

The US is a vitally important market for IKEA, with the 38 Stateside locations making it second only to Germany in terms of the number of stores. IKEA's enlightened image is also a significant part of its US branding.

IKEA's positive image is so vital to the company in the US that it announced a recent pay increase for starting level employees in a blaze of media attention.

The company stated that it is putting its starting pay rates in line with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) living wage calculator. In a move that should be welcomed, IKEA USA stated that the new base salary would result in an increase of one sort or another for about half of

If IKEA is truly founded on Swedish values, argues **Michael Bride**, its US management should not oppose workers' efforts to unionise



A group of IKEA workers based in Seattle have launched an online petition to secure a decent income. Sign it at www.coworker.org/IKEA/petitions/let-s-build-a-better-ikea-together-2



Picture: Rae Allen (CC BY 2.0)

the company's 13,650 employees.

However, the company's actions – while lauded by external observers – produced some interesting reactions from staff members. It was undoubtedly the case that those who were going to be directly affected by

the raises were positive overall about the development. However, IKEA employees with a number of years of service were, on the whole, less positive. The raise in the floor salaries had the effect of eroding the differential that they had built up over years,

remembering of course that employees with years of service had started much lower on the salary ladder than IKEA was now declaring was a “living wage”. There was a second reason for disgruntlement. While IKEA was proclaiming that it was raising the

starting wage, there was no pronouncement in relation to working hours. Many employees were already struggling financially due to the fact that they were not getting adequate hours scheduled in order to enable them to earn a living wage.



Picture: Matteo Paciotti (CC BY 2.0)

Therefore, a higher starting wage would not help if not coupled with the opportunity to be scheduled for more hours or even be hired full-time.

Workers stand up

A group of workers in the city of Seattle, on the US west coast, launched an online petition aimed at other IKEA co-workers and a wider group of supporters.

Titled Let's Build a Better IKEA Together and addressed to Rob Olsen, the firm's Acting US President, the petition reads: "As Ikea co-workers, customers and stakeholders we think that investing in co-workers will lead to higher sales growth. That's why we're asking IKEA to offer full-time jobs to every co-worker who wants one and raise pay for everyone, not just new hires.

"Why is this important? We work at the IKEA store in Seattle, Washington. Together we have close to 10 years of experience. We enjoy our jobs at IKEA, and take a lot of pride in delighting our customers. However, like many part-time workers in retail, we struggle to pay our bills. Sometimes we work almost full-time, but many times we have to make ends meet on less than 25 hours per week.

"After co-workers spoke out about the need for higher pay, IKEA responded by raising starting pay to match the living wage for our community. Beginning January 1, the national starting pay will average \$10.76/hour. We think raising starting pay is a step in the right direction, but co-workers with years of experience may receive no raise at all.

"We think that investing in co-workers will lead to happier employees, better retention, and higher sales growth. That's why we're asking IKEA to offer full-time jobs to every co-worker who wants one and raise pay for all co-workers, not just new hires.

"We're calling on our co-workers

and customers in the United States and around the world to join us in supporting this petition. We know that when we speak up IKEA listens. Together we'll convince the company to do what's right. Thank you for standing with us!"

The petition is signed by Kwesi, Martina, Ruthe – the Seattle store workers sponsoring it.

Within a couple of weeks the petition has already garnered 600 signatures, including hundreds of IKEA's US workers. It has also attracted messages of support from places as far and wide as Turkey, Columbia, Italy and, yes, even Dublin!

To sign the petition and demonstrate your support for IKEA's US workers go to: www.coworker.org/IKEA-petitions/let-s-build-a-better-ikea-together-2

Choice for IKEA

Now IKEA employees in the US are beginning to talk about the need to have a voice of the job and perhaps join a union. Workers in places such as Washington DC, Boston, Philadelphia, Atlanta and Los Angeles are joining their Seattle colleagues in calling for change.

Typically, non-union companies in the US – even enlightened European companies like IKEA – have a zero-tolerance policy to trade unions.

Macho American management techniques often trump the more sensible social dialogue roots of the European parent corporation when it comes to reacting to workers who wish to join a union.

IKEA proclaims that it is neutral when it comes to its workers choosing to join trade unions. The company will now face a test to determine whether its stated neutrality towards trade unions will survive on US soil. If it does not, then its feted reputation and Swedish values may face irreparable damage.

Michael T. Bride is Deputy Organizing Director for Global Strategies and UFCW International Union, based in Washington D.C.

Low Countries

'So far, talking to IKEA has got us nowhere'

TWO unions in Belgium and the Netherlands have launched a campaign against IKEA after accusing the Swedish furniture retailer of social dumping.

The Belgian Transport Union (BTB) and FNV Bondgenoten in the Netherlands claim that IKEA is drafting in cheap labour from eastern Europe to transport their products. The unions claim these workers have few rights, are paid far less than the going rate in Western Europe and are often forced to sleep in their trucks.

On August 14, BTB organised actions at the Hognoul (Liège), Zaventem and Brussels IKEA stores in Belgium, distributing leaflets and asking customers to support the campaign. The following day, FNV Bondgenoten held picket lines at three IKEA stores in the Netherlands. Over 2,100 customers showed their support by handing over signed statements backing the union at the checkouts.

Frank Moreels, BTB federal secretary and co-president, said: "Our action was very well received by IKEA customers and widely covered by Belgian national and regional media. We are not calling for a boycott of IKEA – we simply want them to take responsibility, talk to the unions and stop this social dumping. So far, talking to IKEA has got us nowhere."

Canada

IKEA's 'unfair labour practices' slammed

IKEA Canada bargained in bad faith and committed "unfair labour practices" after it tried to hire picketing workers to a higher non-union wage through a website job posting, a Labour Relations Board has ruled.

The Board found that the Swedish furniture retailer had negotiated directly with workers at the IKEA store in Richmond, British Columbia, offering those who crossed the picket line better working conditions (including a \$2.50 an hour premium and a \$500 bonus) than those it had offered to the Teamsters across the bargaining table.

The Board also ordered IKEA to pay damages to the Teamsters. Roughly 300 members of Teamsters Local 213 have been involved in the dispute since May 2013.

Teamsters Canada chief Robert Bouvier said: "IKEA must understand that the Teamsters will be there for the members and that we will take all necessary recourses to protect the members and the collective bargaining process."



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Speakers

Gerry Adams
President, Sinn Féin

Mary Carolan
Sheehy Skeffington School of Human Rights & Social Justice

Jack O'Connor
General President, SIPTU

Michael O'Reilly
Dublin Council of Trade Unions

Dr. Margaret Ward
Director of the Women's Resource Centre

Chair: Freda Hughes
Irish Palestine Solidarity Campaign

Tues. 21st of October, 7.30pm Liberty Hall, Dublin



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Going against the grain...



Picture: Charles Knowles (CC BY 2.0)

Food banks as a solution are a plaster, **Conor McCabe** argues, not for the poor but for the rich. Here's why...

IN December 2013, the Scottish government published a report into the dramatic rise in food banks over the past four years.

It found that “welfare reform, benefit delays, benefit sanctions and falling incomes have been the main factors driving the recent trend observed of increased demand for food aid” and that reports suggest that these factors were replicated across the UK.

Just like in Ireland, it is not just welfare recipients who find themselves availing of food banks but also people working on low pay and reduced hours in the brave new world of the trickle-down economy.

Access to the food parcels is conditional: in the case of the Trussell Trust, the single largest producer of food banks in the UK, each request is judged by a “care professional”.

The charity of course has an interest in framing its operating procedures in such management-speak, but striped of its marketing lexicon, it is clear that what these banks demand of people is that they beg for food.

Sherlock Holmes is not the only Victorian to have been reinvented for the 21st century – the middle class do-gooder is also back to sort the wheat from the chaff.

There is, of course, a UK government report into food banks. The Defra-commissioned report was completed in the summer of 2013 and quietly shelved until February 2014. It blamed, among other



Picture: Beth Kanter (CC BY)

things, “high global food prices” for making “food proportionately less affordable for low-income households in the UK”. What it failed to mention was the role of financial

speculation in creating a price bubble in wholesale food prices.

In 2013, researchers at ETH Zurich and the UN Conference on Trade and Development found that

up to 70% of commodity price changes, including wholesale prices for wheat and other grains, were due to “self-generated activities” on financial markets.

Deborah Doane, Director of the World Development Movement, in a letter to the *Financial Times* in

‘In 2013, researchers at ETH Zurich and the UN Conference on Trade and Development found that up to 70% of commodity price changes, including wholesale prices for wheat and other grains, were due to ‘self-generated activities’ on financial markets’

March of that year said that it further supported “the substantial body of evidence that excessive financial speculation is distorting commodity prices”.

The very same markets that were saved with unprecedented state funds in the aftermath of the 2008 crash are now a causal factor in the growing unaffordability of food.

This is before we factor in the millions of jobs lost to the speculative mania, as well as the substitution of low-pay and zero hour contracts for a living wage.

Poverty is structural. The re-emergence of food poverty in the wake of the banking crisis is no coincidence.

The use of bailout funds to garner profits for financial institutions via speculation on wholesale food prices; the litany of tax avoidance measures which serve to make such speculation a profitable game; and the utter refusal to engage in genuine job-led growth – in all of this we see that food banks are a plaster not for the poor but for the rich.

Food banks exist to justify unlivable wages and financial profit. The fact that they ease those nagging middle class consciences is an added bonus.

By Gerry Light
Mandate Assistant General Secretary

IN THE run up to Budget 2015 much of the debate is focused around the issue of taxation and in particular the manner in which the current system negatively and disproportionately impacts against those on lower to middle incomes employed in the private sector.

One of the main benefits of such a public debate is to highlight not only the amount of taxation being extracted from ordinary workers' pay packets but also the various means of direct and indirect methods favoured by the current government.

In the past, many taxes were introduced on the promise that they were only temporary measures intended to bolster the state revenues in times of crisis.

Experience has shown that over time these taxation sources become permanent in nature and grow in respect of the amount of tax that they yield.

A typical example of such a tax is the Pension Levy which was introduced in 2011 on a promise that it would last for no longer than four years and the revenue generated

Pension levy: a temporary little arrangement...



would specifically be used to offset VAT reductions and assist job creation schemes.

Since its introduction, the levy has generated some €2.3bn for the exchequer and it is expected that a further €675m will be handed over from workers' pension funds at the end of September 2014.

In relative terms this far exceeds the €500m expected from the soon-to-be-introduced water charges.

Ironically, the increased value of the Pension Levy arises for two reasons – first, a general improvement in investment markets and, second,

the levy was actually increased in last year's budget from 0.60% to 0.75%.

Investment returns have also buoyed the overall size of private pension funds in general which had a value of some €91.5bn at the end of 2013. Already this year this pot has increased by an estimated 9.7%.

Some argue that the levy represents progressive taxation in that there is no place to hide for those on higher incomes as they attempt to make provision for their retirements.

The reality for those on lower to middle incomes is that it is a prohibitive factor in deciding to join a private pension fund instead relying even more on the meagre state pension which they will have to wait longer to get because of recent changes to the qualifying retirement age.

IFG Corporate Pensions have estimated that the current Pension Levy will cost €1,000 a year to a worker on the average industrial wage who seeks to commence a pension at the age of 35.

So when Minister Noonan makes his budget speech this year, look and listen beyond the obvious headline

issues and see whether he intends to commence a genuine programme of tax reduction which clearly favours lower to middle earners.

Remember the Universal Social Charge, Water Charges and the Pension Levy are taxes by another name. If this Government is serious about lifting workers and their dependents out of the world of austerity, then surely the place to start is by reforming or indeed removing in their favour taxation schemes which were initially introduced under the pretence of temporary measures.

'The reality for those on lower and middle incomes is that the levy is a prohibiting factor in deciding to join a private pension fund instead relying even more on the meagre state pension'



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TTIPing point

By Ed Teller

Trade Union Left Forum

THE Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is a bilateral agreement being negotiated between the EU and the United States.

A bilateral agreement between a sovereign state and the EU as a sovereign entity is possible as a result of the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty and it was under the Irish presidency of the EU that the 28 Member States agreed that the EU Commission should enter into these negotiations.

In reality this is a set of negotiations between European capital and American capital (which willingly agree on most things) in response to the shift in growth from the north to the so-called BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China).

Real growth has stagnated for decades in both Europe and the US, giving rise to the dominance of financial speculation and a shadow banking system, and this is a further attempt to create growth in this context at the expense of people and our environment.

It seeks to increase profitability for big business in the United States and Europe at the expense of workers

and their rights, of the public and the services they rely upon, and of the environment and food safety.

It is being carried out by unelected technocrats who held private meetings with big business in advance and, whether on the European side or the American side of the negotiations, largely agree on what needs to happen to capital.

It is estimated by independent researchers that the agreement will cost Europe up to 1.3 million jobs just as NAFTA cost the US more than a million jobs.

Private exploitation

The TTIP would further cement liberalisation and privatisation and open up new areas for private exploitation. It would greatly restrict "public good" clauses in public procurement contracts.

It would confer new rights on corporations, allowing them to sue sovereign states for policies that negatively affect their profits, and to have their case heard in unaccountable courts through the "investor-state dispute settlement" (ISDS) process.

The TTIP would do away with some of the modest financial reforms

that were introduced in response to the economic crisis, creating more instability, risk and speculation in the economy, and would result in significant loss of jobs in EU countries.

It is vital that unions oppose these negotiations. It will be tempting to merely concentrate efforts on the most offensive ISDS part; but all areas that negatively affect workers, the public and democracy must equally be opposed.

These negotiations are being carried out in secret, with very little comment or analysis by the media. Therefore, the trade union movement must start with a public awareness campaign both with members and with workers more generally.

If we wish to secure public services and to halt privatisation and outsourcing, we must fight to prevent TTIP being agreed.

The TULF has now released a fact sheet on these negotiations at www.tuleftforum.com. Additional information is available through the People's Movement website at www.people.ie/economy/ttip.pdf. The TULF is also encouraging workers to sign the a petition on the issue at <http://bit.ly/1Ay1ty>



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PEOPLE HAVE THE RIGHT TO KNOW WHAT'S AT STAKE IN AN EU-US TRADE DEAL



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NERI report: bottom 10% are paying more tax as a percentage of income

A NEW research paper, titled *How Much Tax do People Really Pay?*, by the Nevin Economic Research Institute has highlighted the varying impact direct and indirect taxation has on different segments of the population.

It also explains how direct taxation is “progressive” and indirect taxation “regressive” in terms of better outcomes for society as a whole.

Report author Dr Micheál Collins claimed that too much focus is placed on income taxes or income-related taxes such as social insurance.

He told *Shopfloor*: “This is a narrow way of looking at the issue, given the total tax take received by the exchequer. It is true that the phrase ‘tax-payers’ is generally given to mean income taxpayers rather

that the more appropriate meaning of all those who pay taxes, whether it comes from income, expenditure or other contributions.”

Mr Collins looked at the most recent *Household Budget Survey* in making his analysis.

Total amount

“It brings together information on the total amount of direct (income tax and social insurance payments) and indirect (VAT, excise and levies) tax paid by people in the Republic.”

His research found that:

- On average Irish households pay 13.60% of their gross income in direct taxes (income and social insurance) and 10.36% in indirect taxes (VAT, excise and levies).

- The direct income taxation system is progressive – as income

increases, more tax is paid as a percentage of gross income.

- The indirect taxation system is regressive – as income increases, less tax is paid as a percentage of gross income.

Mr Collins’ research revealed that the top 20% and bottom 10% of earners contribute taxation to the exchequer at above the average level.

He continued: “This gives a U-shape to the overall household tax contribution curve – households at the bottom and top of the income distribution contribute the most, with contributions as a percentage of gross income declining to their lowest points in the third, fourth and fifth deciles and then increasing after that towards the top decile.”

Read the report at <http://bit.ly/1ps07xe>



Picture: Mehr Demokratie (CC BY-SA 2.0)

Enough said: German anti-TTIP protestor at a demo earlier this year

Could you write for Shopfloor?

Do you have a perspective on the Irish political, social or economic environment that you'd like to share with your fellow members in Mandate Trade Union? Do you have a good news story about how being a union member has benefited you and your colleagues in the workplace. Have you a story about how you or your family are coping in the current recession. Whatever it is, we'd like to hear from you. Please contact Shopfloor at news@mandate.ie or post your article to Shopfloor, Mandate Trade Union, 9 Cavendish Row, Dublin 1



Sightsavers

Every wipe of his eyes takes Talla closer to blindness



Clenny Mathews/Sightsavers



Clenny Mathews/Sightsavers

Talla is just five. He has trachoma, a painful eye disease which can lead to a lifetime of blindness. Repeated infections cause the eyelashes to turn inwards and slowly and painfully every blink damages the eye and leads to blindness. Trachoma can be treated effectively in its early stages with a course of ointment costing just 50p – but for millions of people this is still too much.

If, like Sightsavers, you believe that nobody should go blind needlessly from trachoma, river blindness or cataract, please make a donation today to support our eye care work in some of the most deprived communities in the world.

Euro donations, please call 1850 50 20 20 or visit www.sightsavers.ie
Sterling donations, please call 0800 089 20 20 or visit www.sightsavers.org
Please quote ICTU. Thank you!

Registered charity numbers 207544 and SC038110

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BLOW THE WHISTLE ON THE BAD BOSSES



10 REASONS TO JOIN MANDATE

1. An organising and campaigning union:

Mandate is focused on building an activist base to protect and improve employment conditions. Through better organised workplaces and the power of the collective strength, we will deliver justice for working people.

2. Modern and effective training:

Mandate provides free courses to help you learn new skills, improve existing skills and develop you and your prospective career. We negotiate agreements with employers to pay for attendance at courses and also to provide reasonable time off for employees to attend them.

3. Campaigning for success:

Mandate is a progressive campaigning union fighting on issues that really matter to our members, their families and society in general. Mandate campaigns challenge social injustice at all levels of Irish society.

4. Protection at work:

Highly trained and skilled Mandate officials provide professional advice and assistance, where appropriate, on a variety of employment issues.

5. Safety at work:

Mandate health & safety representatives are trained to minimise the risk of workplace injuries and ensure that employers meet their legal obligations at all times.

6. Better pay:

Year on year, Mandate campaigns for and wins pay rises for its members. Mandate also campaigns to close the widening gender pay gap in Irish society.

7. Legal protection:

Mandate has won significant legal compensation for members who are injured as a result of an accident at work.

8. Mandatory pensions:

Mandate has secured pension schemes with a variety of retail employers and will campaign to secure mandatory pension schemes for all members working in the private sector, particularly those on low wages.

9. You're less likely to be discriminated against:

Mandate has won agreements with employers on respect and dignity at work policies and procedures. Mandate will continue to campaign for tougher laws to make it illegal to discriminate on the basis of sex, race, age, disability or sexual orientation.

10. You're less likely to be sacked:

Membership of Mandate protects you and strengthens your voice in your workplace.

Together we're stronger



JOIN MANDATE TRADE UNION ONLINE AT <http://www.mandate.ie/Contact/Join.aspx>

The Living-In System

Dublin, August 1905

Trade unions have always been a voice for health and safety and the protection of workers. For many years, Mandate's precursor union the Irish Drapers' Assistants Association (IDAA) highlighted the accursed 'living-in system' where workers lives were risked by employers locking them in drapery factories.

This is looking back at the Camden Street Holocaust with an article written in 1905 by IDAA leader Michael O'Lehane



Michael O'Lehane

THE inevitable has taken place. The fire fiend has, as a result of that accursed system known as "living-in," claimed three valuable young lives. On the morning of July 10th, the premises of Aiden Grennell and Co., Camden Street, were burned to the ground. One young lady got enveloped in the flames and nothing but her charred remains were discovered. Two others, as a result of the shocking injuries received, succumbed the following day, while two others are still in hospital not having yet recovered from their dreadful injuries.

Before entering further on our exposure of the system which has been responsible for this catastrophe, we hasten to tender to the relatives and friends of the deceased our sincere sympathy in their terrible affliction.

We will now examine this "paternal system" which is known as "living-in." The danger of fire has been fully illustrated in the recent sad calamity. We wish to point out that we have over and over again emphasised this great and dreadful danger. In commenting on the matter after the recent fire in Tralce, we wrote:

"One of these periodical outbreaks of fire which from time to time occur in almost every drapery establishment in Ireland, where the living-in system is in vogue, occurred in Tralce on the morning of 21st January. On that date the splendid premises of Messrs. Rivington and Sons were almost completely destroyed.

"The assistants, sixteen of whom were sleeping on the premises, had the usual hairbreadth escapes, and as usual lost their all in the conflagration. We are glad to learn that the services of all the employees have been retained by the firm. We trust that one result of the fire will be to abolish in another important establishment that dangerous and degrading system of living-in.

"We fear, if a similar process has to be gone through in connection with all the other houses where the living-in system has not been yet burnt out, it will prove a costly business, and a large number of lives will surely be sacrificed."

And again, at the Trades Union Congress, which was held in Wexford on Whitsuntide week, Mr. O'Lehane in proposing a resolution in condemnation of this system said:

"It was only by a miracle that scores of lives were not lost in the burning of Arnott's and Todd Burns, Dublin. In case a fire should break out in some of the large establishments at the present time there was scarcely any provision

made for escape, and certainly no adequate provision.

"The municipal authorities ought to see to this matter, and they also ought to see that proper sanitary accommodation should be provided for the employees who have to live under this unfortunate system. But while saying all this, he was strongly of the opinion that no 'bolstering up' would remedy a condition of things which deprived men of the ordinary rights of citizenship, which prohibited them from having any voice in the affairs of the nation, and which placed as many restrictions on their actions as if they were a lot of school-children." We wish to emphasise that statement, nothing short of the complete abolition of the system will satisfy those whose claims we advocate.

The fire danger is doubtless at present

The 'living-in' system is a disgrace to latter day civilisation and an enemy to the interests of drapery employees – morally, mentally and physically – and in face of all this and of the terrible danger of which we have had such a sad illustration of recently, is the system still to continue?

the great objection to the system which is uppermost in the public mind, but we say emphatically that there are dangers far more serious.

We are aware that as a result of the evil effects of this system a number of young persons, boys and girls, are annually done to death; the process may be a little slow, but nevertheless sure. Healthy young boys and girls coming up fresh and vigorous from the country have to sleep in insanitary surroundings, in overcrowded apartments, in company with consumptives and in some instances have to share the same bed.

The result is inevitable, and is fully exemplified in what we must describe as a sad procession of young men and young women who are ordered home almost daily to the country in ill health, in a great many cases never to return. Their places are filled up by other young aspirants, with fees, who in turn will in a short time be superseded by others, and so the clever city trader supplies the terrible human leakage

which annually takes place in connection with shop life.

The Drapers Assistants' Association has during the past four years been preaching in season and out of season against this system. Dealing with this question in May, 1904, we wrote:

"We have no hesitation in characterising the system as a slavish and degrading one – another relic of the less enlightened days of the past, and a business feature which is altogether out of keeping with the more enlightened and progressive spirit of the present day. It is a system which compels men to pay for board and lodgings in the selection of which they have no voice and over the quality of which they have no control.

"The result is that the food supplied is in the majority of cases either of an inferior kind or unsuitable. In some instances it is unfit for human use, and it happens not unfrequently that the supply has to be supplemented out of the slender purses of the already victimised assistants. Under this system the dyspeptic has to accommodate himself (or herself) to fare suitable only for the robust, he is denied the privilege of selection in diet even though the dietary selected would not be more expensive than that ordinarily used."

The living-in system means a curtailment of the personal liberty of those who submit to it. It is an infringement of their social rights and of their ordinary rights as citizens and as men who are responsible for their actions.

In a democratic age, when every man wishes to have a voice in the administration (Local or National) under which he lives, the tendency of the times is – as it should be – to cut adrift from feudal customs and institution. These drapery lodging-houses savour too much of the school room or barrack-room. Men are timed going out and coming in, spied upon, fined, and generally worried – in fact it is more difficult to conform to the various rules and avoid the pains and penalties, than to go through the day's work.

And as the President of the Association stated at the recent great meeting in the Rotunda: "To this system also may be attributed the abnormally low marriage rate in the trade." Under its stupefying influence the drapery employee drifts along in a listless and unenterprising spirit, while the meagreness of his pay naturally deters him from seeking a partner to share his joys and sorrows.

The system we are exposing is one that militates against the cultivation of the mind and against that social and domestic enjoyment which every respectable business person should look forward to when his day's work is over. Even a draper's assistant's life should consist of more than sleep, work and meals. In a word, the "living-in" system is a disgrace to latter day civilisation and an enemy to the interests of drapery employees – morally, mentally and physically – and in face of all this and of the terrible danger of which we have had such a sad illustration recently, is the system still to continue? Are all these warnings to go unheeded, and are we to wait for its abolition until we have yet another holocaust offered up on the altar of human greed?

Cancer cover with financial support for Mandate members

MANDATE Trade Union is delighted to offer Mandate members a new Cancer Cover Plan, providing financial assistance and emotional support on diagnosis of cancer through AIG.*

The emotional impact of dealing with a cancer diagnosis can be very difficult. It not only affects you, but also family and friends.

The second concern is often money. How do I support my family, run a home and continue to pay bills during my treatment? What if I have no health insurance? What if I can't work?

These added financial pressures can cause unwanted stress during this already difficult

time. Our Cancer Cover is designed to help with this financial worry.

Our unique cash benefit plan gives members payments of up to €64,000 to support you through every stage of your recovery.

There are no restrictions on how the money is spent; it could help pay for child care, help around the home, and even pay for the little things like parking charges, getting to the shops or the doctors.

It can also be used to help pay medical bills or spent on a relaxing holiday to help with recuperation.

Cancer Cover Benefits**

- **Unique product providing financial support on diagnosis of cancer**
- **Standard and Premier Cover options: cash benefits up to €64,000, broken down into monthly and lump sum payments**
- **Monthly premiums from only €3.50**
- **Cover available regardless of family medical history**
- **Free Care Advisory Service**
- **FAQ's, Policy documents all online**

There's no medical examination, no awkward health questions and no exclusions due to family history. Claims can be made just 90

days after taking out the Plan.

Mandate Trade Union looks forward to offering this product to our members in the coming months. In the meantime if you want further information please call **1800 287 287** or log on to **www.aig.ie/cancer-cover**

**This plan is underwritten and administered by AIG Europe Limited, Ireland branch. AIG Europe Limited is authorised by the Prudential Regulation Authority of the United Kingdom and is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland for conduct of business rules.*

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Personal Finance and Maths course

Starting from scratch this course helps you to improve your maths and personal finance.

Mandate Trade Union in conjunction with Skills for Work are offering members the opportunity to attend training. The courses are to encourage members back into learning and training while aiming towards a FETAC level 3 Award.

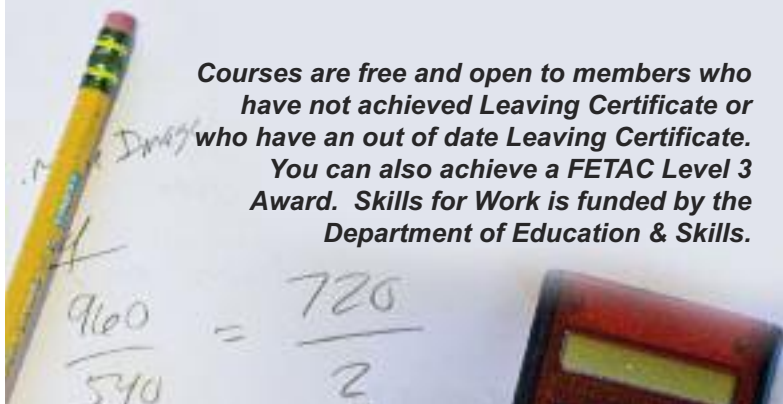
If you are interested in doing a Communications through Computers course, contact:

Mandate Training Centre
Distillery House
Distillery Road
Dublin 3

Phone: **01-8369699**

Email: **mandateotc@mandate.ie**

Courses are free and open to members who have not achieved Leaving Certificate or who have an out of date Leaving Certificate. You can also achieve a FETAC Level 3 Award. Skills for Work is funded by the Department of Education & Skills.



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Centuries of workers' struggle in song

By Doug Nicholls
GFTU General Secretary

VOICE and Vision is a two-CD collection of radical songs compiled by the General Federation of Trade Unions Educational Trust together with Topic Records to mark two celebrations – the label's 75th year and the GFTU's 115th.

The songs on this collection, dedicated to the memory of Bob Crow and Tony Benn, resist class oppression, celebrate the lives of workers and the fight for peace, democracy, socialism and social justice in the world.

We not only wanted to re-connect this rich singing tradition to a new audience of trade unionists, but also showcase younger or lesser-known voices that are developing this heritage anew.

The greatest popular historian of our songs, Roy Palmer, was also on hand to help us explore our culture, thus *Voice and Vision* was born.

Culture plays an essential role in our ability to resist and offer alternative views of the world. As the cultural writer Raymond Williams found this music offers "affirmation of a world in which one is not necessarily a stranger and an agent, but can be a member, a discoverer, in a shared source of life".

And, as Pete Seeger – who appears on this collection – reminds us, "a good song can only do good".

In our songs you hear history singing and people like us, though long dead, speak directly to us. Hear for example how the actual mid-seventeenth century words of *The Diggers' Song* say everything you need to

say about inequality today in an elegant rendition by **Chumbawamba**.

Martin Carthy's stunning *Dominion of the Sword*, based on an anonymous poem, gives voice to this astute undercurrent that sustained and developed 'socialist' ideas from the mid-17th century into William Blake's days and into ours.

Or feel how *The Hard Times of Old England*, written around 1815, when the first trade unions were forming, reflects our continuing frustration with mass unemployment.

Ewan Macoll's version of *To The Begging I will Go* also reminds us with humour how the ignominy of begging is better than the life of those who cause it.

These songs shape and reflect a collective experience of hundreds of years of social development. Deep meaning is conveyed in beautifully-crafted tunes and words. But the performers are singing about us improving our fortunes as a class, not to make a fortune for themselves.

Consider the song *The Pleasant Month of May* sung by brothers in a family of agricultural workers from Sussex, **The Copper Family**.

The song may appear at first an idealised depiction of the joys of rural life. But it was written long before May Day became international workers' day identified for strike action to win the eight-hour day.



Pete Seeger said 'a good song can only do good', *Voice and Vision* has a CD full of them...

Spring itself is symbolic in many cultures of forces of renewal and re-birth. Rulers throughout history hated spring celebrations because they could not control the exuberance of revellers.

As industrialisation and invention mechanised farm labour, so bitter struggles in the countryside raged against the replacement of existing modes of production and the reduction of wages and worsening of living conditions. Farm workers starved as they fed the nation.

The intensity of centuries of rural struggle is portrayed in the powerful song *Captain Swing* which recreates the 1830 rebellions and links their

causes to current resurgences.

Like the name Robin Hood, which was used in peasant songs in the medieval period to express their opposition to the Church and tax-greedy monarchy, the name Captain Swing personified a secret, class-conscious organisation, not necessarily an individual.

In the great blaze of the Industrial Revolution, farm labourers moved into the new factories. Conditions were appalling and life was regulated by the clock and dangerous machines in ways unfamiliar and frightening to those used to the rhythms of the sun, moon and seasons.

No other song so well captures the plight and suffering of early textile factory workers than *Poverty Knock*.

Just as industrialisation displaced people from the land, so it brought mass production, replacing family and home-based handloom weaving for example. The word Luddites or Luddism is still frequently used by the ill-informed to describe workers who oppose technological advance or seemingly stand in the way of social and economic progress by irresponsibly wrecking things.

This is factually wrong because all new technology is made by workers and the real Luddites were not opposed to new production methods per se, but to the use of them by em-

ployers as a means of reducing wages.

The Four Loom Weaver says everything about the vulnerability of all workers who are little more than a week, month or sometimes a day away from destitution if they do not keep earning a wage.

In one of its key verses *General Ludd's Triumph*, sung in a gentle style by **M G Boulter**, puts the record straight on what the Luddites actually stood for.

Jack Forbes' Rolling Down the River, echoes the sea shanty tradition, painting the historic transformation of life on the seas and reflects on the reality today.

There are many songs about trade unions. We include **Peggy Seeger's** magnificent song *If you want a better life*, which perfectly expresses the very essence of the particular kind of democracy within trade unions that uniquely propel them as the most powerful organisations in society.

This collection begins with a ballad reflecting on the first socialists who emerged during the mid-seventeenth century revolution *The World Turned Upside Down* and ends with a reggae song called *War*, a call to arms against the neoliberal blitz on the people and all we have achieved.

Like *Joe Hill*, these songs will never die. Our hope is that this CD will keep them alive by inspiring another generation to take on the fight of our lives. Part of this fight is to ensure that they do not extinguish our history. Keep music live. Keep songs live.

For more information and to order copies, priced €13 each, please email sean@gftu.org.uk

FOCUS ON...

Uplift: building a people powered community

By Siobhan O'Donoghue
Uplift

UPLIFT is a new Irish organisation that is determined to tap into the leadership, energy and interest in society that exists in every corner of Ireland and beyond.

One of the main motivations behind the formation of Uplift is the belief that far from being apathetic, Irish people care about the future of society. There is a lot of evidence to show that the people care about democracy, political accountability, corruption, preserving the planet, building a sustainable economy, health, education and many more issues that shape what we are.

Being able to take a stand on the issues that matter, knowing that you will be listened to and that your action can make a difference is at the heart of what it means to live in a democratic society. Uplift is ultimately about building civic power and is totally independent of any political party.

Leadership and people powered action is evident everywhere. However, it is often disconnected, isolated and not harnessed in a collective effort for the common good. This adds

to the frustration that is palpable throughout Ireland. Many of our most talented people live outside Ireland but are deeply committed to progressive change in Ireland. Irish people who have emigrated are politically disenfranchised and Uplift aims to be a voice for emigrants too.

The power of people to effect change is

'Uplift is ultimately about building civic power and is totally independent of any political party'

often cited as a rallying call for action. While most definitely the case, it is also true that building people power is determined by multiple factors. For many in Ireland, the ability to effect change seems to be an ever-decreasing possibility. Trust in political parties and the traditional structures of democracy are in decline. Representative democracy is failing the majority and more and more people feel dis-

empowered and distanced from decision makers.

Uplift is about providing an organising hub for people no matter where they live. Uplift will provide the tools (online and offline) that enable people who have a shared sense of purpose to use their resources and talents to make a difference. Actions and campaign tactics will include everything from petition delivery events, public meetings, company boycotts, letter/email writing, street theatre, house meetings, shareholder speak outs and much more.

Uplift is first and foremost a campaigning organisation and this will be at the heart of member participation and engagement. Campaigns will be selected based on member preference and 'urgent' issues that members are motivated to take action on. Short-term 'fast response' campaigns will be chosen as long as they help contribute to longer-term social change.

Too often 'problems' seem too big and complex to engage with. Uplift will help to unscramble complex issues and present them in a way that members can engage with clearly

and simply. Rather than reinforcing a tendency towards populist reaction, careful consideration of solutions and a roadmap to influence a specific outcome will be presented and members will know how their action is making a difference. Advancing progressive values will be a critical priority. Members then grow in confidence and there is stronger commitment and belief in the potential for change. The process of becoming a member involves a simple sign up or taking an action initiated by Uplift.

It is envisaged that Uplift campaigns will fall into the broad categories of social, economic, political and environmental concerns. This could include health care, democratic and political reform, progressive taxation, climate and environmental related decisions, addressing inequality and poverty, budget related decisions, corporate responsibility, data protection.

Uplift is to launch next month. If you would like to be kept up to date with what we are doing and to get on board sign up at <http://uplift.ie/> or contact Siobhan@uplift.ie. I look forward to hearing from you.

THE LAST WORD...

INCREASINGLY we have all bought in to the logic of the market. It is indeed the end of history, and the most pragmatic solution is to agree that there are no alternatives – indeed to suggest otherwise is to be utopian, un-economic, impractical, naïve, or –worse – socialist.

The lesson, of course, is that capitalism is so normal it has become part of our common-sense understanding of the world and therefore there can be, there are, no alternatives.

This dictatorship of no alternatives has colonised the political and economic regime, academia, our school curriculum, and even large parts of the labour movement.

It is most obvious in a sometimes slavish adherence to the “skills” agenda, in which individual approaches to personal development and improving our own “economic opportunities” supersede organising, collective bargaining, and industrial action.

Language of individualism

Too much of our trade union education is infused with the language of “lifelong learning,” “career-pathing,” “personal effectiveness.”

It is the opposite of collectivism and redistribution; it is the language of individualism and pre-distribution, a philosophical fraud that suggests that the way out of inequality is “responsible” or “inclusive” capitalism, in which a much higher-skilled, higher-wage economy is the apparent solution.

In this economy it is the responsibility of individual workers to “up-skill” themselves and to better sell their labour power by being more attractive to entrepreneurs and foreign capital, thereby ensuring higher wages at their point of entry to the market: “pre-distribution,” not redistribution.

So, the way to tackle massive inequality and social breakdown is “up-

This is an extract from a forthcoming Trade Union Left Forum pamphlet on Workers’ Education by **Dr Stephen Nolan** – the full paper will be available soon on www.tuleftforum.com

Beware the fraud of meritocracy...



Picture: Mark Hunter (CC BY 2.0)

skilling.” Never mind tax reform, democratic banking, green new deals, social housing; in this new world you don’t need welfare states, progressive tax or trade unions to redistribute the wealth that is created:

workers, by virtue of their supreme skills, will ensure higher wages through their own individual competitiveness, their own “human capital,” their own entrepreneurial and individual spirit.

But the answer to the massive inequality that characterises the majority on this planet is not FETACs. Upskilling everyone leads to lots of highly-skilled unemployed; and what of care workers, cleaners, creche

workers, and other so-called low-skilled jobs? How do they “pre-distribute”? Oh, that’s right, they don’t. To hell with them; they should have worked harder; applied themselves better at school; they should have availed of the opportunities that the “upskillers” took. Their low pay, their children’s poverty are by definition their own fault and, therefore, fair.

This is neo-classical liberalism dressed up as “opportunity.” It’s the fraud of meritocracy all over again. It’s a global race to the bottom... and we’re in the lead.

Workers’ education should not become a mirror of the needs of the market. This is the discourse of the

‘Upskilling everyone leads to lots of highly skilled unemployed – and what of care workers, cleaners, creche workers and other low-skilled jobs? How do they ‘pre-distribute’? Oh, that’s right, they don’t...’

“global market,” of competition, of supply and demand, within which there is a remarkable, even unprecedented, degree of consensus between capital and labour, as if there were no class differences any more, as if our interests were the same as theirs.

Well, thank heaven there are some people around to remind us that that’s not the case. “There’s class warfare, alright, but it’s my class – the rich class – that’s making war, and we’re winning” – *Warren Buffet.*

Do your bit on the Shopfloor!



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