

# SIPTU Fightback

No.7

July 1998

**A newsletter for SIPTU activists seeking a democratic & fighting union**

**The first blossoms of a revolt by rank & file workers have appeared in this summer of unpromising weather but reawakening industrial action**

## The Rank & File Revolt

It was inevitable that when workers began moving again, after depression and in the face of P2000, they'd come up against the dead-weight of an officialdom used to calling the shots.

It was also inevitable that some group of workers was going to rebel against the recurrent practice of union leaders calling off strikes at the last minute for new talks. The local authority and health board craft workers had already rejected offers and the craft workers saw the usual pattern emerging, of ballot after ballot until acceptance, of all resources going to the 'yes' side.

In the deals that came back the craft rebels also faced the now usual pattern of productivity for pay, of local bargaining as a door for restructuring, instead of the reinstatement of their relativity. So they

pre-empted the usual drill and put pickets on, supported in many cases by SIPTU general workers.

Their action was consciously directed at the union leaders in the Crafts Group, ICTU and SIPTU. But the heat was turned up by union leaders

calling them 'mavericks' and 'wildcats'. However, the action on the analogue claim was no isolated foray. One union, the TEEU, was officially opposed to the deal.

The Regional committees organised staggered strikes around the country; mass meetings of shop stewards convened to discuss policy

and SIPTU members in many places declined the official advice to pass the pickets. Expression of no confidence in the national negotiators were made.

**Sorry - no seconds till they put us in the bonus scheme!**



## RYANAIR

UPDATE

After three months the Ryanair enquiry still hasn't reported. Since our last issue the *Sunday Tribune* reported that the enquiry might urge curbing of strike rights at Dublin Airport (what a backfire!), and another set of SIPTU members have been sacked!

This is the shape of the rank and file movement that will come about in a far more sustained and coherent way to challenge the approach of Liberty Hall and Raglan Road, and offer alternative leadership to union members.

The craft leaders insisted the deal was a good one and campaigned for it in the ballot that continued after the rebels stilled their strikes. The media explained it was 20p or so short. yet the 'mavericks' were in the majority in the ballot and the negotiators went in (after deferring the strike yet again) and got an improved offer (see report elsewhere in this issue).

Unofficial or semi-official bodies like the BATU bricklayers and the national locomotive drivers committee are part of a rise in rank and file confidence. The Garda pay dispute is also, in a way, a rank and file revolt and its funny to see union leaders reversing the roles as pay police in that dispute.

With strike figures running high and disputes lining up (ambulance, courts, trains) more workers can be expected to collide with P2000 and union red tape.

**The bosses are not our partners**

SIPTU is the biggest union in Ireland. It is also one of the most bureaucratic and conservative. Its forerunners - ITGWU and FWUI - had inspiring early histories but that doesn't impact on Liberty Hall in the 1990s. Today we are fed a constant diet of 'partnership', moderation and restraint. Our union has become so cautious that it couldn't (or more accurately wouldn't) even sort out Ryanair when they denied recognition to our members.

Twelve months ago three SIPTU members decided that something should be done. We knew we weren't on our own, over one third of members consistently voted against the 'social partnership' agreements. But those who want a more militant and democratic union are isolated from each other. Very few know other activists from outside their own workplace or branch.

So, instead of waiting for someone else to kick things off, we decided to do our bit. The first 'SIPTU Fightback' last July was posted out to about 100 people in the union whom we had addresses for and thought might be interested in what we were doing.

We made it clear that we were not a front for any political party, that we had no detailed platform or policy list. We want to help build a network of activists for change, a network of people with political affiliations and people with none. We do, however, have definite viewpoints, the core of which is opposition to 'social partnership'. "The bosses are not our partners" (as we said on the cover of every bulletin).

We also said we wanted the Industrial Relations Act repealed or

## EDITORIAL

# Happy Birthday Fightback

drastically reformed; solidarity from throughout the union for sections in dispute; a fighting instead of a compliant and timid union; open access for all views, on national Programmes or whatever, in Union literature; vigorous pursuit of a decent (not a token) national minimum wage; and a recruitment campaign like the Nurses and Dunnes Stores rather than "watches and sweatshirts".

Strong organisation in the workplace is the key to changing our union, we want an end to decisions coming from the top (no matter who is making them). If the union really is the members, the members should feel a real sense of ownership and control.

With these ideas we have sent out six issues of this bulletin in the last 12 months. We covered news of fellow workers in struggle like at Irish Life, the Three Lakes Hotel, Aer Lingus Catering, the building workers successful fight against sub-contracting, Ryanair and the Liverpool Dockers. Inside the union we looked at the three elections, the proposed rule changes at the Ennis conference, the sexual harassment allegations (and how the bureaucracy reacted).

We also wrote about the High Level Group report on union recognition, the joint union-management AnUMAN conference, Haughey's role in the 'partnership' deals, how the Finance Act

encouraged wage cuts, the ICTU's EU funded propaganda for 'partnership', and how the Irish Independent fiddled the figures to prove that the Irish were the best paid in Europe with an average take home wage of £7 an hour!

Other topics covered ranged from the formation of a trade union group within the Anti-Racism Campaign to the Dublin Council of Trade Unions' minimum wage campaign. And our history spot told the stories of the laundry strike that won paid holidays, how the unemployed organised in the 1930s, the unofficial National Shop Stewards Federation of the 1970s, the tax marches, and the women of Jacobs who stayed out longer than anyone else in 1913.

A lot of you seem to have liked it, our mailing list has jumped to about 450 people. And, amazingly, we have (just about) managed to finance it through small donations from readers and the proceeds of a pub quiz.

We were clear (amongst ourselves anyway) when we started this project that we were not going to provide a neverending service for everyone else. Our hope is to work with other activists to improve our union - not to work for them. What we agreed to do was to "fly a flag and see who saluted". Enough of you "saluted", if we all get together with each other in some form of a network we can have far more of an impact inside SIPTU.

Now it's time to move on to the next step - getting more people involved in this bulletin and beginning the work of building that network of militants within our union. Over the next few months we will be organising fairly informal meetings for readers, where we can meet each other and discuss the best way forward from here.

## Ray Burke, Rennicks, and 'social partnership'

We spoke before of the implications of the unmasking of Charlie Haughey for social partnership of which he was a chief architect. Also of the SIPTU/ITGWU factor. Ray Burke, another early partner who had rather stranger partnerships with big business, it seems, also produced an interesting if minor SIPTU link, though it's none of SIPTU's doing.

Earlier in the Fitzwilton exposés it was noted that directors

from two Fitzwilton subsidiaries, Novum as well as Rennicks, handed the chicken's neck to Ray Burke because both companies were in his constituency. Now Novum Press-O-Matic are a long standing company in the Dublin Electronics and Engineering Branch.

Some time ago, the same

Branch entered into dispute with Rennicks because of the company's refusal to recognise the Union. Government Minister, party to the Programme for National Recovery (forerunner of P2000), receives £30,000 donation from anti-union firm.

## Creative

One of the settlements with the Revenue Commissioners for previous faulty tax returns, published in June, was for £108,042 paid by

Mr. John Quinn, a director of Creative Yarns Ltd., Longford. The joke's not so private anymore.

# Yarns

VIOLA  
a major  
... but no

CTU's ED  
rnership,  
ent fiddled  
Irish were  
average

# NOLANS TRANSPORT: a major victory ...but no hard feelings

SIPTU's "major victory" in the Supreme Court on 15th May still remains a major defeat in New Ross and in national industrial terms. All SIPTU members shared the glee upon the faces of the SIPTU team leaving the Court after the judgement. The mildest misgivings, however, must at least engender this question: Why is there an Act on the statute books, the 1990 Industrial Relations Act, which allowed an official dispute to be closed down in December 1994, after 22 months, and to be declared a bone fide dispute after all in May 1998, three years and five months later?

Is SIPTU the only appellant in Western jurisprudence to have to wait three years and five months for an erroneous injunction to be discharged? (Recent trade union appeals to the Supreme Court took mere weeks.)

The strike was legit. SIPTU won't have to shell out £1.3m (more on that below) and the injunction was wrong. What else was entailed in the judgement? It was wrong to injunct the dispute for being a strike for a closed shop, because the evidence did not support it. But the reports (and perhaps the judgements themselves) do not make clear whether unions can pursue purely recognition claims for a section of workers with industrial action, or whether make-up claims must be substituted.

The judges, again according to reports ('Irish Times' and 'SIPTU Report') do not say if the supporting findings were true. For instance that SIPTU had defamed Nolans by issuing normal strike propaganda. Does the original injunction still inhibit SIPTU on this score?

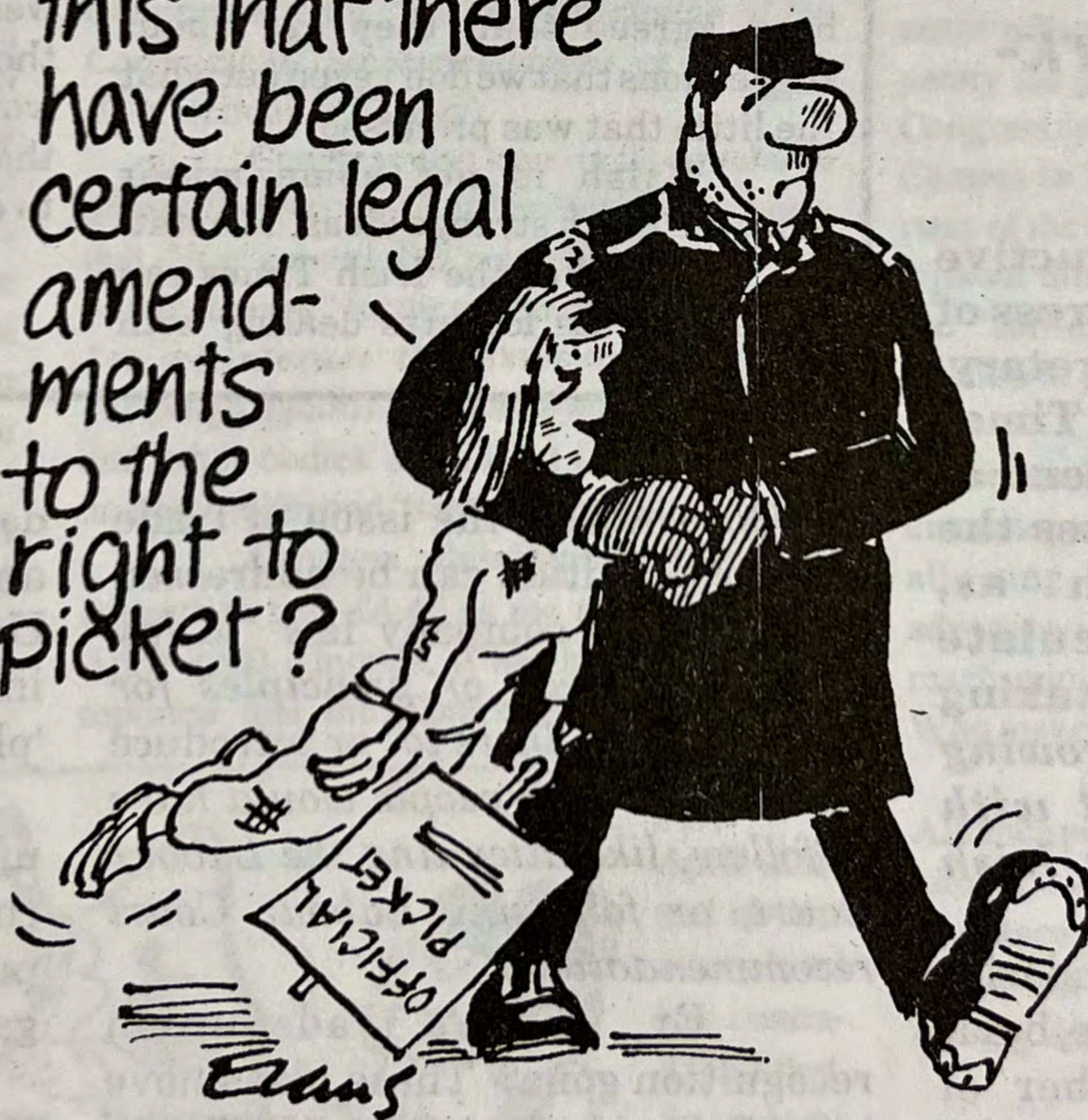
One factor the Supreme Court did uphold is that the ballot was unsatisfactory and Justice O'Flaherty suggested that, ideally (ideally?) an independent person should supervise ballots. (They do that on company boards, you know!) Ballot papers must specify the issue. However "the court found that even if a union conducts an irregular strike ballot it can still claim immunity, under the 1990 Industrial Relations Act, from claims for damages by employers." (Irish Times, 16.5.98).

This was probably the most important thing about the judgement and means that, on the ballot question,

unions cannot be sued for £1.3m or whatever. However the only proviso is that the union is pursuing a legitimate goal and has embarked on the dispute in good faith" (Irish Times). We're not back to 1906-1900 yet.

Not by a long shot. The Irish Times continues: "The judgement does not affect the right of employers to seek

Can I take it from this that there have been certain legal amendments to the right to picket?



injunctions against unions which fail to conduct proper ballots." This stands in spite of the assurance of the Minister proposing the original Bill (Bertie Ahern no less) that the Act would allow only workers to question ballots.

But this saga had another GUBU event left. On 23 June the parties gathered in the Supreme court to deal with the matter of costs. The original judgement had been overturned, "a significant victory" (Report No. 7) had been won. So SIPTU would be arguing that Nolans had brought it on themselves and should pay all the costs, and furthermore,

compensate the drivers for three and half years stress.

Wrong. Ercus Stewart for SIPTU declared to the Court that SIPTU was not seeking the costs of the High Court nor the Supreme Court actions! After winning the case SIPTU will now generously hand over the members' contributions, badly-needed for service in the Branches as we all know, to the already-bloated purses of the lawyers. (We can't afford shop stewards commission, you know.) Who makes these decisions?!

Ercus Stewart explained that "his clients had had regard to the judgement of the Supreme Court and attempted to approach the situation in such a way as to reduce the element of confrontation in what had been a bitter trade dispute. It was hoped that approach would be met in the spirit in which it was offered". (Irish Times, 24.6.98, our emphasis).

**Who makes these decisions? Is there backbone at all in the leadership of SIPTU or do they pass around a single vertebra between them?**

Naturally enough, the judge found that each side should pay their own costs. He said the parties had wisely decided to leave this unhappy episode behind them and that harmony was now established. The same Justice O'Flaherty said on 15th May that the papers of the case made him think he was back at the turn of the century; the days of the class struggle should be regarded as long gone.

Meanwhile, back in reality, is harmony established? Is SIPTU recognised at Nolans Transport? Is the strike back on, now that it's declared bone fide? Where are the Nolans members? Are they still SIPTU members? In

the country?

Three years and five months later it seems the aims of the company, the law and the whole set-up are practically achieved, despite an unjust injunction. There's no union in Nolans and the company goes about its business as usual, unhindered in any port-of-call its trucks may turn into. Must the members in SIPTU recognition battles, from Pat the Baker to Ryanair, go quietly into oblivion?

# ICTU head Peter Cassels talks about his idea of 'trade unionism'

we ask him:

*\*where's union  
recognition?*

*\*who said we want to  
'phase in' the  
minimum wage?*

*\*who says we don't  
want a shorter work-  
ing week?*

The extended and instructive interview with Irish Congress of Trade Unions General Secretary, Peter Cassels, in the Irish Times (2nd June) merits comment at great length. He elaborates the partnership approach as, perhaps, its most articulate philosopher on "our" side, taking on board that "there are growing signs of disenchantment with Partnership 2000 among Irish workers".

He pushes out the boundaries of the consensus agenda a little, but it is his flights on a number of particular issues that need immediate attention and take him beyond anything that has been agreed or stated (that we know of) as policy at any level of the movement.

He says "we will have to switch our focus from issues like a shorter working day to how best to release people's potential in the workplace". Does this mean that unions should stop aspiring to shorter hours? What about people's potential outside the workplace?

He says that once the Ryanair enquiry results are put to

Early June saw Professor Brendan Walsh tell the government that the promises of tax cuts under Partnership 2000 should not be honoured. Walsh is one of economic 'experts' who advise politicians and captains of industry. Not only did he want us to be denied the tax cuts which the government has pledged in return for us taking pathetically small wage rises, he went on to advise that the "best strategy" would also include substantial cuts in current spending, particularly in the public sector pay bill.

He said that if the unions saw his proposal as "reneging" on P2000, "then so be it". So what was the response from the union head offices? Not a lot. ICTU general secretary Peter Cassels managed to get out a statement saying that the government should ignore him.

However when the craft workers wanted their analogue agreement implemented without any strings (i.e. they should get what was agreed) union leaders were falling over themselves to condemn the workers. A cynic might suggest that many of union tops are more worried by their own members taking action to get what has been agreed than they are about suggestions that we don't even get what the little that was promised.

Walsh is not some minor economist with strange ideas. His stature is such that the Irish Times ran three separate features dealing with

the Government the issue of trade union recognition can be addressed by amending company law "to lay down standards or principles for employers to adhere to" or introduce procedures "that people would have to follow, like attending the Labour Court, or following Labour Court recommendations".

Er, where's trade union recognition gone? These ideas have been floated before, from SIPTU via the Labour Party Bill. If a 'golden circle' at the top of our unions have decided their own policy on union recognition, it bears little resemblance to the rallying cries at the SIPTU Conference last October.

He says, in relation to the National Minimum Wage and the new British rate "the priority in the Irish context is to get on with phasing in our own minimum wage." Phasing in? The ICTU is, in its own literature, seeking the Commissions rate to be introduced "at an early

## Economist says no to "payback time"

his pronouncement - on one day alone (June 13th). His message was clear - workers should put out of their heads any notion about it being "payback time". And we didn't see a rush of union officials, politicians or 'social partners' disagreeing with him.

At a time when economic growth is running at 10%-12%, when house prices are going through the roof, and there is so much money around that already a dozen separate Tribunals have been set up to look into the brown paper bag corruption of our rulers - Walsh wants our living standards cut even further. Our union leaders *could* have reacted by demanding more for the people who actually create all the wealth (i.e. you, your workmates and the rest of the working class) ...but it would be just a wee bit naive to expect that from Cassels, Geraghty & co. Silly to even suggest it...

Alan MacSimóin

date" (presumably before April 2000) and the Dublin Council of Trade Unions is seeking immediate implementation. Where did the 'phasing' in come from?

As Peter said elsewhere, the unions should lead "the charge for change". But trade unionists should put a stop to Peter's gallop until he gallops off into the European sunset.

Two statements made by Peter we wholeheartedly endorse, though we doubt he was coming on the same train of thought to them: "We need unions to go back to the workplace and fuller involvement locally" [Whoops of delight! 'Way to go, Peter!'] "The whole question of creating such structures may mean full-time officials giving back more power to workers" [Why, Peter, you trotskyist devil you!]

0 to  
vist

# Partnership 2000 and your pay

continued from previous page

elastic deals that disfigure P2000 out of all proportion, all kinds of local side settlements, will be tolerated as long as P2000 remains to ensure the unions are on side and the union leaders keep their place at the table and, it seems, to ensure that the letter of P2000 wage rises applies to a significant proportion of union

members.

But what happened to centralised bargaining; the strong holding back for the weak and all that guff? It seems some can go ahead as long as no links are made with the rest. To combat that, union leaders will go further than restraining claims; they will

openly say that people who have nothing to do with them, or P2000, i.e. the Gardaí, should NOT get a pay rise above a certain level, even if their employer would pay it.

Despite attempts to consolidate or shore up P2000, with workplace partnership below, and calls for better budgets above, and gainsharing deals in between, Partnership 2000 looks like continuing to be viewed as more hole-y than holy.

The trade union movement, together with community and voluntary organisations, has secured a very important breakthrough with the proposed establishment of a National Minimum Wage. While the rate recommended by the Commission ("around two thirds of median (average) earnings" which "in today's terms (April '98) would represent £4.40 per hour") was considerably short of the ICTU target of £5.00 per hour, it was generally agreed that the recognition of the principle of a National Minimum Wage was to be welcomed.

However, the National Minimum Wage is not targeted for implementation until April 2000, keeping the very low-paid waiting for two years amid the wealth of the Celtic Tiger if the government sticks to the Commission's timetable. Also, if the minimum rate was to be set at £4.40 per hour in April 2000 inflation would have reduced it to a real rate of £4.14 in today's values (and a rate below the recommended two thirds of the average).

Furthermore, the Commission has surrounded the National Minimum Wage with many conditions and loopholes. It recommends a "sub-minimum" rate for under-18s, and for job entrants without experience, regardless of age, for up to three years. In addition the employers are maintaining a heavy lobby against the implementation of even the Commission's recommendations.

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions has impressed upon its affiliated organisations the need for follow-up on the Commission's report. The Dublin Council of Trade Unions is continuing its campaign around the National Minimum Wage to urge: no watering-down of the recommended rate per hour; immediate implementation of the National Minimum Wage; a minimum rate without strings attached.

## NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE NOW

The Dublin Council of Trade Unions will kick off its programme of activities on the minimum wage with a 'festive parade' through the pedestrianised area of the city centre on **Thursday, 9 July**, from the Ambassador Cinema, Parnell Street, at 6 p.m.

The ICTU also has a campaign going on the national minimum wage, though you'd be forgiven for not noticing it. It consists mainly of encouraging affiliated organisations to make representations to individual public representatives (TDs, Councillors, etc.) Congress's is for "the implementation of the Commission's recommendations at an early date" (circular, 22 May).

Congress also says, in its circular to unions, trades councils and unemployed centres, that "it is essential to maintain political and public support" for the national minimum wage "to counteract the extensive lobbying campaign against it by employers". So unions and other bodies should get behind this and energise it beyond "seeing your TD".

Congress, while urging an early date, appears to take £4.40 as the rate, even up to April 2000. Indeed, it has been universally reported that the Commission recommends

£4.40 per hour in April 2000 and no-one at any level has contradicted that. So it seems safe to interpret the Report as meaning that.

Yet the Report states: "The initial rate

for the national minimum wage should be set at around two-thirds of median (average) earnings" and "a target date of 1st April 2000 should be set to implement" the National Minimum Wage.

This would imply that the April 2000 rate should be set at two-thirds of median

earnings then. The £4.40 is introduced only in the following sentence: "In today's terms, two thirds of median earnings would represent £4.40 per hour". (Our emphasis) Isn't the £4.40 an illustration in the Report?

Unfortunately other provisions of the Report have been more strictly interpreted, and unfortunately, by Congress - word for word, penny for penny. In a truly shocking move, Congress requested its Network of Unemployed Centres in May to ensure that the minimum rates of the Report - still an advisory document without direct union participation - including the 'sub-minimum' rates are observed in relation to jobs advertised in the Centres!

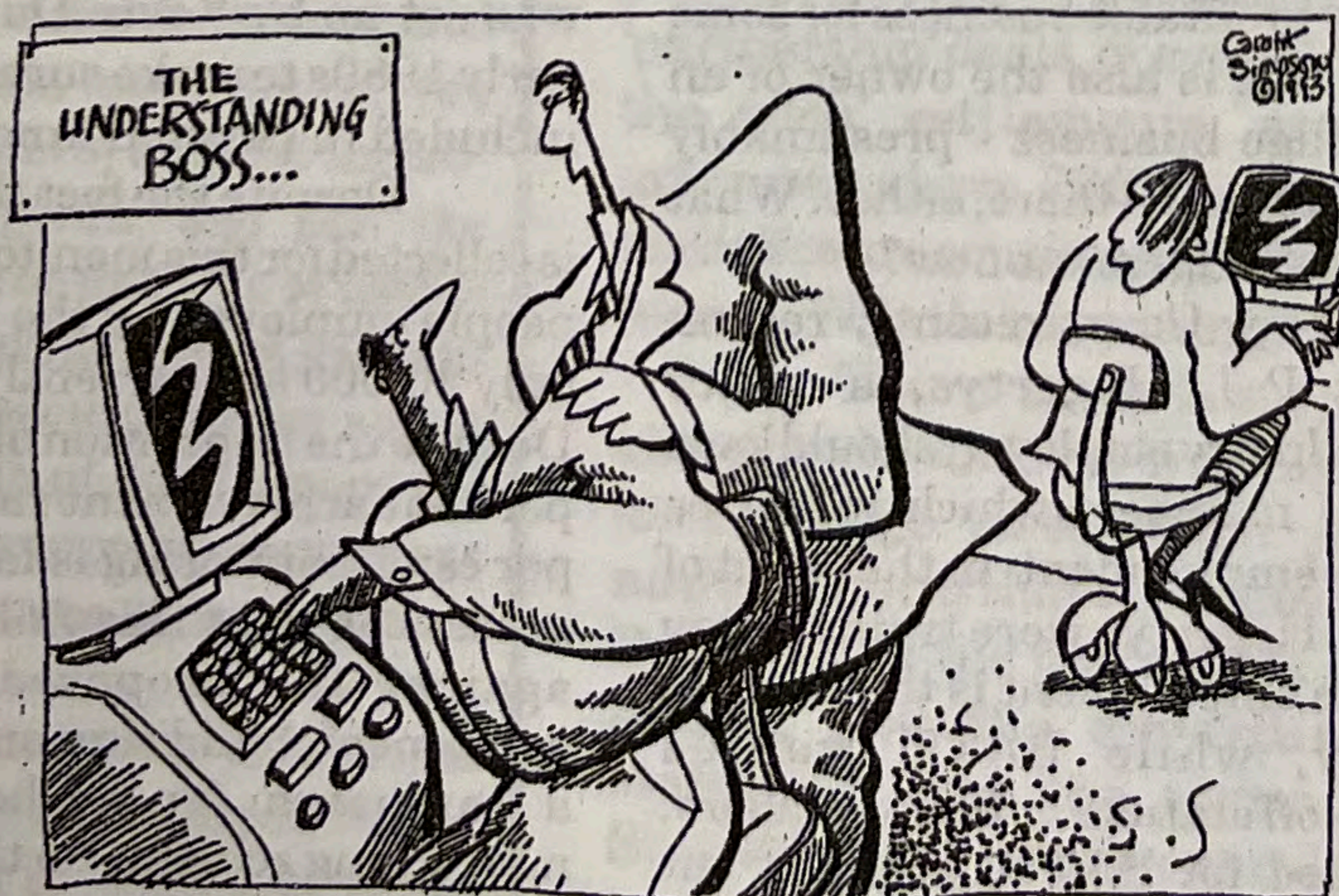
Congress even provided a table of the Report's sub-minimum rates, codifying the more circumspect language of the Report and allowing ICTU Unemployed Centres to advertise jobs at £3.20 per hour that would reach minimum wage only after three years. Who makes these decisions?

As an officer of the Scheme Workers Alliance pointed out to us, if the above training rate were to apply to a National Minimum Wage introduced in April 2000, the minimum wage would not come in for those who most need it (young and unskilled) for five years!

More gems from the Commission report: the rate should take "overall economic conditions" and "competitiveness" into account (p.79); the introduction date is explicitly related to the end of P2000, allowing bartering and dependence on a fifth Programme; EMU fluctuations can be a factor too.

Some employers have taken comfort from the British £3.60 rate (all employers north of the border), pointing out that the punt equivalent is £4.14. Funnily enough, if the National Minimum Wage is postponed to April 2000 and inflation stays as it is, the £4.40 then will be worth just about £4.14 in today's values. In the meantime, the British rate will apparently have increased by a promised 20p per hour. In sterling.

Des Derwin



"I understand you need more money. Why don't you take a second job?"

# Brickies take on Zoe

## The craft workers claim

### Traditional trade unionism beats 'partnership' hands down

Health Board and local authority craftworkers are balloting on the latest offer by employers. The new agreement has been recommended by all the unions in the craftworkers' group, and the votes will be counted on July 7th. The agreement does not deliver the pay levels expected by the members but, in other aspects, it is more acceptable than the previous offer.

The offer is £18.87 an hour, back-dated to July 1st 1997 - with no new productivity. While this is significantly less than the £25.26 which the workers should have got under the analogue agreements (which are supposed to keep them in line with similar workers in the private sector), it has been argued by the negotiators that too much was being expected by the employers for the higher amount. In three companies used for the analogues payments are higher, so an additional payment on top of the £18.87 will have to be worked out.

The agreement will be reviewed in October 2000 and flexibility demands will be negotiated at that point; but nothing new can be introduced by the employers without consultation. The agreement includes guarantees to exclude contractors who are not registered for VAT, pension funds, immunisation schemes for hospitals, and sick leave arrangements. It was pointed out to the employers' side that many contractors working in the public sector are just as guilty of operating in the black economy as their comparators in the private sector.

The ICTU has agreed that the analogue payments supercede the percentages in Partnership 2000, and that the level had to be brought up to the correct amount, regardless of the productivity. The analogue in the health boards and local authorities had been falling back over the years and the workers showed they were not prepared to let this go on, particularly in view of the flexibility and productivity that were demanded by the employers. Proof, once again, that traditional trade union weapons are a darn sight more effective than all the so-called partnership advocated by the ICTU.

BATU bricklayers on the Zoe Developments site in Dublin's Wolfe Tone Street have been on strike since May (see last two issues of 'Fightback' for details of their successful battle against Cramptons). Zoe Developments are the building company with the appalling safety record that led to their managing director being fined and severely censured in court. Building companies normally negotiate with BATU to set rates, but Zoe refuses to do this.

They are paying £9.00 an hour compared to the going rate in Dublin of £13.50 an hour. Zoe issued a statement claiming they paid £700 per week to bricklayers on their sites although, not surprisingly, they have been unable to back this up with any details of these lucky workers. The bricklayers objected to the low rates of pay which Zoe were insisting on and when agreement could not be reached, they took the only option open to them.

The Labour Court at first failed to make any recommendation, then came back with a recommendation for an extra 50p an hour, which will be balloted on shortly. When the strike began, Zoe changed their name to Crossman Developments on the Wolfe Tone Street site (possibly in an effort to intimidate the picketers by claiming they had no right to be there) although they forgot to change the planning permission notice, which is clearly granted to Zoe.

They have changed the name on another site to Dillinger Developments (very appropriate). Carroll, the managing director of Zoe Developments, has bought up huge amounts of land in Dublin city, so he is obviously looking to secure his extraordinarily profitable business for some years to come. He is also the owner of an extensive haulage business - presumably unions aren't recognised there, either. What price the Nolans judgement now?

The Labour Court recently recommended that P.J. Hegertys, a major construction industry employer, should keep a list of BATU members which would be used for future employment, in the event of jobs finishing. Hegertys were trying to say that site by site employment is the norm in the industry, while BATU wanted temporary lay-off status for their members. The Court ruled for BATU, pointing out that workers could find it impossible to make financial arrangements without continuity of employment.

The strikers are still concerned about the issue of direct employment, which was the basis for their strike against Cramptons. BATU are opposing the new sub-contractors agreement which has been negotiated between the Construction Industry Federation and the building unions, including SIPTU. The agreement

would legalise sub-contracting and attendant problems for workers, including the open door it leaves for operation within the black economy. ICTU appear to be negotiating this agreement without asking the building workers what they think about it and no arrangements have been made for a ballot. BATU have secured an interlocutory injunction against signing the agreement as arranged on 2 July, in an effort to force discussion of the implications.

It is difficult to understand SIPTU's role in the recent building workers disputes. SIPTU represents labourers on building sites and the sub-contractors agreement, if carried, would weaken the labourers' already poor position. Despite the long hours they work, many labourers are only earning £4.00 or £5.00 an hour and few of them have continuity of employment.

Instead of supporting BATU's firm stance against the black economy, SIPTU instructed members to pass the pickets and made much play of the unofficial nature of the last strike. Despite the fact that the Zoe Developments strike is official, SIPTU officials are still instructing members not to support it on the basis that it is not their battle!

Leaving aside the question of trade union solidarity (although we would never recommend doing this in the workplace), the resistance to rotten practices in the building industry should be supported by every union for the sake of their own members' best interests.

SIPTU's Construction Branch officials have welcomed the national agreement because it will make trade union recognition mandatory for sub-contractors who are approved under its terms. So what's the problem, you might ask? Simply that such recognition will mean in this case that in return for recognition in the industry, trade unions can formally turn a blind eye to the abuses by the sub-contracting system.

The 'Bounty', as it is known in the building industry, is a payment of 25p per week made by workers on building sites, and it is intended to fund the operation of the Pension Fund Monitoring Agency, which was set up by Kevin Duffy in ICTU in the early 1980s to make sure that workers were included in pension funds.

Despite the fact that so much money is collected for this monitoring, of the 100,000 people employed by the building industry, only 20,000 are currently in pension funds. Despite the imposition of this levy, a twenty per cent achievement rate for one hundred per cent monitoring is fairly pathetic. As a protest against this failure to deliver and against the proposed sub-contracting agreement, building workers are beginning a campaign for withdrawal from the monitoring scheme, on the basis that it has achieved virtually nothing and there is no consultation with members.

The slogan of the campaign will be: No Say, No Pay. This is a slogan that could well be extended to other areas of union activity - if members are not consulted about issues that are intrinsic to their well-being in the workplace, they have considerable financial clout at their fingertips (or their 'Deduction At Source' authorisation) to make their position clear.

SIPTU higher take

...and a  
...including  
...operation with  
...CTU appear to be  
...what they think about  
...ment have been made for  
...signed the agree-  
...in an effort to  
...TU's

## SIPTU members in higher education take national pay initiative

At a recent meeting in Liberty Hall, SIPTU members employed in Ireland's higher education sector agreed to form a united front in dealing with pay negotiations under the local bargaining clause of the PCW, even though the workers are represented by different SIPTU branches throughout the country.

Staff in third level colleges are paid by the Higher Education Authority, which in turn is funded by the Department of Education and ultimately, the Department of Finance. Both the PCW and P2000 called for significant changes in efficiency and flexibility from the public service, in return for pay increases that were completely out of line with the productivity being demanded.

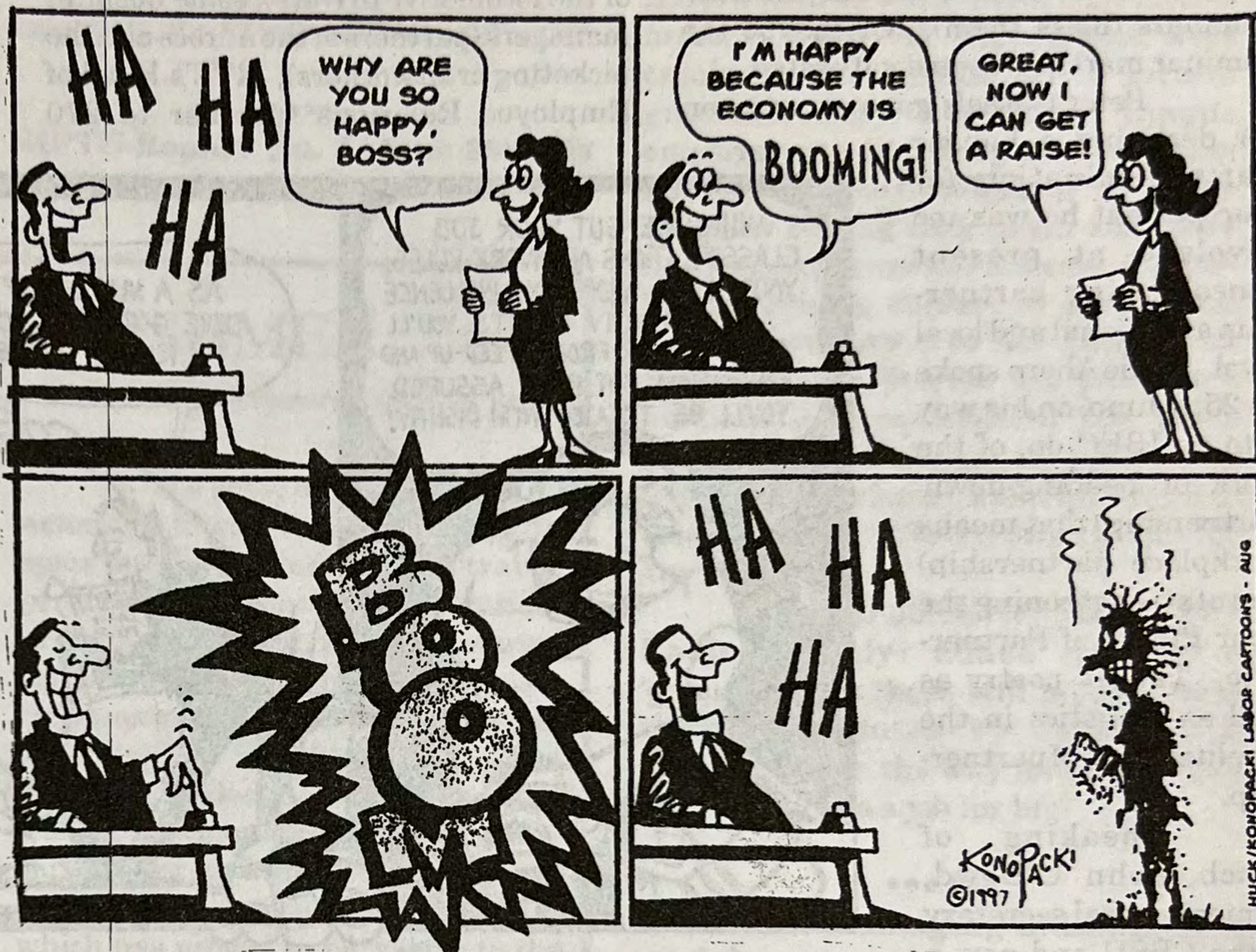
Despite the massive increase in student numbers over the last ten years, which has led to a significant increase in work for everyone from cleaners and maintenance staff to administrators and lecturers, the HEA is offering education sector workers a maximum payment of 5.5%, on the basis that they would be in breach of the partnership agreements if they paid any more. The HEA is also insisting on productivity levels and changes in work practices that would be like writing a blank cheque for college managements if they were accepted.

SIPTU's Education Branch, which represents all grades of workers in the Dublin third level institutions, has agreed that their minimum position in the negotiations is payment of the 5.5% for productivity already given, and that the negotiations must be on the basis of further payments which would be more in line with others in the public sector, like the nurses and the Gardaí. Both of these groups got offers outside the partnership restrictions because they took action to support their case.

SIPTU's members in colleges throughout the country have agreed that the management agenda is unacceptable and they are calling on SIPTU's national officers to state their position unequivocally. Further national meetings of activists are planned, to develop a common approach based on the resolution of the Education Branch to ensure that public sector workers get a fair share of the huge economic growth from which they have been excluded.

# Partnership 2000 and your pay

This year P2000 provides a basic pay rise of two and bit per cent and a local negotiable two per cent. In contrast to that, profits, share prices, property prices, top salaries are soaring. Also salaries in certain skilled areas, such as computers, are escalating. Also a string of groups of workers, mainly in the public sector, have got deals which stretch 'the parameters' of the Programmes beyond credibility: nurses, Gardaí and local authority and health board craftworkers.



Construction electricians won extra increase for themselves. In a range of private sector companies, as a glance at the current 'SIPTU Report' shows, local productivity, gainsharing and 'partnership' deals, or even straight 'above the odds' settlements, are producing extra pay above P2000. Also, published statistics are consistently above the P2000 terms. What's happening?

There is nothing mysterious about profits and non-wage incomes flying above wage rises when you have a national norm that restrains wages only. But what of the disparities in the wage sector, and the departure of wage statistics from the terms of P2000? Statistics use average earnings, so let's put aside overtime, etc. and concentrate on all these wage increases.

Here's the picture. On the one hand the unions are signed up to P2000 with even official inflation paralleling pay rises now. Outside of that high-tech semi-professionals in some areas are having cash thrown at them. There's simply no incentive for them to join up the four and a bit per cent the Unions have delivered. The same could be said

for P2000.

Within P2000 strong sectors, or confident sectors, have wrenched rises way above the basic terms, even when productivity, etc. is taken into consideration, and fair balls to them. But why should the rest of us be confined to the strict terms? In the private sector highly profitable firms have been able to give a little extra, no problem, on the good side; and productivity and concessions, on the bad side, have produced other special increases.

No wonder ISME have said P2000 is dead in the water! Would it were so. Because it appears that all these exceptions are exceptions. A large body of trade union members are subject to strong wage restraint and will continue to be so unless they defy P2000. This is borne out by Peter Cassels who speaks in his 'Irish Times' interview of the middle 50%-60% of trade union members, running to stand still. A recent 'Irish Banking Review' would seem to corroborate this view of general wage restraint.

The picture is that all kinds of

*continued on the next page*

# Bedding down with strange bedfellows

**The banner of P2000 may be ripped and soiled from ever more breaches, welcome and unwelcome, but the machinery beneath it rolls relentlessly along, particularly the indoctrination of shop stewards and members into workplace partnership.**

Our own Union's plans for shop stewards seminars (see Fightback No. 6) seem to have been put on ice, due perhaps to the less than full houses for the officials' seminars (bless them). Or maybe the seminar market was just saturated.

Peter Cassels gave as a reason for declining a Labour Party nomination for Europe that he was too involved at present consolidating partnership at national and local level. Bertie Ahern spoke on 25th June, on his way into an IBEC do, of the work of 'bedding-down' partnership (that means workplace partnership) and of strengthening the Four Pillars of Partnership. There's poetry as well as statistics in the new literature of partnership.

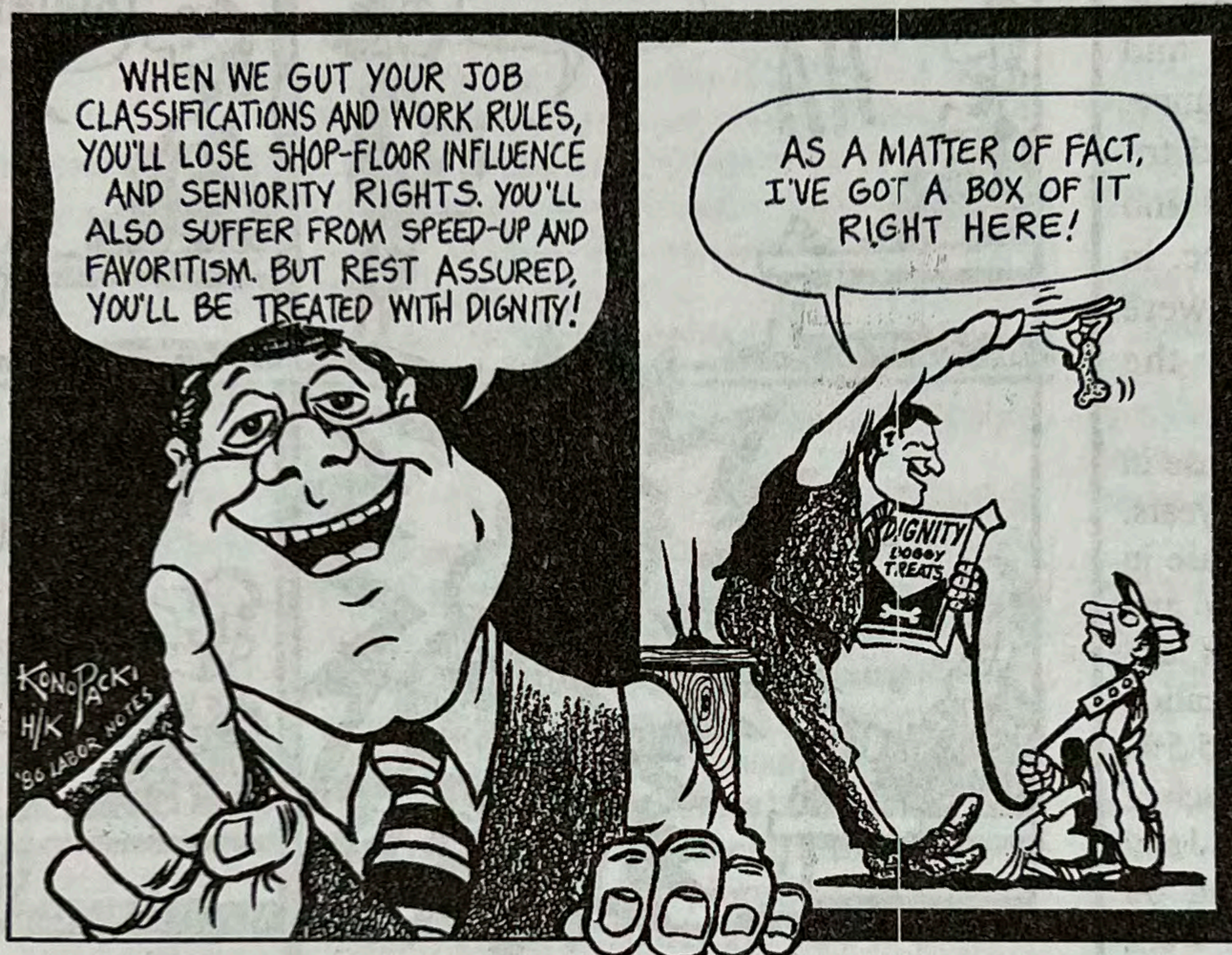
Speaking of which, John O'Dowd, former general secretary of the CPSU and now a director of the National Centre for Partnership, has just published a new book, 'Employee Partnership in Ireland: A Guide for Managers.' The partnership approach must be extended from the top level down, it says.

On June 9th, the National Centre organised a Half-Day Seminar on 'Partnership at Enterprise Level' for a host of managers, shop stewards, union officials, IBEC officials and other industrial relations professionals. Many of the delegations comprised managers and stewards from the same firm.

The agenda included addresses from IBEC and IPC officials, a filmed interview by Tim Hastings (of the Indo) of John Dunne (IBEC) and Peter Cassels, a video featuring Burnside Engineering ('Adapting to Change'). Horror stories to our usual address please, and a panel discussion (IBEC, ICTU and our own Jack O'Connor, Regional Secretary). Then lunch.

The method of invitation seems to have been a bit selective. Some people are asking why they weren't asked when others in the same area or position were.

To scan the list of our partners present is enough to sink this sham. The Human Resources head of CIE (partner of the locomotive drivers); some hospital managers (partners of the nurses and the picketing craftworkers); RTE's Head of Employee Relations (partner to 270



redundant workers); HR Manager, Tara Mines (where large cuts were recently forced through under threat of closures, proposed by a partnership committee); Works Manager, Tinsley Wire (don't get us started);

The Financial Director of the Law Society of Ireland (they'd never make us a partner); HR Development Rep. Intel Ireland (no, it's on the list, just above two SIPTU lay officers and a SIPTU official and two MSF officials - one of the SIPTU officer's factory has just closed!); HR Director, Wellman International (Wellman, Wellman ... that rings a bell, man); Industrial Relations manager, Construction Industry Federation (nobody from BATU though).

It's the turn of Congress to host a Briefing Session on 'Partnership in the Workplace' in Dublin on 8th July, one of a series of regional sessions. IBEC have another go to address the assembly, plus two ICTU addresses and a case study, presented jointly by the ESB and the TEEU (those happy partners at state companies, local authorities and health boards).

The ICTU flyer says of the case study of the local agreement in the Poolbeg Generating Station: "This workplace had traditionally been considered a classic adversarial workplace." Read: if we can tame these beasts we can pacify any workplace.

Shop stewards and committee representatives opposed to partnership should take these events as opportunities to put forward an alternative, realistic view. Many good shop stewards are going along to these seminars as a day out and a free lunch.

Many are concluding local partnership deals as the only way to get a few bob over the P2000 pittance, without fussing about common-interest ideology. Nevertheless, the 'social partners' aren't organising these 'free lunches' for the good of their health and a "debate both within the trade unions and in this case with IBEC about the methods and limits of workplace partnership" (ICTU circular for 8th July) would not go astray.

Bertie Ahern's 'bedding-down' remark was a particularly perceptive term for the project, now intensifying, of planting workplace partnership: compacting-in the soil at ground level. This solidifying has a double purpose. To secure roots for the national programmes above, in the stony and shifting soil of the workplace, where partnership is daily unfrocked by the actions of

employers.

To compress into the life of the workplace, into shop stewards and members, the seeds of consensus grown over a decade in the national canopy above, to lubricate change and to germinate there even if the National Programmes above should come toppling down in April 2000 or even before.

And here is the permanent significance of workplace partnership for the soul of the trade union movement. Beware, these people are determined to keep on pushing 'partnership' even if a fifth national programme is defeated or fails to materialise. Us people will be sown into local partnership agreements and mindsets to take us beyond the life and limits of the national deals.

The irony of all this talk of workplace fora and structure, of 'full involvement locally' is that 'partnership at enterprise level' is within a national framework, is legislated for in Chapter 9 of P2000, and directed from the top down. Real engagement at the workplace, real responsibility for stewards is called 'free collective bargaining'.

On Friday, 26 J  
released advi  
in order  
transfe  
bud



...of the ca...  
...in the Poolbe...  
...workplace had...  
...idered a classic...  
...ead: if we can...  
...ify any

# That's Partnership

On Friday, 26 June a report was released advising 270 to 370 job cuts in order to prepare RTE for the transfer of 20% of its programme budgets to independent production (i.e. the private sector) from next year. The split-second response of the RTE group of unions, including SIPTU, was to reach for 'partnership'. If ever there was any doubt that local partnership is little more than newspeak for collaborative downsizing it was dispelled in RTE, and RTE carried the news first.

The RTE group of unions said that any changes will have to be founded on a partnership based on consultation,

negotiation and agreement. The Secretary of the group said an early agreement in a partnership structure for advancing the process of change would be a useful start in building trust (Irish Times, 27.6.98). RTE had just released a war plan and the unions responded by calling for a partnership. Once the slogan would have been 'defend jobs'; now the bloodcurdling battle cry is 'an early agreement on a partnership structure!'

The RTE Authority welcomed the report. Is our Vice-President still on it?

.....

'SIPTU Report' No. 7 (June 98) tells us that at Aer Lingus "discussions

under the Partnership Framework continue" and that "training in the partnership method of problem-solving is due to commence shortly". Some of this method would not be lost on Bernie Cahill, John Behan, Mary O'Rourke and the TEAM management team (still part of Aer Lingus).

The workers there have still not been paid rises due under Partnership 2000; a shop steward, Denis Smyth, was unfairly dismissed; the workers were cajoled into TEAM with letters guaranteeing their Aer Lingus employment which they are now being bullied into surrendering, with the company coming back again and again until it gets the answer it wants; individual interviews, threats of closure and welching on return to Aer Lingus - all so that Mary O'Rourke can privatise a public industry and sell it to FLS. Quote from Mary O'Rourke, in relation to letters (another legacy from Haughey that turned to dust): "No one has a job for life any more".

A SIPTU official for TEAM (RTE Radio, 1 July) added his bit of 'persuasion' to those still holding on to their parachutes by saying FLS ownership was the way forward. Have SIPTU officials a job for life?

.....

**A far more damaging indictment of social partnership than we could manage is carried in a couple of short paragraphs in the 'Irish Times' editorial of Saturday, 20 June.**

*"The facts of tax evasion, as we now know them, bear repetition. About 700 individuals or companies had money or shares in the Ansbacher deposits or in National Irish Bank's offshore bank schemes. Some 53,000 bogus non-resident accounts, containing nearly £600 million, were held with Allied Irish Banks alone by Irish residents who wished to avoid tax or hide their affairs from the Revenue.*

*The extent of tax evasion cannot be unrelated to the lenient manner in which evaders are treated. The culture of tax evasion has been actively encouraged by government. The tax amnesties introduced by Fianna Fáil in 1986 and 1993 were rightly described as a 'charter for cheats'."*

Now brothers and sisters, stop overheating the economy. The first ever custodial sentence for tax evasion (half a million in the Isle of Man) was given in June in Galway ... and promptly suspended. The former managing director of Cavan Crystal withheld £165,000 in taxes and recently 'walked' from the courtroom.

## THE UNITED IRISHMEN

*continued from back page*

Thomas Russell, one of the Belfast leaders, once defended the journeymen weavers in an industrial dispute with local linen merchants and the 'Northern Star', the paper of the United Irishmen, applauded the defeat of an anti-combination bill in the House of Lords. Russell produced a pamphlet entitled 'Letter to the People of Ireland' which attacked the abuse of wealth and power by the aristocracy and the church, although he did not outline any clear programme of social reform, other than proposing a reduction in taxes and tithes.

The impact of the French Revolution changed the politics of the United Irishmen from their essentially bourgeois nature to a more revolutionary perspective. The events of 1798 weeded out the socially conservative from those who recognised that democracy could not be confined to the propertied classes. Sadly, the real revolutionaries were those who died or were condemned to permanent exile, and those who remained got caught up in sectarian politics.

Connolly suggested that the rising failed because of the lack of co-ordination between the rank and file and the leaders, so that the arrests of the Leinster leadership in early 1798 left the ordinary members of the movement unprepared:

*"The people were wretchedly armed, totally undrilled and compelled to act without any systematic plan of campaign, because of the sudden arrest and imprisonment of their leaders"* (Labour in Irish History).

The government also had an extensive intelligence network, with spies and informers who betrayed practically every move the revolutionaries made. The administration used the press to depict the uprising as a religious war, whereby Catholics were attempting to throw out the Protestants (despite the fact that the leadership was mainly Protestant) and this further undermined support and lent itself to the popular sectarianism which has proved so pervasive to the present day.

The influence of the "men of no property" on the United Irishmen is particularly evident in the following extract from 'The Union doctrine; or poor man's catechism', which was published anonymously in the early 1790s:

*"I believe in a revolution founded on the rights of man, in the natural and imprescriptable right of all citizens to all the land... As the land and its produce was intended for the use of man 'tis unfair for fifty or a hundred men to possess what is for the subsistence of near five millions..."*

The legacy of the United Irishmen is still the memory of a great moment of defiance in the face of oppression and a reminder that Irishmen (and women, who have been excluded only in deference to 18th century sensibilities) could leave aside sectarian divisions to tackle a common enemy.

*Mary Muldowney*

## 1798: THE UNITED IRISHMEN AND THE EARLY TRADE UNIONS

This year we are celebrating the 200th anniversary of the 1798 rebellion, long considered a great moment in Irish history, even though it resulted in death and defeat for many of the participants. The leaders of the United Irishmen were, as has often been pointed out, mainly from middle-class, prosperous backgrounds and many of them were actively opposed to combinations, the late 18th century trade unions. However, despite the drawbacks of their social conservatism, the leaders did have a republican reading of history which at least confirmed for them the necessity for radical reform and revolution in their society.

They looked at the great republican states of the past which had fallen because prominent citizens, obsessed with wealth and luxury, had pushed their own interests before the public good. This was the United Irishmen's understanding of the nature of English occupation and it was why Connolly cited the movement as "a revolutionary party openly declaring their revolutionary sympathies but limiting their first demand to a popular measure such as would enfranchise the masses, upon whose support their ultimate success must rest" (Labour in Irish History).

Wolfe Tone, in particular, recognised that "the men of no property" must be an intrinsic element of the society which developed out of the rebellion. The social programme of the United Irish movement could be summed up in the phrase "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" (Secret Manifesto of the Friends of Freedom in Ireland, written by Wolfe Tone with Samuel Nielson and others, June 1791.)

In March 1793, the Volunteers (the 'military wing' of the United Irishmen) were suppressed by the government. Up to that date, despite much discussion about the need for democratic reform, their only military engagement had been to suppress a strike of cotton workers in Belfast. After 1793, the movement increasingly operated underground and embarked on a period of reconstruction. This was based on a more social radicalism and recognised the need, already outlined by Wolfe Tone, to enlist "the men

of no property", the journeymen and wage-earners who were already well organised in combinations, especially in the Dublin area.

There was a network of workingmen's 'reading clubs', which



developed alongside (or 'beneath') the mainstream, middle-class radical, United Irish movement. The influence of the French Revolution and Thomas Paine's 'The Rights of Man' was crucial.

This was an era of rapid social change in which, although Dublin was still a pre-industrial city in the sense that most people still worked at home, the artisan and the small workshop now existed side-by-side with the factory.

Economic hardship developed, apparently as a result of the war with France, and led to widespread discontent. The combinations continued to disrupt public order as demands were made for a more just society and riots were a frequent occurrence. A handbill entitled The cry of the poor for bread, was found stuck in a tree in north county Dublin in 1796:

*"Oh! lords of manors, and other men of landed property, as you have monopolised to yourselves the land, its vegetation and its game, the fish of the rivers and the fowls of heaven ... in the present condition of things can the labourer, who cultivates your land with the sweat of his brow, the working manufacturer or the mechanic, support himself, a wife and 5 or 6 children? How much comfort do you extort from their misery, by places, offices and pensions and consume in idleness, dissipation, riot and luxury?"*

The United Irish leader, Oliver Bond, seemed to think "if Dublin was once taken, all the rest of Ireland would directly submit". From an opposite political perspective, General Carhampton, discussing the possibility of a French invasion, predicted that "the city [would] be handed over to a municipality formed of the dregs of the people, who, armed with pikes and whiskey, would probably plunder and burn the town, and the whole kingdom then be undone for a century to come".

Many of the leaders of the United Irishmen were anti-union, subscribing to the conventional wisdom that combinations artificially distorted the labour market and acted as a brake on economic growth. However, it would be as wrong to see the United Irishmen as totally anti-labour as to suggest that they were early socialists.

continued on page 9

If you want to continue receiving SIPTU Fightback each month please return this coupon to SIPTU Fightback, 22 Melrose Avenue, Dublin 3.

NAME

ADDRESS

WORKPLACE

If you would like 5 extra copies for friends/workmates please tick here

**Title:** SIPTU Fightback, No. 7

**Date:** 1998

Downloaded from the Irish Left Archive.

Visit [www.leftarchive.ie](http://www.leftarchive.ie)

*The Irish Left Archive is provided as a non-commercial historical resource, open to all, and has reproduced this document as an accessible digital reference. Copyright remains with its original authors. If used on other sites, we would appreciate a link back and reference to us, in addition to the original creators. For republication, commercial, or other uses, please contact the original owners. If documents provided to The Irish Left Archive have been created for or added to other online archives, please inform us so sources can be credited.*