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Plus all the latest union news with
food, music, travel and competitions



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Spring-Summer 2019

People get ready

Standing up and speaking out

Fórsa is produced by Fórsa trade union's communications unit and is edited by Niall Shanahan. Deputy editor Róisín McKane.

Front cover: Pictured left to right from front row: School Secretaries branch chair Maria Dunne, Assistant General Secretary Barry Cunningham, President Ann McGee, Liz Phelan, Anita O'Reilly, Marion Jackson, Kathleen O'Doherty, Lead Organiser Joe O'Connor, Head of Division Andy Pike and Senior General Secretary Designate Kevin Callinan at the launch of the Support Our Secretaries campaign in January. Photo: Conor Healy pictureitphotography.ie

Contact Fórsa at:
Nerney's Court, Dublin 01 R2C5.
Phone: 01-817-1500.
www.forsa.ie

Designed by:
N. O'Brien Design & Print
Management Ltd.
Phone: 01-864-1920
Email: nikiobrien@eircom.net

Printed by Boylan Print Group.

Advertising sales:
Niki O'Brien.
Phone: 01-864-1920.

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Hope springs eternal

AS WE head into the brighter, warmer months of the year, it's a good time to remind ourselves of those things that make us feel optimistic and hopeful about the future.

I've spent the last number of months on the road meeting members attending their branch AGMs. It proved to be a lively and busy AGM season for the union, and I was inspired both by the level of participation of members, as well as the careful preparation and hard work of branch committees. This organisation would not be successful without the work lay representatives put in at branch level throughout the country and I thank these activists.

All of that hard work and preparation provides a great foundation as we head into a series of divisional conferences, and I'd like to take this opportunity to wish all the divisional executives well, and I'll look forward to the debates and discussions that emerge from the delegates in attendance.

It has been very encouraging to see the growing support for school secretaries since the launch of the *Support Our Secretaries* campaign in January. Not alone has it inspired a boost in membership for the School Secretaries branch, it has given a number of our individual school secretaries an opportunity to tell their story like never before, helping the wider public to better understand their cherished role in every community.

I joined CE supervisors and assistant supervisors at their rally outside the Department of Finance offices in Dublin in February. The rally was one of several taking place around the country as CE members from Fórsa and SIPTU engaged in a one-day strike action.

It's been almost 11 years since the Labour Court issued a recommendation to provide pensions for these workers. Their action is warranted and they have the solidarity of all our members as they fight for that recommendation to be implemented.

I'm also delighted to see Fórsa's youth network up and running again with a busy agenda for the year ahead. I'll be meeting with the network again in April as they prepare to build their visibility during our divisional conference season.

Finally, it was a privilege to have taken part in Fórsa's *INSPIRE* training event in January, and to welcome so many great female activists into the room to talk about encouraging more women to become activists within the union.

For all of these reasons, the future remains bright.



Ann McGee, Fórsa President

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Niall Shanahan.

Thank you for the music

FIRST OF all our thanks once again to all of you who've taken the time to get in touch and give your feedback about the magazine. Our survey (page 48) has been attracting lots of your comments and ideas, which we've taken on board. Keep the ideas coming.

In this edition we've looked ahead to conference season, and highlighted a couple of the campaigns launched by Fórsa so far this year.

The union's health and welfare division is focusing on mental health, while the Civil Service has produced a people manager's guide to help with staff who might be experiencing difficult times. We also look at the hidden addiction of gambling, and how one member reached out to start his recovery.

As we emerge blinking from the long dark winter, it's hard not to notice how much of a shadow is cast by Brexit over conversations inside and outside of union business.

Britain's departure from the EU has become the Schrödinger's cat of international diplomacy, as the phrases "Brexit will never happen" and "Brexit will never end" appear, most days, to be simultaneously true.

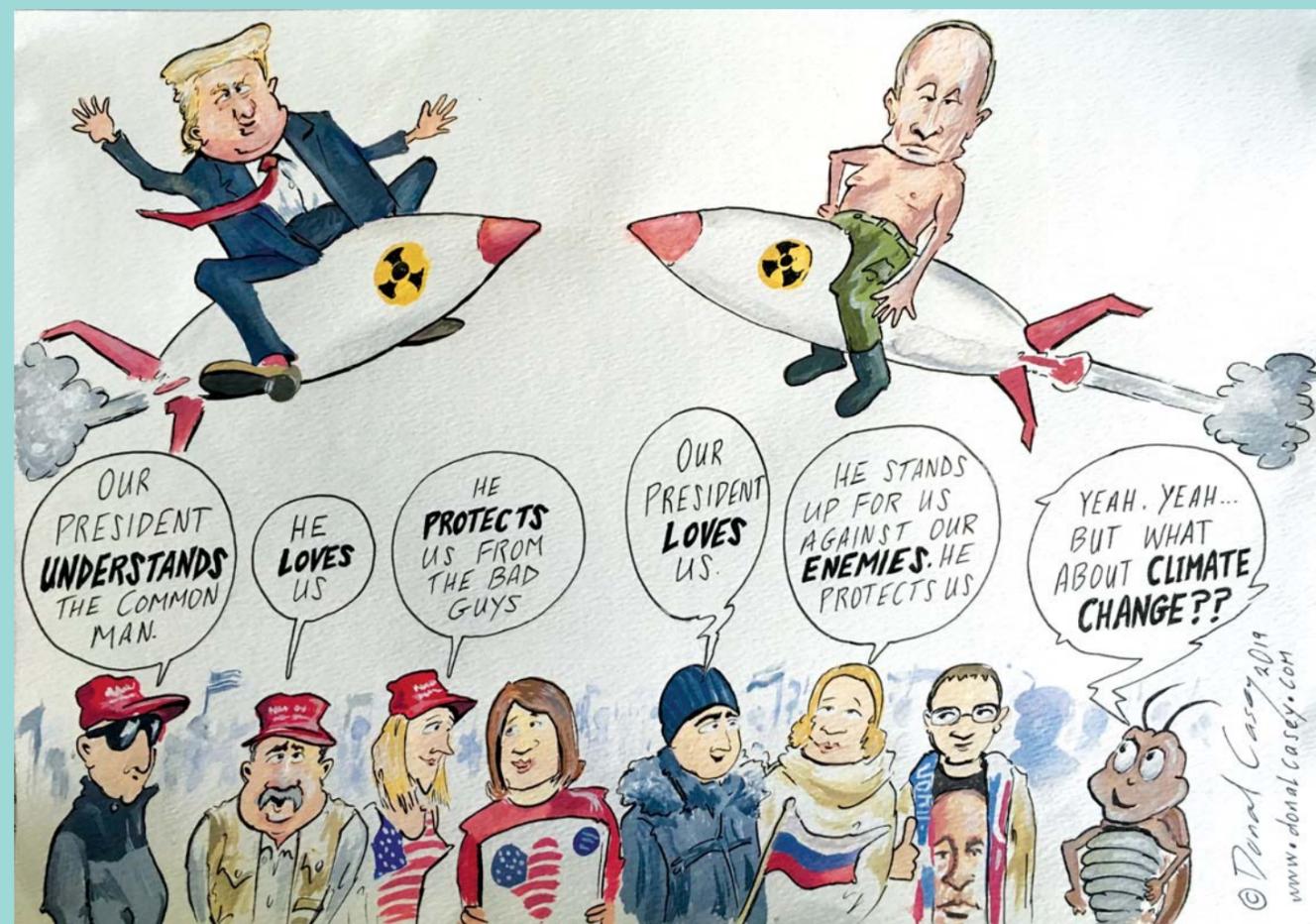
Our head of communications Bernard Harbor joined his family in London to march for a People's Vote on 23rd March. His report is on page 22. You have to hand it to remain campaigners, for all they've been put through, they maintain their sense of humour when they take to the streets. And there were

a million of them at that march... there's hope yet.

In a bid to retain our own good humour, our music column in this edition focuses on British music we love. We've compiled a Brexit-themed Spotify playlist highlighting our favourites and why we chose them.

One of the tunes we picked is *Too Nice To Talk To* by Birmingham legends The Beat. Raymond Connolly is still down at his local toasting the finest rudeboy of them all, Ranking Roger, who sadly passed away as we were compiling this edition.

Whatever happens next, we still have the music ■



Public service pay deal must address spending power and grade claims

THE UNDERLYING assumptions of the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA) need to be reviewed to take account of lost spending power, recent and projected growth rates, and pay movements in the wider economy, according to the next Senior General Secretary of Fórsa.

Speaking at the annual Industrial Relations News (IRN) conference in Dublin in March, Kevin Callinan said public service agreements should also allow for individual grade claims to respond to enhanced responsibilities, higher qualification requirements, additional skills, and increased productivity.

Kevin said: "The credibility of the current agreement [the PSSA] is being stretched by two important factors, which have taken root over the past decade and which now need to be addressed. One is the spending power of incomes after living costs are factored in; the other is the scope for the agreement to respond to profession-specific and grade-specific issues and ambitions."



Kevin Callinan, Fórsa Senior General Secretary Designate.

Referencing CSO data, he said public service incomes fell or remained static between 2008 and 2018, a period when cumulative inflation was just over 6%. The result was a significant reduction in the value of wages during a decade in which public servants had also experienced increased working time and other negative changes. "It will simply not be credible to seek to continue on the current course without a correction to this," he said.

Kevin also noted that both the Government and the Labour Court had recently recognised, in the nurses' case, that the PSSA is capable of dealing with grade claims, a process that had been absent from public service pay determination for over a decade. The Labour Court linked this to a wider public service review previously recommended by the Public Service Pay Commission.

"This could herald a positive change in direction. Other grades and professions who aspire to participate in such an exercise will expect similar treatment in the same timeframe," said Mr Callinan.

Kevin was appointed 'Senior General Secretary Designate' of the 80,000-strong Fórsa earlier this year. He will succeed Shay Cody as Senior General Secretary in the summer.

He told the IRN conference: "It's time to shift our focus from the past and focus on the challenge of delivering real improvements in wages and purchasing power. By way of comparison, German public service employers and unions have just agreed a three-year pay deal that comfortably outstrips inflation.

"Furthermore, it is simply no longer possible to refuse workers the periodic opportunity to make the case for their own grade or profession; to robustly – and fairly – test the validity of their arguments, be they based on increased productivity, changes in relativities, enhanced qualifications, additional skills, or added responsibilities. It's now almost 20 years since public service workers had that opportunity – 20 years that have seen enormous changes in roles, responsibilities and working practices.

"This would go a long way in restoring confidence in the PSSA, whose underlying assumptions also need to be reviewed to take account of inflation, the exceptional growth of 2017 and 2018, and pay movements in the wider economy. Such an approach could frame the negotiations on a successor to the current agreement, which will have to be sufficiently flexible to pair general increases, designed to protect living standards, with progress on specific grade or profession reviews. We want to restore and maintain full confidence in the PSSA, and our model of public service pay determination."

Kevin said unions had been assured that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) would continue to engage with them, including on the broader implications of the nurses' Labour Court recommendation. "Fórsa expects these engagements to continue to take place over the coming weeks with the objective of ensuring the continued effectiveness and stability of the public service agreement, and to ensure that it remains fit for purpose," he said.

Kevin's full speech is available at forsa.ie (search term #PSSA) ■

Unions call for enhanced local authority powers

Research shows Ireland ranks last in European local democracy index



The campaign, which launched in March is a collaboration between Fórsa, SIPTU and Connect trade unions.

TRADE UNIONS representing over 30,000 local council workers have launched a campaign for substantially increased revenue and funding powers for local authorities, and published research that shows Irish councils have less autonomy from central government than their counterparts in 39 European countries. The 'More Power To You' campaign also calls for legislative changes to facilitate directly-elected mayors and restore and expand town councils, which were abolished in 2014.

The research paper, 'Democracy Works If You Let It' by Dr Mary Murphy of Maynooth University, finds that only 8% of Irish public spending occurs at local government level, compared to an EU23 average of over 23%, and that a quarter of the Irish spend is not fully under local authority control. And it says that, with just one city or county council for every 148,507 people, Ireland has far fewer local municipalities than similar-sized European countries.

The study says Irish local authorities perform fewer functions than municipalities across Europe, with their roles largely confined to physical infrastructure and environmental and recreational services. This impacts negatively on local employment, service quality, value-for-money, environmental protection, and local jobs and economic development. It has also contributed to

declining local election voter turnout.

The campaign is seeking commitments from political parties, and candidates in the upcoming council elections, on a range of local government reforms covering waste, water, housing, and energy services.

Speaking at the launch, Dr Mary Murphy of Maynooth University said: "Local government can be an important source of economic development and local jobs, while local authorities across Europe are playing a leading role in transitioning to low-carbon renewable energy. We need to rebuild Irish local democracy and citizen participation to build strong local economies based on good jobs and decent incomes, and to address climate change."

Fórsa National Secretary Peter Nolan said: "Irish people take great pride in their counties and cities, yet this element of our democracy has been systematically eroded by centralisation, privatisation and austerity. People in Ireland deserve structures and systems that deliver quality local services that match the best in Europe. We're calling on political parties and local council candidates to join us in a campaign to achieve that."

For more about the campaign, see our special feature on page 20, and visit forsa.ie/morepower ■

Stobart Air cabin crew ballot for industrial action

CABIN CREW directly employed by Stobart Air in the Republic of Ireland are balloting for industrial action over the airline's refusal to recognise Fórsa and negotiate with the union on staff pay and working conditions.



Fórsa official Ashley Connolly.

If passed, the ballot (due to be completed on 10th April) would also give the union a legal mandate for industrial action if the company takes disciplinary action against any crew member because they have joined the union, or because they participate in an industrial dispute.

Fórsa says a recent pay proposal in the non-union company fell short of recent airline industry norms, and was rejected by cabin crew by a margin of more than two-to-one of those who voted.

The union has since hosted a number of information meetings for Irish-based Stobart crew, and says there is overwhelming staff support for the union to negotiate on their behalf. It also referred the dispute to the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC), which subsequently invited the company to talks. The airline refused the offer.

Fórsa official Ashley Connolly said Stobart cabin crew had expressed annoyance at company management's refusal to engage with the union. "They see their colleagues in other Irish-based airlines and they know it's the industry norm for unions to negotiate on behalf of staff. I understand their frustration at a management team that continues to deny its workers access to a service that other airlines accept as normal practice and sound industrial relations.

"Management's refusal to do business in the usual way has left its staff feeling they have no choice but to consider industrial action," she said. ■

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Fórsa news

Critical welcome for Sláintecare action plan

FÓRSA HAS welcomed aspects of the 2019 annual Sláintecare action plan, while saying the health department is moving too slowly on important aspects of the initiative. Sláintecare is an ambitious ten-year plan to achieve high-quality healthcare, free at the point of delivery. It won cross-party support in 2017.

Speaking after the publication of the Sláintecare action plan 2019, Fórsa's head of health Éamonn Donnelly backed the objective of agreeing a new organisational structure this year for reconfigured health and social care services, which would clarify the roles of the HSE, health department and regional and community organisations.

But he said limited plans to develop "policy proposals for how to provide universal services at no or low cost" to patients and service-users lacked the necessary ambition. And he claimed plans to "review" existing recommendations for removing private practice from public acute hospitals fell far short of what's needed.

"Fórsa totally supports the vision of a fair, high-quality health service free at the point of delivery, and we understand that making this a reality will take time and effort. We are actively involved in work on the reconfiguration of services, particularly in the community and primary care sector.

"But I am disappointed that the Government is not moving faster and with more ambition to get the foundations of a decent health service in place. 'Reviews' and 'roadmaps' are insufficient in fundamental areas like funding services and getting private medicine out of public health service facilities," he said.

Fórsa has previously outlined a range of steps necessary to put Sláintecare in place. The union says there needs to be synergy between GP and state healthcare services, along with a shift away from the insurance-based funding model and towards public funding. The union also says there is an urgent need for better alignment of hospital and community-provided services, and that private practice in public hospitals should be phased out as quickly as possible.



Fórsa's head of health Éamonn Donnelly.

Sláintecare requires a massive development of community services as

it aims to shift the majority of care from the acute to the community setting.

"Fórsa has been leading the charge on this because we recognise and champion the principle of multi-disciplinary primary care delivered, as far as possible, in our communities rather than in hospitals. But there is a real concern among health professionals and staff that their experience and contribution will be sidelined, to the detriment of patients and clients, in yet another structure that puts all its focus on doctors – be they GPs or consultants – as the managers and epicentre of service delivery," said Éamonn.

The 2017 Sláintecare report envisages a substantial increase in the number of people working in, and supporting, the health and social care professions ■

Four-day week brings 20% productivity gain

THE FOUNDER of one of the first large organisations to switch to a shorter working week has called on others to follow suit, following a successful eight-week trial. New Zealand finance company Perpetual Guardian switched its 240 staff to a four-day week, with no pay reduction, last November. The result has been higher productivity, increased profits and significantly better staff wellbeing.

The trial was supervised by the University of Auckland and Auckland University of Technology, who surveyed staff after the eight week experiment. They reported a marked improvement compared to a 2017 survey in the same workplace.

Results from the trial, which has been closely watched by trade unions, employers and policy makers globally, indicated a 20% increase in productivity, with staff stress down 13% and work-life balance up 14%.

The company's chief executive Andrew Barnes said staff initially wondered how they could do five days' work in four

days. "Not only could they do their work in four days but they were better able to do the work in four days. That, for me, was the one result from the research which was extraordinarily surprising," he said.

Fórsa added its voice to international trade union calls for a move to a four-day week at an international conference hosted at the union's Dublin office last November.

The conference, born from a number of motions brought to Fórsa's national conference last May, explored the future of working time with a number of experts in the field, who highlighted the evidence-based positive results of shorter working time.

The conference also heard from Fórsa Senior General Secretary Designate Kevin Callinan, who said that reduced working time was again emerging as one of the central issues in international debates over the future of work.

See also our feature on automation on page 24 ■

Partnership workers push for restoration

FÓRSA members in Wicklow County and South Dublin County partnerships have backed industrial action in a dispute over income restoration. Like workers in voluntary sector 'section 39' organisations - which are publicly-funded but not directly managed by the State - they were subject to crisis measures, which cut incomes during the economic crisis.

Union official Brendan O'Hanlon explained: "Staff in both partnerships had their incremental progression

frozen and were subject to changes in their working hours." The union represents 24 workers across both partnerships.

Brendan said staff in both partnerships had voted unanimously in favour of industrial action last month. "In the case of South Dublin County Partnership, the ballot result persuaded management to agree to engage with the union at the Workplace Relations Commission and we're due to attend the WRC on 24th April.

"The union told management we intend to take industrial action if there is no progress on the issue. We are awaiting a response," he said.

Brendan added that County Wicklow Partnership had recently announced a 2% pay increase, backdated to January 2019. Brendan said the union has advised management that while the offer was welcome, it falls far short of addressing the disputed matters ■

SNA contract issues archive

'SNA contract issues for the news bulletin' in the subject heading.

The issues covered so far in the archive are:

- Pilot Schools and Non-Cooperation
- SNAs and assault leave
- Advice on the '72 Hours' and does an SNA have a supervision function?
- How is the pay for part time hours calculated?
- Notice periods
- Panel Appeals
- Displacement: Are You Doing Someone Else's Job?
- Standard contract for 2018/2019 school year
- SNA allocation FAQs
- The NCSE's SNA review: main points and recommendations
- Q&A: NCSE Comprehensive Review of the Special Needs Assistant Scheme
- Post fragmentation
- I was a full-time SNA but have had my hours cut. Am I entitled to any redundancy payment?

You can access the news bulletins at forsa.ie/news/newsroom/ and select 'Education' ■



FORSA'S EDUCATION news bulletin is host to a special segment focussing on contract issues facing SNAs. Devised and written by Assistant General Secretary Seán Carabini, it has proved to be one of the most popular items in the Education news bulletin.

We've archived all of these items for ease of access, and we update the archive in every fortnightly edition of the bulletin.

If you have SNA contract issues you'd like to see covered in the bulletin, please contact us at info@forsa.ie and include

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Roisin McKane.

This year's Fórsa Health and Welfare divisional conference will highlight mental illness and the stigma that clings to it. Fittingly, it's being held in Sligo's Clayton Hotel, which opened its doors in 1855 as Saint Columba's psychiatric institution. RÓISÍN McKANE reports.

Seeing off the stigma



MEANDERING THROUGH the expansive grounds and manicured lawns of Sligo's Clayton Hotel, I was struck by the scale of this imposing grey building and wondered what it must have meant to so many who passed through its doors over the years.

I thought of Ireland's history of dealing with mental health, and how poor it's been even in fairly recent times. Just 30 years ago, people were forcibly dragged to psychiatric hospitals like St Columba's - now the hotel where Fórsa's

Health and Welfare division will hold its conference. They were likely to live out their days in the confines of the institution.

I was struck by how far our nation has come in terms of attitudes, but found myself thinking of how much more we need to do.

Last November, an OECD study called for mental health to be given greater priority in health systems across Europe. It attributed more than 84,000 deaths across the continent to mental

illness or suicide and, worryingly, found that Ireland ranked joint third out of 36 European countries in terms of mental illness rates.

According to its *Health at a Glance* report, over 18% - or nearly a fifth - of the Irish population was recorded as having a mental health disorder. These included anxiety, depression, bipolar disorders, and problems with alcohol or drugs. It said mental health problems cost the Irish economy a massive €8.2 billion each year.

Stigma

So the decision by Fórsa's Health and Welfare executive to highlight mental health at its 2019 event is timely.

The union's Head of Division Eamonn Donnelly says it's less than 30 years since secure units set the standard of psychiatric services here. "The stigma of poor mental health is still alive and well, and we must do more to combat it. We need to make the provision of mental health services a mainstream healthcare function," he said.

The Fórsa event, which takes place in May, will explore the need for enhanced mental health services in our healthcare system, as well as the requirement to address mental health issues caused by, or presenting at, work.

"Labels don't change people, attitudes do. You're still the same man, woman, partner, father, sister, cousin, wife, or friend that you were before a diagnosis of a mental illness."

Jarlath O'Connor works in the mental health area and sits on the union's Health and Welfare executive. "Mental health has been the poor cousin in our health service delivery. For too long it's been associated with institutions, and these institutions have left scars on people who became victims of their care," he told me.

Anxiety

The voluntary organisation Mental Health Ireland says workplace pressures, especially long hours, contribute to poor mental health in Ireland and elsewhere. It quotes a recent survey by the UK Mental Health Foundation, which found that a third of workers were unhappy or very unhappy about the amount of time they spent at work, while 40% said they neglected other aspects of their life because of their job.

Long working hours caused depression for more than a quarter of respondents, and anxiety for more than a third. And it found we're more likely to spend our leisure time worrying about work if we work excessive hours.



Workplace pressures and long hours contribute to poor mental health according to Mental Health Ireland.

Michelle Spearman Geraghty, who's on the Fórsa health executive and its mental health sub-committee, explained the decision to focus on mental health. "It's extremely rare that we think of mental health in a positive way," she says.

"When we salute our friends, family or colleagues and ask them how they are, we all expect to hear 'grand'. We don't ever expect to hear 'I am not in a good place at the moment,' or 'I feel really down.' Very often it is the reaction by others to a person's mental health issues that can compound the situation."

Michelle said the conference would specifically focus on the stigma that still clings to mental health issues. "Let's talk about it. Let's remove the stigma and let it be known that it's okay for a person to feel down, it's okay to ask for help," she told me.

Reality

She thinks the lack of resources, services and treatment is compounding Ireland's mental health problems. "We want to highlight the fact that mental health care would not function in this country without voluntary groups, which provide vital support to state services," she says.

Corinne Phelan, who sits on committees alongside Michelle, said coping with mental health issues, at home or in the workplace, was a daily reality for many Fórsa members. "It could be the person beside you on the train, a family member, a colleague or yourself. It's time to change," she said.

The conference will feature speakers from mental health groups like See

Change and Mental Health Ireland. A number of lunchtime workshops will explore issues like stigma and workplace wellness.

And mental health is on the business agenda too, with a number of motions covering public and union policy in the area up for discussion. Some call for better support mechanisms for staff experiencing difficulties, while others demand more investment in mental health services and the staff that deliver them.

"Let's talk about it. Let's remove the stigma and let it be known that it's okay for a person to feel down, it's okay to ask for help."

Jarlath says the decision to embrace the challenge, and the stigma attached to it, is a statement that Fórsa wants to go beyond talk, to change attitudes and help develop pathways for people experiencing difficulties.

"We need a model of care that includes clinical treatment, but also incorporates support services like education, diet and therapies. We need to empower people to take a proactive view of mental health by discarding the stigma.

"Labels don't change people, attitudes do. You're still the same man, woman, partner, father, sister, cousin, wife, or friend that you were before a diagnosis," he said.

Roisin McKane works in Fórsa's Communications Unit



Mike McNamara.

Celebrations to mark the centenary of the Limerick Soviet, a self-declared Irish soviet that existed from 15th to 27th April 1919, run throughout the month of April. The Soviet ran the city for the period. The death of IRA volunteer Bobby Byrne, and the response of British military authorities, triggered a general strike organised by the Limerick Trades and Labour Council, and the creation of the Limerick Soviet. *Fórsa* Official MIKE MCNAMARA, President of the Limerick Council of Trade Unions, outlines the events of the time.

Limerick Soviet centenary

ROBERT JOSEPH (Bobby) Byrne was born on 28th November 1889 in Dublin. Following the death of his father, the family returned to their father's home city of Limerick in the Donovan's Row area.

In May 1907, Bobby commenced work as a learner in the General Post Office in Limerick, later working as a telegraph operator.



Robert Joseph (Bobby) Byrne.

He became involved with the postal workers trade union. Many Limerick workers had begun to have a new found interest in political and nationalist awareness, influenced by the writings of James Connolly and by Limerick's first working class newspaper, *The Bottom Dog*, published by the Limerick Council of Trade Unions.

Labour Day had been celebrated in Limerick for the first time on 1st May 1918. Up to ten thousand workers paraded through the city in a "striking display of the strength and solidarity of organised labour in Limerick City."

The workers passed a resolution extending "fraternal greetings to workers of all countries, paying particular tribute to our Russian Comrades who have waged such a magnificent struggle for their social and political emancipation."

By now Bobby was chairman of his local union branch. In September 1918 he attended a meeting about the Lord Lieutenant's visit to Limerick. Despite his attempts to agitate the workers, he didn't receive much support. But the effect was to expose local agitators.

He was brought before the management at the Post Office where a number of charges were levelled at him, most notably his attendance at the funeral of the Fenian John Daly in 1916. He denied a range of spurious charges levelled against him but was subsequently sacked from his job.

In November 1918 he was made Adjutant of the 2nd Battalion of the Limerick City Brigade of the IRA. The December general election saw Sinn Féin attract huge support on the promise of "using all resources to render the power of England useless in Ireland."

The police did not delay in rounding up activists. On Monday 31st December a

raiding party descended on the home of Bobby's mother, Annie. A gun and ammunition were found. Byrne was arrested on 13th January 1919 and brought to Limerick Prison.



Leader of the Soviet, John Cronin.

His subsequent trial, on Tuesday 21st January, coincided with the first shots in the War of Independence at Soloheadbeg in County Tipperary, and the first meeting of the new Dáil.

Drastic Sentence on Limerick Man was how his sentence to twelve months hard labour was reported on 3rd February.

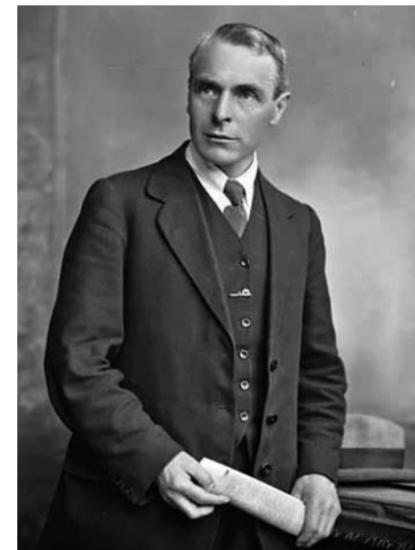
Byrne immediately set about the task of organising the prisoners to campaign for political status. The response of the authorities was swift and brutal, prisoners were shackled to their beds

and given little food or water. The prisoners went on hunger strike to secure their objectives.

After three weeks, Bobby Byrne was transferred to the Limerick Workhouse hospital in a very weak state. The prison authorities placed a jail warden and several armed police on his ward.

The local IRA units mounted a rescue on Sunday 6th April. Two armed volunteers went to the hospital, with twenty unarmed volunteers posing as visitors.

A signal rallied the volunteers to Byrne's bedside. Two constables drew their weapons, one fired at Byrne, wounding him badly. They managed to escape and Byrne was transported to Knockalisheen as his condition worsened.



Leader of the Labour Party Tom Johnson.

He died in the presence of two doctors and a priest, his mother Annie, and other family members, all of whom were arrested. Large numbers of people descended on the streets around the vicinity of the police barracks, as police and armoured cars were drafted into the city.

On 9th April 1919 the British military authorities declared Limerick a special military area. Barricades were erected with hundreds of military personnel, tanks and armoured cars. Permits were introduced to regulate the movement of people.

Byrne's funeral on 10th April drew an estimated crowd of 10,000 mourners.

The reaction of the workers to the permit system was overwhelming. On 13th April a meeting of the Limerick Trades and Labour Council declared a general strike, upwards of 15,000 workers took part. The city was at a standstill.



Barricade on Thomand Bridge.



Checking the pass on Sarsfield Bridge.

International journalists began to refer to it as the "Limerick Soviet."

Food depots were established and prices were fixed. Shops opened on the approval of the strike committee, any evidence of profiteering would result in immediate closure.

A citizen's police force was established. Gas, electricity and other essential services were allowed to operate with a skeleton crew. *The Workers Bulletin* kept the people of Limerick informed of the progress of the strike

On 17th April the TUC sent Labour Party leader Tom Johnson to Limerick to announce that the full strength of the Labour movement in Ireland would be exerted on behalf of the men and women of Limerick. A fund was established to supply the Soviet with money for purchases from outside the city. By now the Soviet was experiencing problems with the supply of fuel. Coal merchants were hostile to the strike and refused to open their yards.

As the days pressed on, tension mounted and funds supplied by the trade unions were fast disappearing. The Soviet issued its own currency, in the guise of promissory notes to be issued to the workers.

Tom Johnson assisted them in the design for the special bank notes, and

agreement was reached with a number of trusted shop-keepers. This was seen as a great victory for the strike committee. Not only did the workers of Limerick challenge the might of the British military, they had now also challenged the Central Bank of England.

On 24th April, after long and protracted discussions, the strike leaders shifted their position. A compromise offer would end the Soviet and withdraw the military permit order. The final proclamation of the Limerick Strike Committee was issued.

The leader of the Soviet, John Cronin, addressed the enormous crowd waiting in Glentworth Street. He called on the workers who could resume work, without the need for permits, to do so immediately and that those who could not "to continue in their refusal to accept this sign of subjection and slavery."

Many of the workers were triumphant, but were glad the strike was over. Others were furious and wondered if everything they had endured had been in vain. The debate about the rights and wrongs of the Limerick General Strike continued for some time after.

This is an edited extract of a longer article written by Mike McNamara, President of the Limerick Council of Trade Unions ■



Diarmaid Mac a Bhaird.

Gambling addiction is a serious issue, but it's seldom seen in the same light as other addictions. DIARMAID MAC A BHAIRD talks to Fórsa member Ciaran Kelly who says there is a need for the issue to be highlighted more, and hopes that doing so can encourage those struggling to seek help, rather than suffer in silence.

A hidden addiction



Photo: dreamstime.com

BEFORE I spoke to Ciaran the little I knew about gambling addiction comes from one well-known name in the world of Gaelic football, Oisín McConville. The 2002 All Ireland winner with Armagh has been talking about his gambling addiction publicly for a number of years. It's an issue I hadn't heard much about, which I found surprising given how serious it is.

Since 2015, the HSE's stats show that over 800 people have been treated for gambling addiction, but it admits its own figures don't paint an accurate picture of the scale of gambling addiction in Ireland. The Government has recently approved a plan to establish a gambling regulatory

authority and a new social fund, supported by levies on licensed operators, will also be introduced to support research, information campaigns and the treatment of those affected by gambling.

Early days

"I'm telling my story in the hope that readers who have, or know someone with a gambling addiction, might seek help after reading it," he begins. "It started off quite innocently. Like any child growing up in Ireland, Grand National day at Aintree was a fun day in our house. We would all stick a pin in a newspaper listing of the horses to run,

and put a bet on one that would probably fall at the first fence. I really enjoyed those days, but looking back now I think I was hooked from the very first race.

"Everything was fine up until about 20 years ago. I was still placing bets, but I noticed that the bets were getting bigger, more frequent, and beginning to spiral out of control."

Losing control

Ciaran started to reflect on how his behaviour at the time affected the people around him. "During those years of compulsive gambling I was never there for my family and friends. I was

physically there but my mind wasn't. I was always thinking of my next bet or how or where I would get the money for my next bet. I got myself into severe debt.

"I was still placing bets, but I noticed that the bets were getting bigger, more frequent, and beginning to spiral out of control."

"I was in a relationship at the time and I have three lovely children, but I gambled away any future of stability we would have had. I begged, borrowed, gambled away savings, and I lied to family and friends. I was selfish, nasty and only cared about myself and my next bet," he says.

Acknowledging that he had lost control, Ciaran describes the erratic behaviour caused by his addiction: "Gambling had taken over my life and brought me to places I thought I would never go. I often lost a week's wages in 10 minutes – an alcoholic couldn't drink their wages in an hour. You would find me on Saturday mornings looking in the window of the local bookies waiting for it to open, and I would leave last thing at night."

Getting help

Having hit a low ebb, Ciaran told his family and friends about his gambling addiction. It was an important first step, but only the beginning of a difficult journey. "It was a terrible time because I had destroyed so many people's lives as well as my own. You never think about the people you hurt, you only feel sorry for yourself because the game is up. I love my kids dearly but I put gambling before their happiness," he explains.

"The recovery programme works, but it's one day at a time. I am in a much better place today. I feel lucky to be here to tell my story."

Fourteen years ago, Ciaran sought help by attending a Gamblers Anonymous meeting for the first time. "I went to my first Gamblers Anonymous meeting and I went because I needed help and I wanted to keep other people happy. I wanted people to see that I was making

an effort. My first meetings were a blur, listening to strangers telling their story. I honestly thought 'What am I doing here?' It took me many meetings to finally admit that I had a problem."

Ciaran says he is in a much better place now, but to this day, his addiction leaves a legacy he continues to grapple with. "I'm still trying to win back trust of those dear to me. I have to keep my guard up at all times. In the first eight years of my recovery I relapsed twice.

"I had stopped attending meetings as I thought I was cured. I wasn't. Six years ago, I went back to the meetings because it was my last chance with so many people, I took it very seriously.

"I still go to meetings two to three times a week and listen to young, old, male and female speakers. Some are just hours off a bet and some years off a bet. The majority seem to be addicted to online gambling now. I have met some truly wonderful people and to be able to tell your story and not be judged is empowering. We are all in the room to help one another," he says.

One day at a time

Ciaran says he is looking forward to the future and is in his sixth year of recovery bet free. He's enthusiastic about continuing to share his story in the hope of helping others.

"I went to my first Gamblers Anonymous meeting because I needed help. I wanted people to see that I was making an effort."

"The recovery programme works, but it's one day at a time. I am in a much better place today, I have family and friends and the most amazing kids ever. I live a simple but very happy life, and I feel lucky to be here today to tell my story.

"I wanted to highlight gambling addiction among Fórsa's membership because gambling is a hidden addiction, it's compulsive and secretive. I really want to get the message out there that help is available for anyone who needs it, especially through Gamblers Anonymous."

Ciaran also said he wanted to thank the An Post branch for their support in getting the issue highlighted, and everyone involved in Gamblers Anonymous ■

Time to regulate

THE GOVERNMENT approved a plan in March 2019 to establish a gambling regulatory authority. The plan includes a new social fund, supported by levies on licensed operators, which will be used to support research, information campaigns and the treatment of those affected by gambling.

Online gambling technology is developing quickly. So quickly, in fact, that legislation written in 2013 is obsolete now due to technological developments in the industry. The Government has said it could take up to 18 months for a gambling regulator to be established.

The Minister of State with special responsibility for gambling regulation, David Stanton TD, said the decision to approve the establishment of a regulating authority is in response to a report from the Inter-Departmental Working Group on the Future Licensing and Regulation of Gambling.

The Gaming and Lotteries (Amendment) Bill 2019 will aim to modernise a range of issues pertaining to gambling including standardising the minimum gambling age at 18.

Since 2015, the HSE's stats show that over 800 people have been treated for gambling addiction but the national health body has said its own figures don't paint an accurate picture of the scale of gambling addiction in Ireland.

Gam-Anon provides support for people who've been affected by a loved one's compulsive gambling. Find out more at gamblersanonymous.ie/gam-anon ■



Diarmaid Mac A Bhaird works in Fórsa's Communications Unit ■

Unions representing non-teaching staff in the education sector were invited to make a submission in March about issues of concern for non-teaching staff in schools to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills. The Fórsa education division made a submission on behalf of a number of the professions that we represent in the sector, including SNAs, school secretaries and caretakers. The Oireachtas education committee is scheduled to discuss the union's submission on 9th April.

Fórsa submission highlights challenges for non-teaching staff in schools

Union seeks enhanced school completion status

Staff working in the school completion programme (SCP) should be transferred to education training boards (ETB) or the child and family agency Tusla to underpin governance and give national leadership to the service.

In its submission to the Oireachtas committee Fórsa said SCP employees should also be given the same employment status as other public servants.

The majority of SCP staff are employed by voluntary organisations with local boards of management. Despite providing vital services to children and communities, they are not deemed to be public servants.

Fórsa has been seeking a firm statutory basis for the programme with a national management structure and adequate funding for services, pay and access to a pension scheme.

The SCP's 248 full-time staff and 627 part-time staff give direct support to over 36,000 young people at risk of poor school attendance and participation. Its annual budget was cut from almost €33 million to less than €25 million in 2010.

The submission states: "This budget has not increased in any way and staff who have experienced pay cuts due to reduced funding have not benefited from any pay restoration. Fórsa has raised these issues with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Tusla."



Head of division Andy Pike (inset) said that plans to 'frontload' SNA allocations could reduce the incidence of precarious employment experienced by many SNAs.

Education centre staff conditions raised

Fórsa's submission to the Oireachtas committee repeated the union's call for a common set of pay and conditions for staff working in education centres. The union said the workers were employed on a range of salary scales and were not treated as public servants despite providing "key services to public servants."

The union had sought negotiations with the Department of Education and Skills to address the problem, and to ensure that staff were granted public service status.

There are 30 education centres across the country. They provide a range of

educational programmes to teachers, and are grant funded by the Department of Education and Skills.

Staff employed by the centres undertake a range of education development, project management, and clerical and administrative roles.

Range of school secretary duties highlighted

Fórsa also highlighted the very wide range of duties carried out by school secretaries. The union said most school secretaries are very poorly paid, with uncertain short-term contracts, which force many of them to sign on during the summer holidays.

Most school secretaries and caretakers are paid from ancillary grants and are not deemed to be public servants. This is currently the focus of Fórsa's Support Our Secretaries campaign, which has seen membership of the union's School Secretaries branch increase by 15% since the campaign was launched in January.

Work undertaken by school secretaries includes completing pay and pension returns for teachers, and undertaking many tasks necessary to ensure that teaching staff receive holiday pay, sick pay and other public service conditions of service.

"The majority of school secretaries work alongside colleagues with full public service status, but are locked out of the system without public service terms of employment."

Fórsa commissioned research carried out by independent employment expert, Mr Seán McHugh, which demonstrates that the school secretaries' role across all schools is one that carries with it a wide range of duties and responsibilities including:

- Reception and telephone duties
- Secretarial services, much of which is confidential and sensitive by nature
- Report preparation
- Management of school finances including cash collection, payments, wages, keeping accounts
- Administrative support for boards of management
- Managing attendance records, admissions and transfers
- Assisting with pupil welfare
- Managing school data including GDPR and other regulatory compliance.

Fórsa's submission to the committee states: "The routine work carried out by school secretaries in many instances far exceed the limits of responsibility as set out in the clerical officer job descriptions used by the Public Appointments Service for the purposes of recruiting new clerical officers across the public service."

Mr McHugh's research found that, given the sensitive and responsible nature of



Support Our Secretaries campaign, see page 18.

much of the work, school secretaries' role goes well beyond what would be expected of a clerical officer, who would be part of a team rather than working on their own as most school secretaries do.

The submission highlights the fact that the majority – around 90% – of school secretaries work alongside colleagues with full public service status, but are locked out of the system without holiday pay, sick pay, pensions or access to public service salary scales.

The remaining 10% of staff employed by Education and Training Boards (ETBs) are paid according to public service pay scales and have access to the standard benefits of public service status such as pensions and paid leave.

fora.ie/support-our-secretaries-campaign/

Written, compiled and edited by Bernard Harbor and Niall Shanahan ■

Fórsa demands consultation on SNA service

FÓRSA HAS demanded immediate consultation on Government plans to pilot changes in the funding and other arrangements for the delivery of the special needs assistants (SNA) service, which were announced by education minister Joe McHugh at the end of March.

Fórsa says SNAs fear the announcement gives the green light for the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) and individual schools to impose new and untested arrangements without consultation.

Fórsa says consultation on changes that impact on working conditions is obligatory under the Public Service Stability Agreement (PSSA), and that the service implications of any changes should also be the subject of consultation with SNAs and other stakeholders prior to implementation.

Head of the education division Andy Pike gave a cautious welcome for a

proposed national SNA training programme, which was included in the minister's proposals. He also said that plans to 'frontload' SNA allocations could reduce the incidence of precarious employment experienced by many SNAs.

Andy said: "We stand ready to work with the department, the NCSE and schools to improve the service that thousands of SNAs provide to children with special needs each school day. But this needs to be implemented following proper consultation with SNAs and other stakeholders, who need to see more detail before a properly informed view can be established."

"Fórsa recently conducted an SNA survey and consultation, which gathered the views of over 4,000 SNAs. We are in a strong position to constructively inform plans for genuine improvements in this valued service." ■



Sadhbh Coffey Duff.

In January Fórsa launched the campaign seeking fair treatment for school secretaries. Support Our Secretaries seeks respect and fair conditions for all. Currently, around 90 per cent of school secretaries are paid through their school's ancillary grant - leaving some with salaries as low as €12,000 a year. Transition year student SADHBH COFFEY DUFF is one of our guest contributors for this edition, and compiled this selection of photos and captions from the launch.

Support Our Secretaries



forsa.ie/support-our-secretaries-campaign/



Fórsa President Ann McGee (centre) with Maria Dunne, Marion Jackson and Kathleen O'Doherty.



"In 2010 we were considered public servants when we lost 5% of our pay in FEMPI cuts. So why can't we be considered public servants today in relation to our pay, terms and conditions?" Kathleen O'Doherty, Fórsa education DEC representative.



Fórsa organiser, Joan McCrohan, Deborah O'Connor, Munster SNA branch and Marion Jackson, Fórsa school secretaries' branch treasurer.



"We're very proud of the job we do and the role we play in our school communities. But it's a different type of pride that often stops us speaking out about our poor pay and conditions." Maria Dunne, Fórsa school secretaries' branch chair.



Maria Dunne, Marion Jackson, Kathleen O'Doherty, Anita O'Reilly and Liz Phelan.



"I do not believe I am indispensable but I do believe I am an important spoke in a very smooth running wheel. Therefore, I also believe I am entitled to dignity and fairness in my workplace." Marion Jackson, Fórsa school secretaries' branch treasurer.



President of Irish Congress and outgoing General Secretary of the INTO, Sheila Nunan addressing the room and lending solidarity to Support our Secretaries.



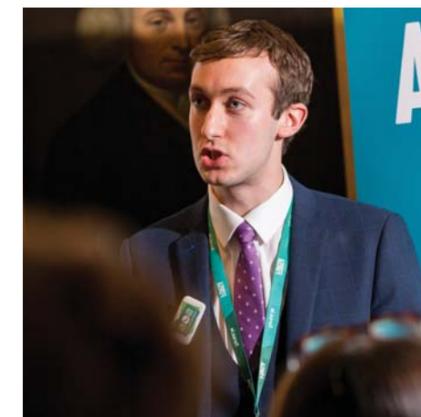
Fórsa Official Barry Cunningham outlining the current injustice with an example of one school secretary who has worked in her current school for the last 30 years is due to retire next year without a pension.



Fórsa estimates that around 90% of all school secretaries are paid through an ancillary grant, earning just over a quarter of the pay enjoyed by a department of education and skills employed secretary at the top of their scale.



"This fundamental lack of respect is unjust, impractical and unsustainable. The time has come to end this arbitrary and unfair system. The Department of Education must implement measures to treat all school secretaries fairly." Kevin Callinan, Fórsa Senior General Secretary Designate.



"Out of 681 secretaries surveyed, 66% have no pension entitlements, 47% don't get paid during the summer months and are forced to sign on and 27% have no access to sick leave." Fórsa Lead Organiser Joe O'Connor delivering some of the Fórsa survey results.



Diarmaid Mac a Bhaird.

Fórsa and other unions have launched a new campaign, More Power to You to lobby for greater powers at local government level and better local services. DIARMAID MAC A BHAIRD talks to PETER NOLAN and JOE O'CONNOR about the campaign and the upcoming local government divisional conference.

More Power to You

forsa.ie/morepower

THIS NEW Fórsa campaign, launched in March, is a collaboration between Fórsa, SIPTU and Connect trade unions, and aims to start a conversation on the future of local government in the run up to May's local elections. The launch featured a number of guest speakers, including Public Service International (PSI) general secretary Rosa Pavanelli.

Joe says the campaign is a crucial effort to address the consistent stripping away of local government functions in recent years, which he says has resulted in Ireland having the weakest local democracy in Europe.

"We're seeking commitments from parties and candidates in the May local elections on local government reform in areas such as waste, water, housing and energy, as part of our 'Local Power Pledge'."

Among the issues the campaign highlights are greater powers at local level to address the housing crisis, reform of water services, re-municipalisation of waste services, and environmental issues, including just transition policies. These will also be high on the agenda at the upcoming local government divisional conference.

"We're seeking commitments from parties and candidates in the May local elections on local government reform in areas such as waste, water, housing and energy, as part of our 'Local Power Pledge,'" he said.

Another key part of the launch was the More Power to You report on the future



"The launch of a new initiative - backed by several trade unions - to campaign for increased powers at local government level, is both a welcome and very necessary campaign," lead organiser Joe O'Connor.

of local government. Prepared by Dr. Mary Murphy of Maynooth University, the report addresses Ireland's weak local government powers and the trend of re-municipalisation in Europe.

Nuala and Dorit

Head of the local government and municipal employees divisions Peter Nolan talked me through developments in these areas.

"Re-municipalisation is the process of bringing services back into public control. In Ireland, it's a subject which is looking increasingly significant with regard to waste management."

The More Power to You report highlights the positive impact of waste services in Oslo and water services in Montpellier being re-municipalised, with improved services and prices for customers and better conditions for workers.

Peter refers to a section of the More Power to You report, which compares the experience of Irish citizen (Nuala) to the average day for Danish citizen (Dorit), in the context of their use of services provided and overseen by local authorities.

Dorit sees her local authority repairing a pothole on her way to drop her daughter to crèche, before going for a swim in her local recreation centre and later interacting with social services through work. For Dorit, all of these services are local authority run. Nuala's day by comparison, involves far more interaction with primarily private companies.

Funding deficit

The funding deficit also highlights the extent of the problem, while 65% of public funding filters through to local authorities in Denmark, in Ireland only 8% reaches local government level.

"There's a sharp contrast between the range of services in Ireland that aren't overseen by local authorities and those in the Netherlands. Rights to local representation and services at that level are enshrined in both the Irish constitution and within EU law. That is why the More Power to You campaign is so timely and important heading into local elections in May," Peter explains.

On housing, Peter said the union recently welcomed the plans to create 15 housing support officer posts in a new team within Dublin City Council (DCC).

Meanwhile, the local government division will be campaigning for greater powers at local government level to aid efforts to address the housing crisis, and that the More Power to You campaign would complement the division's work on the issue.



SIPTU Divisional Organiser Adrian Kane, Fórsa President Ann McGee, National Secretary Peter Nolan and CONNECT National Official Derek Kelleher at the More Power To You launch.

Raise the Roof

Representatives of both divisions also took part in the latest Raise the Roof rally in Cork. The most recent demonstration in the housing and homelessness campaign follows similar events in Dublin, and ahead of a rally in Galway. The event heard calls for increased funding for public housing, an end to evictions and a cap on rents.

"The funding deficit also highlights the extent of the problem, while 65% of public funding filters through to local authorities in Denmark, in Ireland only 8% reaches local government level!"

While pressure on the Government to address housing is increasing, reform of water services is also entering into a key phase. Talks on the establishment of a single water utility - and the Government's rationale for doing so by 2021 - are the next issue to be addressed in the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) facilitated talks.

Fórsa, and other water unions have set out four strands on which progress must be made to facilitate moving forward with the establishment of a single water utility. These include sustainability and revitalisation, structures and governance, employment and industrial relations and, crucially, a referendum on the public ownership of water services.

On environmental challenges, Peter said the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) called for a 'just transition forum' late last year to explore ideas for creating alternative employment for workers and communities likely to be affected by Ireland's move towards a low carbon economy. "This would also protect workers from any negative impact of these important societal adjustments.

"This is an issue which is particularly relevant to local government, as demonstrated by the recent announcement of job losses in Bord Na Móna. It's also an issue which requires greater engagement from everyone. While the interest and commitment young people have demonstrated on the issue is encouraging, it's necessary for people of all ages to get behind reforms," Peter said.

Trend

Looking ahead to the local government conference, Peter says PSI's Daria



To read the full report go to www.forsa.ie.

Cibrario will address the conference on re-municipalisation. Cibrario has been researching the growing trend toward re-municipalisation globally for a number of years, and Peter anticipates that she'll provide one of the most interesting presentations at the conference.

Peter added that "Fórsa wants the Irish public to have access to top class local services, in line with the rest of Europe. Local government functions and services should play a central part in people's lives," he said ■



Bernard Harbor.

BERNARD HARBOR and family joined over a million anti-Brexit marchers in London last month. As uncertainty about Brexit intensifies, and as populists exploit dissatisfaction with the EU, can unions and other progressives develop an attractive alternative to win over those disillusioned by the European Union?

One in a million

EARLIER IN the day it had been an effort to get him out of bed which, at that point in time, had seemed infinitely preferable to a train journey to London and the first demonstration of his life.

But now George was urging us forward through the impenetrable crowd in a vain effort to get up to the stage. Half-way down Whitehall, my nephew gave up the ghost.

I'd found it hard to see any Brexit bright side over the last two-and-a-half years. But for the moment, me and my sister were enjoying the rare pleasure of bringing daughters, nieces, nephews and their friends to the biggest UK demonstration since the anti-Iraq war protests sixteen years ago.

The good-natured crowd – over a million strong – was still leaving Park Lane, almost two miles from the blockage we were now encountering in Whitehall. Alan Partridge spoke to us from the big screen.



Bernard Harbor (second from right) with his sister Jane and nephew George at the Put It To The People rally in London on 23rd March.

massive Put It To The People event, and still nobody knows how the Brexit drama will play out. Since this article goes to print well before the next cliff-edge deadline, I'm going to follow Paul Gascoigne's famous maxim: "I don't make predictions, and I never will."

There are various outcomes on offer but, whatever the final cut, Brexit is going to end badly. That's because there's no 'better deal' on offer – for Britain, Ireland or the rest of Europe – than the arrangement that's currently in place.

Yet, serious as it is, many in Brussels are getting weary of this saga, and keen to move on to other pressing environmental and economic threats including the continent's sluggish economic performance, Trumpesque and other assaults on global trade, and the accelerating challenge of automation (see page 24).

And there are political threats too. With the extreme right already in control (or in governing coalitions) in Italy, Hungary,

Austria and Poland, this May's European Parliamentary elections will significantly change the Brussels scene, with (mostly right-wing) populists tipped to make gains in virtually every member state bar Ireland.



Even the dogs in the street...

Enter a recent policy paper from the Charter Group – a civil society collection of pro-European trade unionists and others – which recently joined the dots

by outlining the bones of a reform agenda that could start to disarm the populists with a new people-friendly vision of Europe.

It referenced the many protections for working people and others that are rooted in EU treaties, legislation and case law. These cover workplace health and safety, working time, equality and equal opportunities, maternity and paternal leave, employee consultation, and opportunities to work and study abroad.

Along with citizens' rights and consumer and environmental protections, the Charter Group says these measures are rooted in the idea of 'social Europe,' which gives citizens' rights, workers' rights, decent public services and environmental protections the same status as economic and trade matters in EU policy.

"The fallout from Brexit could present opportunities to develop and implement reforms that address the problems working people face today, and to reconnect the EU to working people."

But it says the EU's recent focus on economic liberalism has eclipsed 'social Europe' advances, with popular support for the EU ebbing away as progressive developments slowed almost to a halt.

On top of that, and as Ireland knows to its €64 billion cost, the EU's clumsy response to the Eurozone crisis was excessively deflationary, claiming millions of jobs and livelihoods and stoking the dangerous fires of populism.

Globalisation

The Charter Group says urgent steps are needed to rebalance the impact of globalisation and emerging technologies. It says progressive and democratic forces should unite around a common agenda to build a strong and sustainable Europe based on secure incomes, social protections, equality and fairness.

A comprehensive body of new EU social rights in areas like precarious work, minimum incomes, childcare, and wage undercutting is needed. And it says investment in education and training – and in regions hit by deindustrialisation

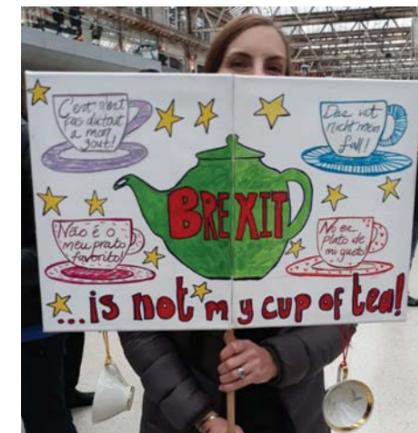


'A good natured crowd' - Bernard and family joined the million-strong rally calling for a people's vote.

and changing patterns of work – should be put in place.

The group also argues for investment to tackle climate change, with protections for working people in the transition, saying this would bring medium and long-term jobs and economic benefits.

And it calls on progressives to develop proposals for EU laws to underpin rights to trade union membership and collective bargaining, and to strengthen protections against the privatisation of public services.



Straining to make the point.

The Charter Group is convened by Blair Horan, the former general secretary of the Civil, Public and Services Union (CPSU), now part of Fórsa. He calls its latest publication an outline agenda for progressive change, which will require time, effort and determination from trade unions and others.

"Whatever its final form, the fallout from Brexit could present opportunities to develop and implement reforms that address the problems working people face today, and to reconnect the EU to

working people, their families and their communities," he says.

Blame the Etonians

The public school-educated engineers of Brexit want an extreme version of a free-market based Europe with few rights for workers, their families or their communities.

It's ironic that, although their vision is far from the interests of the people that unions represent and work to protect, they have successfully appealed to many of those angry at the EU's failure to protect living standards and rights.

"The public school-educated engineers of Brexit want an extreme version of a free-market based Europe with few rights for workers, their families and their communities."

However, the Brexit saga concludes over the coming weeks, it's up to trade unions and other progressives to make that case and seize the potential opportunity to re-frame the European project, just as we did in earlier decades.

This might seem a long way off in a world populated by noisy Trumps, Rees-Moggs, Orbáns and Le Pens. But as my nephew George discovered last month, you can achieve a lot once you've made the effort to make a start. It's time to get up!

The Charter Group proposal is available on www.chartergroup.ie



Meanwhile, over four million people (5.5 million as I write this) had signed an official parliamentary petition calling on the Government to exit Brexit. With pizza and beer to look forward to, we had good cause to feel optimistic. And yet, and yet...

Reality check

Back to reality with a bump, I'm writing this in Dublin the Monday after the



Bernard Harbor.

The impact of artificial intelligence and other new technologies on jobs and the workplace is testing the best minds in industrial relations and beyond. BERNARD HARBOR reports on some recent developments.

Why can't we all benefit from workplace automation?

TWO IN five Irish jobs could disappear as a result of automation in the coming years, according to a new academic study. Its University College Cork (UCC) authors say clerical, administrative and other office work will be among the first to be swept aside in a tsunami of new technology.

While we don't know precisely how the new wave of artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics will land, this is just the latest in a library of academic and other studies that suggest automation could have as big an impact on jobs and the organisation of work as the industrial revolution.

Former US national security advisor Tom Donilon recently identified the issue as one of the top security challenges facing governments across the world.

Speaking in February, the former advisor to Barack Obama – who also worked for presidents Clinton and Carter – ranked the future of work alongside the most terrifying geopolitical challenges including nuclear proliferation, cyber warfare, and the re-emergence of great power confrontation (code for China and the USA falling out.)

"We have conversations about trade, and trade has had negative impacts on communities in the United States. But it's not at the same scale, frankly, as these technological impacts are going to be," he said.

Radical

Donilon outlined the huge political consequences of governments failing to act. "Populism is not at its peak right now. We have a much more fundamental populist challenge in the western democracies, and one of the essential things in dealing with this is having a really serious discussion about how we're going to manage the future of work in the face of technology," he said.

Like other progressive thinkers, Donilon doesn't call for a halt to technological progress. But he does want radical government action to deal with its consequences, and to ensure that everyone in society benefits from the potentially liberating and wealth-creating power of artificial intelligence.

This theme was echoed by Fórsa's Senior General Secretary Designate at the union's recent seminar on working time.

Kevin Callinan argued that most of the benefits of increased productivity, achieved through workplace technological change, had so far gone to a small global elite – not working people and their communities.

"A former US national security advisor ranks the future of work alongside the most terrifying geopolitical challenges including nuclear proliferation, cyber warfare and the re-emergence of great power confrontation."

Adding Fórsa's voice to international trade union calls for a four-day week as part of the response to automation, he added that reduced working time was emerging as one of the central issues in international debates about the future of work.

Fair share

"Trade unions don't want to impede economic progress in a twenty-first



Photo: dreamstime.com

century Luddite escapade. We know that technology has the potential to take a lot of the drudgery and danger out of current workplace tasks, while increasing prosperity and creating many new jobs. But we are determined to secure a fairer share of the benefits of economic growth and technological advances for all workers in all sectors of the economy, including through reduced working time," he said.

More recently, a union-backed economic think-tank has called for an expanded role for trade unions and collective bargaining to protect job quality in the face of workplace automation. The Nevin Economic Research Institute's (NERI) *The future of work: The impact of automation technologies for job quality in Northern Ireland* also highlighted the need for improved social security supports and a broader focus on skills.

NERI says automation may do away with jobs, but that it will probably create more employment than it destroys. It adds that assessing the impact for workers demands an evaluation of both the jobs lost and those that might be created. But it concludes that job quality is unlikely to improve without direct policy intervention.

Public services

Fórsa has also argued that public service management should work with unions to ensure that the introduction of new technologies does not lead to job losses or poorer services.

"We will support properly thought-out automation, controlled by workers whose aim will be the continued enhancement and delivery of public services. Citizens do not want to talk to machines."

In a paper presented to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in February, the union called for steps to ensure that new recruits are equipped to thrive in increasingly-automated work environments, and said older workers should get help to adapt.

Our head of Civil Service Derek Mullen, who penned the paper, said the union would not oppose the introduction of new technologies like AI. "But technological advancement should not be at the cost of services or jobs," he said.

He pointed to the win-win experience of Revenue where the introduction of new forms of work organisation, supported by retraining, had increased the tax-take and improved audit and fraud control rather than cutting jobs.

Derek said Fórsa would not give blanket support to the replacement of people-provided services with AI. "We will support properly thought-out automation, controlled by workers whose aim will be the continued enhancement and delivery of public services. Citizens do not want to talk to machines," he said.

And he echoed Kevin Callinan's sentiments, saying that new technologies would flourish best if staff had more autonomy over their working time.

Like AI, the fledgling trade union debate about the impact of the next wave of workplace technologies on our jobs, livelihoods and workplaces looks set to develop fast over the coming months and years.

It'll have to if we're to keep abreast of the technology – and ahead of those who want to keep all the benefits for themselves.

Bernard Harbor is Fórsa's head of communications ■



Roisin McKane.

The Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) launched its People Managers' guide to supporting staff in February, designed to promote employee wellness and organisational effectiveness in the Civil Service. RÓISÍN MCKANE attended its launch and spoke to MARGARET FAGAN to find out more.

A guide to wellbeing

HOME AND life pressures can explode without warning, for anyone, at any time. Reflecting a growing awareness of potential difficulties, there's a growing trend of workplace investment into staff wellness and wellbeing.

Not only is this the right thing to do, but studies show that improving employee wellbeing reduces staff sick leave, boosts team morale and increases productivity.

The Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) is one such mechanism that the Civil Service has invested in to help and assist employees. It plays a key role in the ethos of promoting employee wellness and organisational effectiveness.

The CSEAS provides a wide range of free and confidential supports to the staff and management, and is designed to assist employees to manage work and life difficulties which, if left unattended, could potentially affect their quality of life, work performance or attendance.

Launch

In February the CSEAS launched its People Managers Guide, which aims to assist management across the Civil Service in supporting staff with work or life challenges. I attended the launch on a crisp bright spring morning at the



Aidan O'Driscoll, Susan Clarke and Patricia Murray.

Department of Foreign Affairs Ballroom in St. Stephen's Green, Dublin. The event was well attended by managers, advocacy groups and trade unions alike.

The morning kicked off with an address by Aidan O'Driscoll, secretary general of the Department of Justice and Equality, who spoke at length of the importance of this guide for all staff across the Civil

Service, and praised the careful and extensive work that had gone into its creation. Susan Clarke, CSEAS manager closed the morning by thanking all involved for their hard work.

The floor was also addressed by Patricia Murray, Chief Occupational Psychologist at the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), who gave the guide a colourfully

engaging introduction. Patricia spoke of her experience in dealing with cases that have been referred to her at the HSA, and stressed the importance of being proactive and forthcoming when dealing with staff who are struggling with work or life challenges.

Support

So what is the guide all about? I spoke to Margaret Fagan, employee assistance officer with the CSEAS to find out more.

"Our job here in the CSEAS is two-fold" explained Margaret. "We provide support to all staff in the Civil Service. The service is designed to assist employees manage or resolve both work related and personal issues. In addition to this, we also work with managers who are looking for guidance on how best to help and manage employees experiencing difficulty."

"Confidentiality is very important, and it's vital that employees know they can avail of the service in the knowledge that information will not be disclosed to a third party."

Margaret went on to explain how the need for this guide came about. "The People Managers Guide was born from both experience and necessity," said Margaret. "More and more, we found managers looking for advice. We decided to put together a 'how-to' guide to assist management in helping staff.

"We had an understanding of the types of concerns we needed to address, and we set up focus groups to establish a comprehensive list of issues. All in all we have seventeen topics included in the guide. This aims to give managers guidance on dealing with a variety of issues, ranging from bereavement to alcohol dependency to stress at home or work," she explains.

It's clear from reading through the guide that time and work have been invested by the team. It's comprehensive and extensive, plainly signposting the resources available to management and staff to best assist an employee in difficulty.

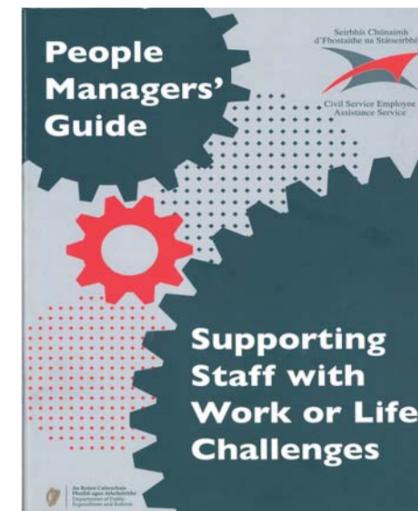


CSEAS team Anne Duffy, Margaret Fagan and Deirdre Maye.

The handbook will be a useful tool in the workplace, and will undoubtedly support managers trying to navigate the difficulties, or previously uncharted waters, of helping a staff member experiencing a work or personal challenge.

Self-care

The guide includes useful advice on how best to have difficult conversations, which can be intimidating for some. Critically, the guide also provides advice on self-care for managers who are providing assistance, an important aspect which can sometimes be forgotten.



People Managers' Guide.

Margaret outlined the manner in which employees can avail of the programme and explained that confidentiality is at its core.

"Staff members can reach out to us for help directly. We do have cases however, where a manager makes contact with us

on behalf of a staff member for whom they have concerns.

"If a manager contacts us regarding a member of staff they will be afforded the opportunity to discuss these concerns in an anonymised and confidential environment.

Confidentiality is very important, and it's vital that employees know they can avail of the service in the knowledge that information will not be disclosed to a third party," Margaret explains.

"We provide support to all staff in the Civil Service. The service is designed to assist employees to manage or resolve both work related and personal issues."

She says feedback so far has been very positive. "Managers have welcomed the guide and see it as an easy and simple tool. It can sit on a manager's desk and when they encounter a situation where a staff member is in difficulty, they can easily flick to the relevant section in order to assist them as best they can."

The People Managers guide is available online to all managers across the Civil Service, and the distribution of hard copies is underway. Employee assistance officers are also providing training in departments on the use of the guide.

For more information, or to avail of the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service email, cseas@per.gov.ie or call 076-1-000-030 ■



Niall Shanahan.

As Forsa's Services and Enterprises division prepares for its divisional conference on 22nd May, NIALL SHANAHAN spoke to head of division ANGELA KIRK about the range of issues the division will be discussing in Sligo.

Under Ben Bulben



Angela Kirk (left) joined CE supervisors at the Department of Finance offices in Dublin on 18th February. The rally was one of a number of protests organised across the country, coinciding with a one day strike action by supervisors and assistant supervisors on the pension issue.

Photos: Conar Healy, pictureitphotography.ie

2018 WAS a critical year for the union's Services and Enterprises division. Aviation issues cast a long shadow over much of the division's activities and attracted a great deal of attention.

Aside from the pilot strike and cabin crew recognition agreements secured with Ryanair, the division was also making sure its newly expanded membership was settling in after the amalgamation that created Fórsa.

With around 7,000 in membership, the division is diverse, representing workers in commercial and non-commercial semi-state organisations, as well as private companies in aviation and communications and community and local enterprises

Among these are the An Post branches (see panel), and a number of North/South bodies created under the Good Friday Agreement.

Head of division Angela Kirk says the division's motions to conference reflect the wider concern among Fórsa members about pay movement, organisation and, because it's likely to affect more members of the Services and Enterprises division, the looming question of Brexit.

"One of the key items that we'll be discussing is the current public service agreement (the PSSA). Like everyone else we are keen to ensure that any variation or improvements secured by any group covered by the agreement must be extended to all public servants, regardless of what sector they're working in.

"Recent developments, including confirmation that the PSSA is capable

of dealing with grade claims, are of keen interest to many members working in state agencies," she says.

Community sector restoration

Angela says a continuing challenge is the restoration of pay and conditions in the Community Pillar of the division. Many members in this sector remain subject to pay cuts, reduced working time and similar measures imposed during the economic crisis.

"Pay restoration for these members remain high on the agenda, and we're encouraged by progress made by our colleagues in Health and Welfare with

Section 39 agencies. There's still a lot of work to do," she says (See *Partnership workers push for restoration* on page 8).

The division also represents workers in a number of North/South bodies (for example, Waterways Ireland and Safefood Ireland), some of which are facing the massive uncertainties of Brexit, as well as challenges emerging due to the continuing absence of the Legislative Assembly in Stormont.

"We anticipate that members of our division will be the most affected by Brexit, and we're keen to engage in talks with the Irish Government to ensure both job security and the seamless continuity of services," Angela says.

More immediately, the absence of the Assembly in Northern Ireland has caused problems. Angela explains: "Foras na Gaeilge are a cross-border body responsible for the promotion of the Irish language, and work in conjunction with the Ulster-Scots agency.

"Brexit, whenever it happens - hard or soft - is likely to deepen the existing problems of delayed approval of posts in North/South bodies."

"They're having trouble getting approval to fill posts by the North-South ministerial council, because posts need to be approved both by DPER and the equivalent body in Northern Ireland, but there's nobody up there. Consequently, posts are not being filled. The longer that continues, the greater a problem it becomes. They're simply not making any decisions, so Brexit, whenever it happens - hard or soft - is likely to deepen the existing problems," she says.

CE Supervisors

The union's long-running effort to win pension justice for community employment supervisors continues. They've been denied any occupational pension provision despite a 2008 Labour Court ruling.

The supervisors went on strike on 18th February, and rallied at a number of locations across the country, including the Department of Finance offices in Dublin, to highlight the problem. The CE supervisors' campaign is being run jointly with SIPTU, and a general meeting in late March considered the options for escalating their action.

Angela said the union is engaging in a campaign of political lobbying ahead of the local elections on 24th May, in addition to national protests. Increased industrial action, with a view to closing the schemes, remains a possibility.

Aviation

Angela says aviation remains a hive of activity for union recruitment and organisation. "We're very encouraged by

the response of cabin crew since we signed the recognition agreement with Ryanair and cabin crew agencies last year.

"There has been a surge of interest while, more recently, cabin crew at Stobart, which provides the regional service to Aer Lingus, have asserted their desire to be represented by Fórsa for collective bargaining purposes (see *Stobart Air cabin crew ballot for industrial action* on page 5) ■

An Post branch



Hazel Gavigan.

Fórsa's An Post branch represents over 250 members across all areas of the service. HAZEL GAVIGAN spoke to branch chair RICHARD DEEGAN who works in Central Operations in the GPO about the kind of work Fórsa members do at work and on the branch.

"We have a broad spread of members with many people working on two of the organisation's biggest contracts - the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) which looks after the likes of prize bonds and savings certs, and Social Welfare which holds responsibility for the distribution of unemployment benefit, state pensions and children's allowance but to name a few."



Richard Deegan.

explains: "We were so grateful for the union's backing on this issue as we immediately stood up to management saying we weren't going to surrender our terms and conditions.

"Through positive negotiations this proposal was taken off the table and we had our conditions ring-fenced and we secured flexible working hours for all our members."

Richard emphasizes the branches' pride in the union's democratic decision-making structures as they are unique to many other organisations.

"We take our lead from the bottom up and prioritise the members' needs. Others often allow important decisions be made at a central level which then get filtered down, but that's not how we operate.

"This can sometimes be a struggle however, as management tends to prefer working with groups who make fast choices without proper consultation. We just hope that our integrity means more to members and they can appreciate that our method is fair and just," he says.

There was an incident recently whereby the company were looking to make savings and so, flexi-time was on the agenda to be scrapped. Richard

"Management tends to prefer working with groups who make fast choices without proper consultation. We just hope that our integrity means more to members and they can appreciate that our method is fair and just."

At conference Richard said the branch is hoping to get support of delegates for a number of proposals put forward by the branch. "But we're mostly looking forward to some lively debate and strengthening our relationships with the other branches in the division," he says ■



Niall Shanahan.

Fórsa's retired members' vocational group continues to develop various strands of work and activity. More recently they've established their presence on the Fórsa website (forsa.ie/retired_members/), providing information on pay and pensions, the committee's campaigning work and the value of membership for retired members. NIALL SHANAHAN had a chat with them just after their March meeting.

Retired vocational group go online

forsa.ie/retired_members/



The elected council of the Retired Members' vocational group; Kevin Armstrong, Frank Brannigan, Martin Bridgeman, John Cluskey, Pat Conneely, Michael Doyle, Mick Duffy, Seamus Fitzgerald, Dick Fitzgerald, Pat Foley, Joe Gavin, Tony Gogarty, Siobhan Ní Gríofa, Micheál Greenan, Aubrey Halley, Joe Heffernan, Jack McCarthy, Pat McNulty, Jim Nealon, Frances Quigley, Paddy Quinn, Michael Rice, Joe Sherlock, Gerry Walsh, Sean Whelan.

"THERE'S A lot to think about and a lot do when you retire. This is a group whose primary focus is the pension rate and retired members' conditions, and since the reduction in pay, seeking the full restoration of the pension," explains Brian Burke, chair of Fórsa's Retired Members' vocational group.

The mood among these veteran union activists varies. As we take some photos during their monthly committee meeting, the atmosphere in the room is one of focused seriousness, a collective desire to attend to the matters at hand.

Later, when we go outside for a photo, there is joking and slugging and an easy camaraderie which reflects many years of shared activism.

Brian explains that it's been more than eleven years since some retired members have had an increase in their pension. "The Retired Members' vocational group, working with the Alliance of Public Servants, has made significant progress in restoring public servants pensions but more needs to be done.

"Around twenty per cent of pensioners are still awaiting full restoration with no end date in sight. It is also a fact that some pensioners haven't received an increase in over ten years," he adds.

Among the group is retired Fórsa NEC member - and former IMPACT senior vice president - Paddy Quinn. A retired CE supervisor, Paddy is one of the many retired members who supported the February strike and rally at the Department of Finance (see page 29). CE supervisors' have no access to any occupational pension scheme, despite a 2008 Labour Court recommendation. The fight continues.

Paddy explains that many Fórsa retired members have not sought membership as retired members. "Most branches

have worked to encourage members to maintain their union membership, or to re-join following retirement.

"As a group we're continuing to pursue this and seek to have membership continue in retirement on what is called an 'opt-out' basis in future. This, we hope, will increase the membership density of retired members and our bargaining position within the union."

The maximum annual subscription for retired members is €96, depending on pension value. "The potential financial and discount benefits alone make

"We want members to know who we are and where we are, and that we're the voice for retired members within the Fórsa family."

membership an attractive option," Paddy explains.

With plans to boost the profile of the vocational group at the upcoming round

of divisional conferences, the group is keen to ensure members who are planning to retire have a voice in the union beyond their retirement date.

Brian adds: "We want members to know who we are and where we are, and that we're the voice for retired members within the Fórsa family. That's why we've established the page on the Fórsa website, to create a one-stop-shop for retired and retiring members who want to find out more."

Check out the retired members' group page at forsa.ie/retired_members/ ■

Digging deep for Castlecomer doc

SINCE HIS retirement from the HSE Martin Bridgeman has continued to devote time and energy to his love of local radio, as well as playing an active part in Fórsa's Retired Members' vocational group.

As presenter of *Ceol Anocht* on Tuesdays and Thursdays (10pm to midnight), on KCLRfm Martin curates an eclectic mix of quality music, providing a platform for Irish musicians.

"With local radio you've got to be able to turn your hand to anything" Martin tells me. That means anything from news to long-form interviews and, more recently, producing the station's Glanbia-sponsored *Farm Show*.

"Martin researched, produced, edited and presented the five-part radio documentary, as the story of Castlecomer's unique mining history intrigued him."

In April the first of a five-part documentary about the coal mining history of Castlecomer will be broadcast on the station. Martin researched, produced, edited and presented the five-part radio documentary, as the story of Castlecomer's unique mining history intrigued him.

"It's called *Three Miles Over and Three Miles Down*, which references the distance some of the miners had to

travel to the Deerpark Colliery mine and the journey underground to the coalface. Mining started there in the 1640s.

"At its peak there were around two thousand people involved with the mining industry in that part of north Kilkenny," he explains.

The Castlecomer mine closed in 1969, displaced mainly by the switch to diesel. Martin's documentary series reaches back to pre-history and the formation of the coalfield, and brings the story up to the present day, and the commercial revival of Castlecomer.

"There was a huge geological interest in the fossils that were found in Castlecomer as these provided a quality comparison for subsequent discoveries, and were used by Charles Darwin's team to help prove his theory of evolution," he explains.

Conditions in the coal mines were very difficult. Low pay, poor housing and a lack of washing facilities were key concerns. In the 1920s, Nixie Boran and some of the local miners formed a branch of the Revolutionary Workers' Group.

Following a visit to the Soviet Union, Boran returned to Castlecomer to help form Castlecomer Workers' Union, later renamed as The Irish Mine and Quarry Workers' Union.

They sought to improve pay and working conditions for the miners but faced opposition from the mine owners and local people, including the clergy, because of its supposed communist connections.



Martin Bridgeman.

Martin says the union was well organised and very active. "The story of their clash with the local clergy is the focus of the fourth episode.

"We also talk to the women of the community, daughters and wives of the mine workers, who themselves seemed rarely to speak of the experience of the mines.

"We look at the struggle for compensation for silicosis or 'miner's lung' which many of the miners fell victim to also," he says.

The documentary also looks at the effect locally of the mining industry's departure from the area in 1969. "In recent years Castlecomer has thrived as the Discovery Park, a new hotel, and Michelin star restaurant have all contributed to the revival of the town, which is great to witness fifty years after the fact," says Martin.

It's hoped the documentary, which is supported by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, will broadcast in late April on KCLR and the series will appear as a podcast in due course on kclr96fm.com ■

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International Women's Day



Hazel Gavigan.

On the eve of International Women's Day, 150 trade unionists gathered in Newcastle Co. Down for the Irish Congress of Trade Unions' (ICTU) two-day women's seminar. HAZEL GAVIGAN was there.

Women empowered

THE 2019 Congress Women's Seminar was opened by ICTU General Secretary, Patricia King who reflected on the continuing battle for gender equality. She emphasised the struggle still faced by women demonstrated (not exclusively) by the gender pay gap (which is currently about 14% in Ireland.)

Patricia explained that gender equality is not only ethical and just, but is an economic imperative – "the IMF (International Monetary Fund) claims that up to 10% of GDP is lost as a result of gender inequality in our labour market."

Patricia also took the opportunity to announce ICTU's intention to launch a leadership and mentoring programme for the trade union movement. "Women's empowerment happens on the ground in the workplace and Congress aims to facilitate that support by training people to assist each other via the programme," she said.



Leading Fórsa activist and Chair of the ICTU women's committee, Margaret Coughlan.

endeavours to further their careers both in the workplace and in the trade union movement. We often aren't naturally drawn to putting ourselves forward for leadership positions and so this programme will offer encouragement and support to those who need it most."

Fórsa President, Ann McGee spoke on a panel of female trade unionists from Ireland and the UK on the challenges and opportunities women in leadership positions face. Describing her average week, much of which is spent on the road. "I feel the union world forgets you have a life outside the movement – family, friends and a job," she said.

Ann said the challenge of union work eating into personal or family time is faced by many women. Fórsa would not exist without the lay representatives at branch level where nearly 60% of our activists across the country are women who give up their time on a voluntary basis.

Ann also emphasised the vital position female engagement plays in our communities. "Women's full participation is essential not only for their empowerment but also for the advancement of society as a whole," she said.

As well as workshops and panels across the two days, the delegation heard from two key note speakers. Director of Equality at the International Trade Union Confederation, Chidi King gave an update on the work at the International Labour Organisation towards a new international convention on violence and harassment in the world of work.

Meanwhile, the Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), Esther Lynch spoke about their call for people, especially women, to vote for female candidates in the May elections who support gender equality and trade union demands for a fairer Europe for all workers ■



Fórsa President Ann McGee speaking on International Women's Day.

After much debate and contributions from many delegates, chair of the ICTU Women's Committee and Fórsa Official, Margaret Coughlan proposed a motion to make the programme available exclusively to women.

Margaret told delegates: "It's important that women are supported in their



Niall McGuirk.

In March, Fórsa's national executive backed a proposal to become part of an alliance of over 60 civil society organisations working together to ensure Ireland keeps its promise to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), both at home and abroad. NIALL McGUIRK is chair of Fórsa's Civil Service division. Here he outlines why he's backing the Coalition 2030 campaign.

Working together, everything is possible



Photo: courtesy Irish Congress of Trade Unions

"Small actions work when we're all doing them together" - Congress has been working to ensure that trade unions here are aware of the Sustainable Development Goals and use them in their work.

IN A previous life I was a Global Solidarity Champion. In a way, it reminded me of my time as a kid watching *Champion the Wonder Horse* on TV. I could race along on my horse empowering people after delivering the worst news imaginable.

You want hunger and poverty? Western Sahara. You want war and killing at an unimaginable scale? Yemen. You want denial of human rights? Bahrain. You want to be killed as a trade unionist? Colombia. You want religious persecution? Take your pick, too many to choose from.

I tried to explain to people I knew that, as we slipped from one humanitarian crisis to another, there was something we could actually do about it. Start with a petition or a postcard.

Small actions work when we're all doing them together, and there were some minor victories along the way. Rosalba Gaviria Toro, a trade union and human rights activist, was detained and imprisoned, without trial, by Colombian authorities in March, 2009. Following sustained international campaigning by thousands of supporters worldwide - lots of people engaged in small actions - she was released without charge in June 2011.

Responding to crisis

As trade union members many of us would have been shocked at the scenes of people fleeing war in Syria and desperate for some ray of hope. Our movement is all about dignity and humanity, and understanding that we

don't have to feel helpless when others need our solidarity and support.

The recently launched Community Sponsorship Programme attempts to shine a light, giving communities the opportunity to be part of the response to the ongoing humanitarian refugee crisis in a real and life changing way. It's heartening to see people in Dunshaughlin and Wicklow trying to make Ireland a land of 100,000 welcomes for families escaping war.

Green deal

Twenty years ago the UN agreed to eight millennium development goals (MDGs) with an aim to eradicate extreme poverty and increase education and healthcare for all by 2015.

Environmental sustainability was included as awareness grew about the increasing dangers of climate change. These warning signs are increasing and formed part of the agenda at Fórsa's "Green New Deal" event which took place in early April.

The self-imposed deadline to achieve these MDGs for 191 UN member states was 2015. And, not unlike well-known political party who campaigned under the slogan "A lot done - more to do", those MDGs are now SDGs, or "Sustainable Development Goals." The number of goals is now 17 and the commitment includes biannual reporting until 2030.

Bottom of the class

Ireland's scorecard doesn't cover itself in glory as we're near the bottom of the class in Social Justice Ireland's Progress Index 2019. We rank 11th out of the 15 countries that made up the EU prior to its expansion in 2004.

So, yes. We have a lot more work to do.

But it's definitely worth doing.

Consider the type of world we can aspire to. A world free from poverty is SDG number one. Zero hunger is SDG number two, while good health and wellbeing comes next. That's how to view the Sustainable Development Goals and how to support them, each one as a step to a better world.

"Our movement is all about dignity and humanity, and understanding that we don't have to feel helpless when others need our solidarity and support."

The recent UN report on climate change gave us 12 years last October to halt the speed of global warming. We all know there are no jobs on a dead planet. Equally, we know the stakes are much higher than that phrase suggests.

We know the dangers, we know something needs to be done. It's OK to feel a bit overwhelmed, but let me introduce you to SDG 13: "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts."

What does that mean? SDG 13 aims to reach its goals in conjunction with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, by including climate

change plans in national policies. It focuses on strengthening countries' capacity to react to natural disasters caused by climate change.

"The challenge now is to incorporate these goals into our work, as trade union members and activists."

The goal is to start the Green Climate Fund to support developing countries to counteract the occurrence of climate change.

To do list

The challenge now is to incorporate these goals into our work, as trade union members and activists.

Take, for example, the Just Transition paper that ICTU is currently working on. It's linked into three of the goals; decent work (SDG 8); sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11); and climate action (SDG 13).

Take the Fórsa School Secretaries campaign. That can be linked into SDG 8. Or our recent Inspire training for women: SDG 5, gender equality.

The list goes on, and the more we link our activities to goals the more we can promote their benefits for everyone.

Coalition 2030 is an alliance of over 60 civil society organisations working

together to ensure Ireland keeps its promise to achieve these Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Now that Fórsa has aligned itself with the Coalition, we'll advocate for the implementation of these goals. It's not just about words, it's about actions too.

Small actions from each and every one of us that will help.



Just like a postcard or a signature on its own didn't free Rosalba, but the sustained collective actions of many together.

Let's do this ■

Agenda 2030 - what relevance for trade unions?

by David Joyce

AGENDA 2030 is the global development agenda for the entire world up to 2030. It contains a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Goal 8 covers decent work and economic growth and has a set of specific targets under a range of headings including sustained per-capita economic growth, higher levels of economic productivity and by 2030, "achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value."

Other goals include ending poverty, gender equality and climate action.

Congress has been working to ensure that trade unions here are aware of the goals and use them in their work. We are also part of Coalition 2030.

We're delighted to welcome Fórsa as a new member of Coalition 2030 and as part of this global movement to ensure that Governments live up to their commitments.

More on trade unions and Agenda 2030 are available at ictu.ie/globalsolidarity/agenda-2030/

David Joyce is Equality and International Development Officer with ICTU ■



Aingeala Flannery.

AINGEALA FLANNERY loves books and has a lifelong love for the library service since the mobile library first rolled into the housing estate that was her childhood home. Despite a few years of estrangement, the love affair continues. Aingeala hails the highly responsive and expanded services of the library and the abolition of overdue fines.



For the love of books

Photo: dreamstime.com

I MET my first boyfriend at the public library in Clondalkin. He wrote a note in red Biro on a scrap of copybook, threw it over the reference shelf, and I caught it. We went out for about a fortnight. I was twelve; he was twelve and a half; nearly thirteen.

The previous year, we'd moved to Dublin from a tiny village in south Kilkenny that had two pubs, a national school, and a shop that sold everything and nothing simultaneously—but it had no library. The estate we lived in seemed to have been dropped, by accident rather than by design, onto the rural landscape, and because there were no other houses

around, it was called simply 'The Estate'. There wasn't much to do in The Estate, so when the mobile library rolled in every few weeks, we bolted outside and lined up along the roadside, the way children in cities do for ice-cream vans.

I gobbled up every *Malory Towers* and *St Clare's* book I could get my hands on. If the neighbours got there first, I'd have to settle for a dog-eared *Nancy Drew Mystery Story*; *The Clue of the Velvet Mask* and *The Ringmaster's Secret* among the most memorable of an instantly forgettable lot. Dozens of library loans later, when we upped sticks for what my parents called 'The Big

Smoke', my agricultural bearing and accent went unheeded. I had social currency among my townie classmates; I'd outgrown Enid Blyton, and was first to introduce them to the more risqué works of Judy Blume.

Books for all

For my entire life I assumed that mobile libraries, like tractors and toppers, exist only outside Dublin—until I spotted one parked outside Sundrive Park in Drimnagh. It's either lost, or broken down, I thought. But no, Dublin City Libraries provide a mobile library service

to housing estates across Dublin, from Bluebell to Donnycarney and beyond. I would feel ashamed of my ignorance if I wasn't so relieved to live in a country that still attaches value to such things; to reading and to books—not only for those who can access and afford them—but for all.

"There wasn't much to do in 'The Estate,' so when the mobile library rolled in every few weeks, we bolted outside and lined up along the roadside, the way children in cities do for ice-cream vans."

There are, I've since discovered, thirty-one mobile libraries in Ireland. And no less than 330 library branches. I've always had more of a head for stories than for figures, but here's a thought: there are 12 million books in the online library catalogue; you can reserve whatever book you want and pick it up at your local branch.

Irish libraries are the first in the world to offer this service—essentially it's like the biggest bookshop on the planet, but everything in it is free. I feel rich when I go to the library, and this is because it's the only time I can have whatever I want. Greedily, I'll grab a couple more books that I probably won't read, but I'll take them anyway, because I can. Better still, I ask for things they don't have in the local bookshops. This week a librarian in Fermoy dispatched a collection of Lucia Berlin stories to Rathmines library for me, I collected it along with a DVD of *The Sound of Music*, which is not on Netflix. Thank you Cavan Libraries, my son needs it to rehearse for his school play.

Cold War

Full disclosure: my dealings with librarians have sometimes been less than genial. There was the small matter of the novel I left behind on holidays, and the huge fine that resulted when I ignored the overdue notices, and put off informing Dublin City Libraries that Colum McCann was now being enjoyed by a different international reader every week at a pensão on the Algarve. I eventually confessed, and tried to cut a deal. No clemency was shown. I got slapped with a hefty penalty, plus a

restock charge—and I fell out of love with the library.

We were estranged for years. And believe me, they were long, lean years, the country was in recession and every cent of disposable income I had was spent on pre-school picture books at Dubray. But these were just a gateway to the more addictive *Diary of A Wimpy Kid*, not to mention the allure of blockbusters like *Mr Stink* and *Gangsta Granny*. I remember seeing David Walliams on the telly, and thinking 'I paid for that suit, but you're wearing it, while I sit here eating frozen pizza, with two-and-half briquettes on the fire.' The next day I started afresh with the library, and we've been inseparable ever since.

There are some spectacular libraries in Ireland, including Lexicon in Dun Laoghaire with its floor to ceiling glass and uninterrupted sea views, and the very smart and modern Tullamore Central Library. But I have a soft spot for the original Carnegie Trust libraries, among them the 1910 Clondalkin Village library, and my rather grand local branch in Rathmines.

"This week a librarian in Fermoy dispatched a collection of Lucia Berlin stories to Rathmines library for me, I collected it along with a DVD of The Sound of Music, which is not on Netflix. Thank you Cavan Libraries, my son needs it to rehearse for his school play"

In the winter months, people go there for warmth and for the newspapers, in July and August it's filled with small children wrestling enormous books onto the loans desk, asking if they've enough stamps on their reading card yet for a Summer Stars pencil and ruler. My branch, like many others, offers IT training, study spaces, public internet access, a film club, a reading group, lectures, writing workshops, and most importantly—evidence of taxpayers' money well spent.

Money well spent

I bristle when I hear begrudgery about the level of funding given to libraries by

local authorities and the Exchequer. It always comes from people who've never set foot in a library, which is their choice, but nor can they tell you how much library services cost. For the record, between 1998 and 2012, a total of €131 million was invested by the Exchequer in library buildings; this was co-funded by local authorities and 95 new libraries were opened.

"There are close to 800,000 registered members in Ireland, but only 16 per cent of the population actively use the library service"

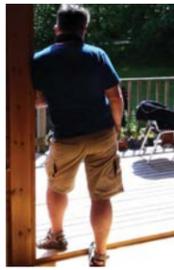
The money was spent on books, on developing online access and on digitising local history content. People have responded by using libraries more, particularly during the recession when the number of books on shelves went up by 55 per cent and the number of library visits rose by 15 per cent.

Earlier this year there was much ado about the headline grabbing decision to get rid of local authority library fines, even for historic offenders. It followed on from a pilot scheme in Sydney, Australia, where fines were abolished and thousands of long-term overdue items were returned, it became clear that people don't bring back late returns because they ignore the reminders and then feel embarrassed that they've let it go on for so long.

The decision by Libraries Ireland to follow the Australian's lead was controversial. Truth be told, local authority libraries have been phasing out fines for some time, including an amnesty in 2018 for a gentleman who returned to Thurles library, 53 years overdue, a biography of the temperance reformer Fr Theobald Mathew. In more punitive times, he would have been hit with a bill of almost a thousand euro.

Under this new, more merciful approach, those who don't return long overdue library books will have their membership suspended, but will not be fined. It's hoped this will encourage people to use the library more often. There are close to 800,000 registered members in Ireland, but only 16 per cent of the population actively use the library service. The intention is to get that up to 30 per cent. Take it as an invitation to return that early edition McGahern, before it turns to dust. In the library at least, your sins have been forgiven.

Aingeala Flannery is a writer. You can follow her on Twitter @missflannery



Daniel Devery.

Beer, cheese, bread, chocolate, yoghurt, soy sauce, wine. A small selection of delicious food and drink that all have one thing in common. They are all products of the process of fermentation, and fermented foods are having a bit of a moment. DANIEL DEVERY says the good news is there are fermented foods with amazing health benefits. The better news is, they're delicious.

Fermento fizz and pickled pleasure



Photo: dreamstime.com

FOOD TRENDS come and go, but the increasing popularity of fermented foods is worth paying attention to. For the most part, they're produced using ancient techniques of food preservation and processing that are slow and require little in the way of technology or energy.

The trend in fermented foods is driven by their increased presence on

fashionable restaurant menus, a growing interest in food sustainability and in the health benefits associated with different types of fermented food.

Chefs such as René Redzepi of Noma in Copenhagen argues that fermentation is the future of cooking, while David Chang (perhaps best known here for the Netflix series *Ugly Delicious*) has even built a fermentation lab to understand

how to capture the nuances of bacterial processed flavour.

Cold cooking

Preserving vegetables in the deep winter months is why pickled vegetables and fish have been a staple in Scandinavian countries for millenia. The fermentation process locks in the

nutrients of fresh vegetables while healthy bacteria 'cook' the food in an anaerobic (oxygen-free) environment.

Take the Korean staple Kimchi, a traditional side dish usually made of napa cabbage, chilli powder, spring onions, garlic and ginger. In Korean households this is made in large batches once or twice a year, and has sustained the supply of vegetables through the heat of summer and the deep cold of winter months for thousands of years.

The probiotic aspect of fermented drinks and vegetables is an area of growing interest, as maintaining a healthy gut (or biome) turns out to be a vital element in maintaining our overall health, including our mental health.

Similarly, sourdough bread combines flour, water and salt with a sourdough starter bubbling with wild yeast. Sourdough bread has exploded in popularity in recent years. The current wave of popularity can be traced back to the Tartine Bakery in San Francisco (visit tartinebakery.com), the city in which the bread was a vital staple for the gold prospectors in the mid-19th century.

Probiotic

Sourdough and pickled vegetables have taken up residence in a growing number of restaurants and cafes across the country. Some, such as the Fumbally Stables (adjacent to the Fumbally Café in Dublin 8 - visit thefumballystables.ie) are offering classes and workshops on sourdough baking, pickling and creating your own fermented probiotic drinks.

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The intestinal microbiota in our gut work to digest and absorb our food, and it turns out that feeding these guys with a regular diet that includes healthy bacteria (such as lacto-bacillus, found on the surface of vegetables and an active ingredient in the fermentation process), will help boost our immune

system, improve digestion and generally keep us in better overall health and mood.

There's a growing body of research on the link between good gut health and its benefits for our mental health. While the modern dietary pattern has been linked to increased rates of obesity and related health problems, there appears to be evidence that it also contributes to depression and other mental health problems. Consequently, researchers are now looking at the links between maintaining a healthy biome and good mental health.

Ultimately, the secret ingredient of this fermenting revolution is flavour. Fermented foods taste really good. The process heightens the natural flavour of the ingredients involved - think about the difference in flavour between a fruit juice and a good glass of wine, or between milk and a mature blue cheese.

Fermentation introduces complexity, acidity, sometimes even a bit of 'stink', all in the service of a more complex flavour.

Home made

My own experiments with fermentation at home include sauerkraut (cabbage pickled with salt and spices), milk kefir (milk fermented with a symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast or 'scooby') and sourdough bread.

Of those three, the kefir is probably the hardest sell to other members of the household, but it's very satisfying. A drinkable version of natural yoghurt, it's been a staple for centuries in Eastern Europe.

"Fermentation introduces complexity, acidity, sometimes even a bit of 'stink', all in the service of a more complex flavour".

My sourdough starter is almost three years old and continues to improve with age. I've a jar of roughly chopped carrots, pumpkin, onion, broccoli, beetroot and spices that have been pickling for seven weeks. The result provides a flavour-packed accompaniment to some sourdough bread and cheese for a packed lunch.

For more about cooking 'in the cold fire of fermentation', check out Michael Pollen's *Cooked* and for the obsessive enthusiast check out Sandor Katz at wildfermentation.com ■

Alex ! Just a French guy cooking

INCREASINGLY I get my TV food fix on YouTube. Let's face it, the tired old cookery-school format of the 1970s has well and truly gone off. Similarly, the ridiculous food fetish TV of Nigella (and her legion of pale imitators) has been cast into the Marie Kondo pit of "What were we thinking?" and has long since failed to spark joy in its audience.

And while Netflix lavishes haute cuisine budgets upon the likes of David Chang, Phil Rosenthal and the Michelin-stellar cast of *Chef's Table* - delivering very appetising TV in the process - something more revolutionary is being prepped in a funky DIY studio kitchen somewhere in Paris.

Alex (French Guy Cooking) is a self-taught home cook and filmmaker and hosts his own YouTube channel.



Each week he delivers a new video about his latest attempts to perfect his favourite foods with obsessive attention to detail.

His presentation style is heavily accented, eccentric and brimming with joyful enthusiasm for all things food related. I discovered him while looking up a long-term storage solution for a sourdough starter (Alex gave me a 30 second tutorial on how to dry it out into flakes on parchment paper) and I've been hooked ever since.

There are currently eight videos devoted to his attempts to perfect croissants. There are similar video series about ramen noodles, knife sharpening, lasagne, homemade mozzarella, the perfect omelette and lots more.

Sample some for yourself at FrenchGuyCooking on YouTube ■



Una-Minh Kavanagh.

The world, in many ways, has never been smaller. Cheaper air travel and the web has shrunk the distance between where you are now and places you'd like to visit. This is a wonderful thing, but let's not lose sight of the great places to see right on our doorstep. ÚNA-MINH KAVANAGH takes us on a whistle-stop tour of some great Irish destinations.

Closer to home



Surfer catching a wave at sunset on the Wild Atlantic Way on the west coast of Ireland.

Photos: dreamstime.com

THE GLAMOUR of hopping into a convertible and driving into a Mediterranean sunset has never been more accessible, though not that practical for everyone. Truth is, you don't need to look too far to have a memorable holiday right at home in Ireland.

Next time you dream of jetting off to far-flung places, consider tearing down the

road, jumping on the train or the bus and exploring the vast variety of landscape that our home country has to offer. You may be pleasantly surprised.

Beara Peninsula in Cork

Head down to the south west of Ireland to a part of incredible land that juts out into the Atlantic. The Beara Peninsula

forms a section of the Wild Atlantic Way and it's no wonder it made the cut. Featuring a glorious varied landscape with mountain passes, lush greens and coastline, it's a feast for those who love the outdoors. Drive along the "Ring of Beara" which follows the roads for about 148 km and, if you dare, head on Ireland's only cable car across the water onto Dursey Island.

The Fermanagh Lakelands

Mountain breezes, amazing walks and breath-taking scenery will have you captivated in Fermanagh. If boating is your thing, try your hand at angling, canoeing, kayaking or simply cruise along the waterways. Want to go further in your adventure? Explore the Marble Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark. The area also offers an abundance of accommodation ranging from your classic chalets to bubble domes in Lough Finn where the sky will be your ceiling.

The Glen of Aherlow in Tipperary

Considered to be one of the county's most scenic locations, the Glen of Aherlow is a lush valley that connects the Galtee Mountains, the River Aherlow and the wooded ridge of Slievenamuck. Cycle, walk, golf or fish in the valley - no doubt you'll be inspired. With brilliant opportunities to bask in the open air, the land boasts the Glen of Aherlow Nature Park (adjacent to the famous Christ the King white statue) and a variety of prehistoric and early Christian sites like St Pecaun's Holy Well. A warm welcome awaits you with its people in the surrounding local restaurants, pubs and guesthouses.

Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht in Kerry

The Kerry Gaeltacht goes beyond Dingle, and this quaint townland and countryside of Irish speaking people are not to be missed. The area is a natural playground for those who love walking, horse-riding, cycling and for those who adore walking on unspoiled long stretches of beach where you could be the only soul on it. Hike Mount Brandon, head to the farmer's market, indulge in Dingle Gin or simply lay on the sand on Béal Ban with the Atlantic at your feet, with the stunning view of the Three Sisters (An Triúr Deirfiúr) mountains as your backdrop.

Nore Valley in Kilkenny

One of the Midlands' hidden gems. If you're feeling like getting those boots on, why not try out the route on the Nore Valley walk from Kilkenny city to the picturesque town of Inistioge. This amazing walk is divided into three sections, each showcasing what the county has to offer: Kilkenny to



Hook Lighthouse, Co. Wexford.

Bennetsbridge, Bennetsbridge to Thomastown and finally Thomastown to Inisitoge, overlooked by the beautiful grounds at Woodstock House. Nore Valley Park includes crazy golf, go-karting, a maze, pet farm and tractor rides for the little ones. You can camp or take a lodge on site too. For the foodies, Kilkenny is well known for having an abundance of food trails with Taste of Kilkenny highlighting the best food producers and brilliant places to eat out.

Strandhill in Sligo

A secret tucked into the west of Ireland, Strandhill right by the sea is a slice of heaven and perfect for those who love water sports. Only 7km from Sligo, it's part of the surf coast on the Wild Atlantic Way and for good reason too. Large open bays, stunning cliff walks and even luxurious seaweed baths. Play a round of golf, hop into a kayak or try stand up paddleboarding ('SUP' to those in the know). The famous people's market takes place every weekend in Sligo airport's hangar and it's a foodies' delight with fantastic places like the Sweet Beat Café and Pudding Row.

Dunmore East in Waterford

Explore the many beaches and coves or simply relive childhood memories building sandcastles and hunting crabs. The popular fishing village is serene and offers ample opportunities to sail. Take the spectacular scenic drive from Dunmore East and on your way discover some of the delights of Ireland's

heritage like the megalithic tombs of Harristown and Cill Aodha's 12th-century church. To see local talent head to The Cliff Gallery where a special experience awaits featuring local artists and creators of photography, textiles, woodwork, ceramics, jewellery and fashion.

Gaoth Dobhair in Donegal

An Irish speaking Gaeltacht, this should be on your must-visit spots in the country. Right on the Atlantic coast up in Donegal, Gaoth Dobhair sits near Donegal's highest peak, Mount Errigal. Home to the Dunlewey theatre, Gaoth Dobhair has the Irish language in the heart of its people. Just 20km from Gaoth Dobhair is Glenveagh National Park with a total area of over 40,000 acres. It's the largest National Park in the country and home to a diverse and unspoiled landscape.

Hook Peninsula in Wexford

Seen as the pinnacle point in the east of the country, this glorious landscape stretches out from the scenic southeast corner of Ireland. Offering a myriad of things to do for all the family. Visit Johnstown Castle, take a tour of the haunted house at Loftus Hall, take gardening or archery lessons or go diving with the sub-aqua club. No visit is complete without a visit to Hook Lighthouse with over 800 years of light keeping. It's still fully operational today ■



Niall Shanahan.

Everybody knows that theatre actors don't do it for the money, but then what are they supposed to live on? With some justification Ireland projects an image of itself as a land of artists and writers. For a small country we punch above our weight in the world of theatre. But are we nourishing the artists enough to sustain Ireland's theatre industry? NIALL SHANAHAN spoke to PETER DALY, an actor, writer and accountant whose work with the Irish Theatre Forum has helped shine a light on the declining earnings of Ireland's performing artists.

Valuing the artists

Vladimir: You should have been a poet.

Estragon: I was (Gesture towards his rags.) Isn't that obvious?

Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot (1952)

THERE ARE two mysteries about working actors that tend to intrigue people if they meet one. The first is "How do you remember all your lines?" The second mystery - how much they get paid - is a question left largely untouched.

It's not something they talk about too much, and while most of us are vaguely aware of the realities of theatre life, the subject of performer's wages seldom gets any kind of an airing.

Paying the bills

Peter Daly is an actor, writer ("Aspiring to be a better writer") and accountant. "The latter pays most of my bills" he tells me over coffee in a northside Dublin café as we chat about his work in the theatre and, more specifically, about his role as chair of Theatre Forum.

The Forum (theatreforum.ie) is a representative body for the Irish arts community, providing training and professional development opportunities for its members. Peter adds: "Separate to that we do lots of practical stuff like tax, VAT workshops and advocacy."

Theatre Forum made headlines in January this year when it published the results of its pay scales survey. The

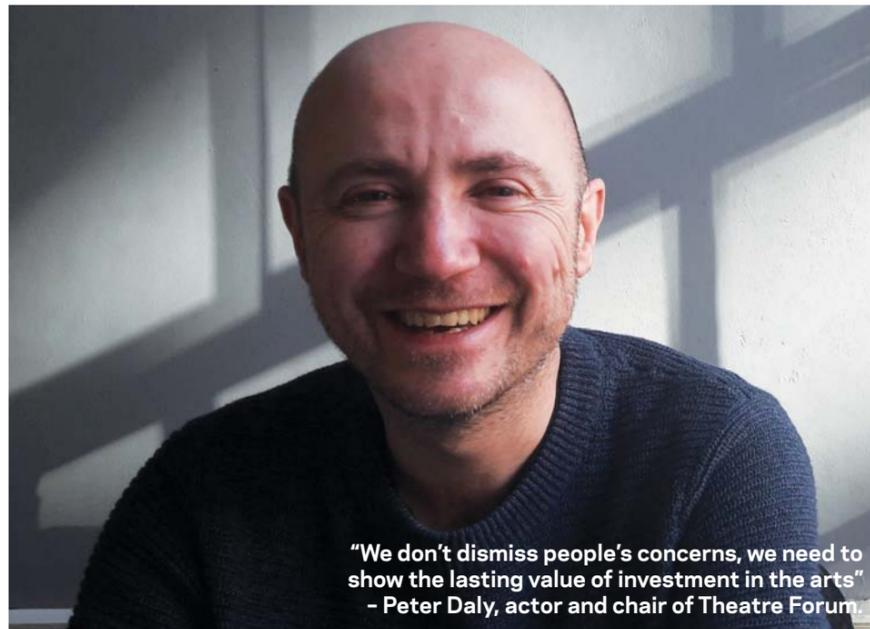


Photo: Fórsa Communications Unit

"We don't dismiss people's concerns, we need to show the lasting value of investment in the arts"
- Peter Daly, actor and chair of Theatre Forum.

results were stark. One third of artists and creative practitioners earn less than the national minimum wage, while the professions are characterised by low pay, poor conditions and precarious work.

Theatre Forum's membership includes individual freelance artists such as actors, directors and writers.

Precarious

Peter tells me the common denominator for these practitioners is the precariousness of their existence. "Within that group we have people who previously would have been running companies that received (Arts Council) funding.

"But with funding levels slashed (during the economic crisis), and fewer companies receiving funding, they no longer had the stability they'd had previously. Then there were others within that group who had never had a stable existence and now it's got even worse. There's less money around, costs are getting higher, and it's just much harder than ever before to survive," he says.

Theatre Forum decided to take a closer look to better understand exactly what was happening.

"We gathered information by conducting the pay survey. At around the same time we invited artists to speak about what their existence is like, illustrating the precarious nature of how they operate."

The survey found that 75% of PAYE workers in the arts don't have a full time job. Those working more of the time still have an income significantly below the average industrial wage.

"When you get to artists, the numbers just go off a cliff, you're talking about a significant number who work below the minimum wage, partly because they take on projects for a fixed fee. The number of hours they're working on those projects drags them down way below the minimum wage level," Peter explains.

Persuasive

Theatre Forum's event took place in Dublin's Project Arts Centre in January. A number of artists, including choreographer and dancer Niamh O'Donoghue, writer Seán Dunne, and composer Peter Power, each gave a five minute presentation on their experience of trying to survive on exceptionally low incomes.

"We looked at the three-month period August to October as it offers freelance artists and creative practitioners more opportunities for work than other times of year.

"Art enriches our lives in a lot of different ways all of the time, and it doesn't come out of nowhere. A certain level of funding has to happen, no matter how neoliberal your ideology might be."

"In the unlikely situation that this level of work was sustained throughout the year, on average they would have earned €22,752, just 64% of the average annual earnings of €33,365 across all sectors in 2017," he says.

Peter explains that on top of a decade of reduced funding, recent changes to Arts Council funding has pulled the rug from under a lot of companies. "There would be a couple of companies on whom you might be confident of getting one or two jobs a year, but that certainty has been eroded now."

The only kind of certainty any theatre professional can hope for is a block of work that covers, at most eight to 16 weeks in a year because of their existing relationship with a particular company. Add in a few bits and pieces of TV or film and that's considered a good

workload for the year for a working actor.

TDs, senators and other political candidates were invited to the event. "Cavan TD Niamh Smyth then invited us to make a presentation in the AV room in Leinster House.

"We gave the same presentation, this time including Louise Lowe from Anú to come in and speak about housing, and to make a few suggestions as to how some targeted initiatives could make a huge difference for at least some artists."

Abbey row

At around the same time that Theatre Forum put the meagre incomes of performing artists in the media and political spotlight, the national theatre found itself embroiled in a row - essentially a row about outsourcing - which saw up to 400 artists write a 'letter of concern' to Minister for Culture Josepha Madigan and the Arts Council about the Abbey's changing model of employment.

The letter criticised the number of international productions and co-productions put on in the theatre since 2016, when the current management team took over. The letter focused in particular on how freelance theatre professionals have been affected.

Peter says the Abbey question would never have bubbled up in the way that it did if people weren't already feeling the effects of the limited amount of work on offer.

"With the Abbey, it was easy to quantify that there used to be a certain number of in-house productions and now there aren't. There were a certain number of particular directors that would work on the main stage in a particular year, giving us all more opportunities to do some work there, but now there aren't.

"Also, the Abbey is a valid target because it gets about 50% of all the available theatre funding for the country. So by that simple metric alone - there are other considerations of course - there's a suggestion that half of all theatre jobs should come from the Abbey. That's one way to think about it, and if it's not working out that way, you need to have a reason why," he says.

State funding

Peter says the net effect of this shrinking pool of work is that actors assume they've gone out of favour'

when demand declines. But when they begin to talk to each other, informally or through Theatre Forum, they discover the experience is much more widespread, and indicative of declining resources for the arts.

"The actual spend is disputed, but we fund the arts and culture here to about 0.1% of GDP, the European average is 0.6%, so we're around one sixth of the European average.

"While the industry grows it should be possible for artists to live. Instead, the sector's at risk of being de-professionalised."

"This is for a country that lauds itself on its artists and writers, that sends work abroad and that prides itself on its artistic output on the international stage. If you don't fund culture and art adequately the whole thing breaks down. That's what's happening now after years of underfunding."

While the industry grows it should be possible for artists to live. Instead, the sector's at risk of being de-professionalised.

But Peter's more optimistic now than when he was involved with the national campaign for the arts a decade ago.

"The invitation to address Dáil members puts us in a whole different world. From that perspective I'm hopeful. I hope people have enough imagination to see that art is valuable, even when it's not necessarily measurable in purely economic terms. Art enriches our lives in a lot of different ways all of the time, and it doesn't come out of nowhere. A certain level of funding has to happen, no matter how neoliberal your ideology might be.

"Aside from the basic question of funding, it's a question of whether you're prepared to fund the arts to a level that can make an impact, and at the moment in this country we're not doing that.

"We don't want to alienate anyone who thinks funding should be going into public services, rather it's a discussion we want to have. We don't dismiss people's concerns, we need to show the lasting value of investment in the arts.

"We know that if people exercise, they'll be healthier and less in need of health services over their lifetime. Art has the same effect, it's money well spent."

Follow Peter on Twitter at @peterdaly10



Raymond Connolly.

Our UK neighbours may be losing their minds over Brexit, while some of what is generously described as 'debate' on the issue hasn't been healthy for Anglo-Irish relations. Rather than despair, we compiled a list of tunes celebrating the best of British music with a bit of a Brexit theme. RAYMOND CONNOLLY, BERNARD HARBOR and NIALL SHANAHAN fashion a musical backstop with no legally binding guarantees. You can listen to our Spotify playlist at <https://spoti.fi/2XPAf8F> which includes bonus tracks nominated by our editorial team.

Don't leave me this way



**The Specials
The Lunatics (2019)**

A reinvention of Fun Boy Three's 1982 showstopper *The Lunatics have taken over the asylum*. Originally written at the height of nuclear war tension, the song is possessed by the spectre of institutionalised power-mongers ready to hit the dreaded nuclear switch. "I see a clinic full of cynics/who want to twist the people's wrist" to a bossa nova shuffle is a sensational mix. It's from The Specials new album *Encore*. A fantastic take on modern day Britain, a must-have record. The perfect going away gift. (RC)



**UNKLE
featuring Thom Yorke
Rabbit In Your Headlights (1998)**

"Washed down the toilet/Money to burn/Fat bloody fingers are sucking your soul away" - There is a beautiful fatalism at work here, as Radiohead's Thom Yorke emits an existential howl into the void as the music builds. That's the sound of a no-deal Brexit. (NS)



**The Kinks
Days (1968)**

"Thank you for the days/those endless days those sacred days you gave me." The sweetest pop song of them all. Even in the dying embers of the telephone landline in the '90s, the great institution that was the Yellow Pages chose *Days* as its signature tune. It could be about a loved one, a lost one, a hero, The Arsenal! Covered by Kirsty McColl is a compliment. Covered again by Elvis Costello classifies it as legendary. So as Britain prepares to walk alone, in musical terms, thank you for the days. (RC)



**Dusty Springfield
I Don't Want To Hear It Anymore (1969)**

Dusty anticipated "project fear" by almost 50 years with this genuinely tear-jerking plea from a young woman ground down by the neighbours' tittle-tattle about her philandering man. ("He sure wasn't thinking about her today"). Taken from the magnificent *Dusty in Memphis*, an album title that hints at a

hankering for that Brexiteers' fantasy, a sympathetic trade deal with the USA. (BH)



**Blur
This Is a Low (1994)**

"Hit traffic on the Dogger Bank/Up the Thames to find a taxi rank/Sail on by with the tide/And go to sleep" - The lyrics come from a handkerchief emblazoned with names from the shipping forecast. There's a theory that Britpop is partially responsible for Brexit, but I'm not buying it. This is a sweeping paean to England, but it's looking outward, pining for friendship. (NS)



**Amy Winehouse
Love Is A Losing Game (2006)**

You know you're doing something right when Prince covers your song and George Michael takes to *Desert Island Discs* to declare it his top track of all time. This is one of Britain's greatest songs from perhaps its best-ever

songstress. (I know that's a bold claim but, hey, this is a Brexit-themed feature). It's a game Amy wished she'd never played. "Oh, what a mess we made." (BH)



**The Who
I'm a Boy (1965)**

"A couple have three girls but the fourth is a boy. The mother isn't happy so she brings him up as a girl. He questions his gender identity. It was, like so much of Pete's music, way ahead of its time," says Roger Daltrey. So when The Beatles were ooh-ing to *Baby you can drive my car*, Townshend was dealing with transgender issues way before society was ready to comprehend them. Hats off to British tolerance of the day. I'm not sure Ireland in 1965 would have been able for this, in the days when even condoms were illegal. (RC)



**The Pretenders
Brass In Pocket (1979)**

They don't come much better than this from Chrissie Hynde, and I'll never forget seeing the band at a dangerously-packed Brighton Top Rank the week it topped the charts. A declaration of sassy, soon-to-be-squandered, solvency? Her UK audience will certainly have to dig deep into that pouch post-Brexit. (BH)

**Joy Division
New Dawn Fades (1979)**



"Directionless so plain to see" - Quite possibly the most Brexit song of the bunch. From my all-time favourite album *Unknown Pleasures*, it draws on the science fiction of JG Ballard and the crumbling architecture of post-industrial Manchester and channels that mood into a crop of timeless songs. The title captures the ironies of Brexit's hollow promise. (NS)



**Spice Girls
Wannabe (1996)**

This reached number one in 37 countries back in the mid-90s. A truly global power at one of those rare moments when it was hip to be a Brit. I hear it's soon to be covered by the EU's chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier, with added emphasis on the lyric "tell me what you want, what you really, really want." (BH)



**The Beat
Too nice to talk to (1981)**

Deftly combining ska and new wave, this captures the creativity and energy of Birmingham's finest. Frantic guitar lines, walking bass and nailed-on saxophone make this a compulsory repeat play record, before the lyric even kicks in. Tense boy spots girl in club. Tense boy keeps drinking and is stuck to the ground while developing conversational lockjaw. Girl does a bunk. The story reminds me that our next door neighbours are as equally possessed by self-doubt as ourselves. I'm not sure this story could be told in the same way in mainland Europe. (RC)



**Massive Attack
Angel (1998)**

"Her eyes, she's on the dark side" - A much abused track by TV current affairs editors as they insist upon using it every time they run a story about crack addiction or serial killers. Nevertheless, as an opener to the seminal *Mezzanine* by this soon-to-split-acrimoniously Bristol trio (though now partially reformed), its brooding bass-heavy menace draws you into the dark underbelly of the album's ethereal world. (NS)



**All Saints
Black Coffee (2000)**

I watched them perform a wonderful a cappella version on the Jools Holland show and immediately became an

enduring fan of this quietly influential electro-R&B classic. It rightly reached number one in the UK, but achieved a more lukewarm number ten spot here in Ireland. Who'd have thought you'd be discouraged to be in Number 10? (BH)



**The Jam
Down in a tube station at midnight (1978)**

Probably the most evocative song written about modern London. In the days before the tragic 1987 Kings Cross underground station fire, strewn newspapers and sweet papers at the side of escalators were commonplace. A sad tale of a young married man going home with a takeaway curry and being beaten to a pulp by right wing yobs in a tube station. "They smelt of pubs/and Wormwood Scrubs/and too many right wing meetings". A work of true genius. I'm not sure it could be recreated today. How would you fit Oyster card and tap your Nat West card here into a lyric? (RC)

**Elbow
Grace Under Pressure (2003)**



"We still believe in love so fu*k you" - A defiant and hopeful note. The refrain of this secular hymn was recorded live at the Glastonbury Festival in 2002, as sung by the audience during the band's set. I like to imagine a more enlightened generation gathering at some point in the future to sing this defiant refrain while demanding a people's vote. (NS) ■





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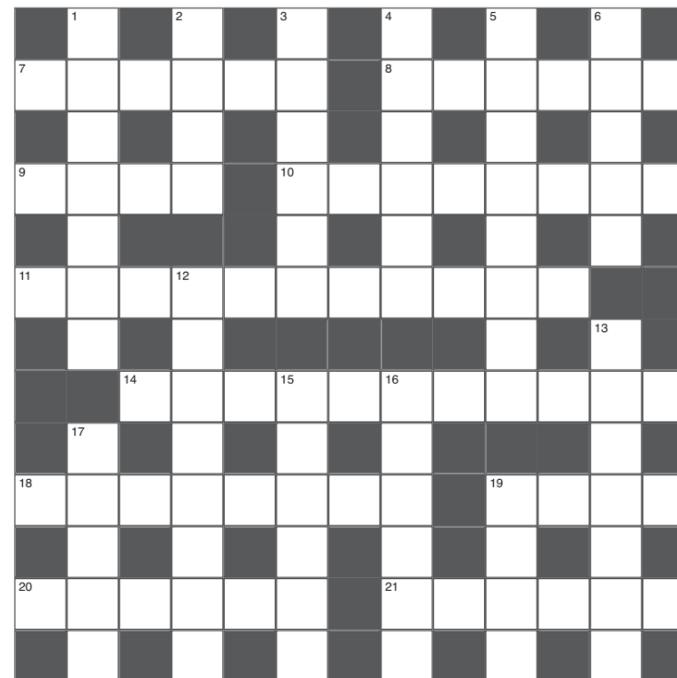
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Crossword composed by Peter Connaughtan.

ACROSS

7. Get a shortage from a bad thread (6)
8. Clockwork model of the solar system (6)
9. Long running musical based on poems of T.S. Eliot (4)
10. Olympic sport combining skiing and rifle shooting (8)
11. President of the ANC from 1967 to 1991 (6,5)
14. The Red Devils of West Sussex (7,4)
18. Sailing vessel and beer glass (8)
19. Throw line in darts (4)
20. Island borough of New York City (6)
21. I see double before the frozen French (6)

DOWN

1. Turn ale and drive it (7)
2. Greek god of love (4)
3. Mountain pass between Pakistan and Afghanistan (6)
4. Sat on a composition for an instrumental soloist (6)
5. Forbid or proscribe (8)
6. Noble gas (5)
12. An ingredient in a Martini (8)
13. Official language of Kenya and Tanzania (7)
15. Of the moon, the opposite of waxing (6)
16. Eavesdropping insect (6)
17. Rapper Travis and singer Calum (5)
19. Supreme Norse god of Art, Culture and wisdom (4)

ISSUE 5 (WINTER-SPRING) WINNERS:

CROSSWORD: Damian Doyle, Tullamore. QUIZ: Moira Griffin, Dublin 1. SURVEY: Miriam Tiernan, Wexford.

ISSUE 5 (WINTER-SPRING) CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS:

ACROSS: 7. Nassau 8. Ararat 9. Skin 10. Newlands 11. Hydrophobia 14. Kardashians 18. Bad Santa 19. Moet 20. Coddle 21. Kansas DOWN 1. Hawkeye 2. ISBN 3. Turnip 4. Daewoo 5. Harakiri 6. Faldo 12. Rhapsody 13. Kneecap 15. Denier 16. Sharks 17. Carol 19. Many

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1. Donal Casey's cartoon in this edition pays tribute to which iconic Stanley Kubrick film?
 - a. The Shining
 - b. Barry Lyndon
 - c. Dr Strangelove
 - d. Eyes Wide Shut
2. Whose death precipitated the events leading up to the creation of the 1919 Limerick Soviet?
 - a. Padraic Pearse
 - b. Wolfe Tone
 - c. Leon Trotsky
 - d. Robert 'Bobby' Byrne
3. Fórsa's campaign to boost local government services is called what?
 - a. More Power to Your Elbow
 - b. The Power of Love
 - c. More Power to You
 - d. Local Services for Local People
4. Who wrote the poem 'Under Ben Bulbin' (page 28)?
 - a. Seamus Heaney
 - b. William Butler Yeats
 - c. Shaun Ryder
 - d. John Cooper Clarke
5. Which of these is the correct title for Martin Bridgeman's five part radio documentary about mining in Castlecomer?
 - a. Mile High Club
 - b. Three Miles Over and Three Miles Down
 - c. River Deep Mountain High
 - d. Way Down In The Hole

The small print*

You must be a paid-up Fórsa member to win. Only one entry per person (multiple entries will not be considered). Entries must reach us by Friday 7th June 2019. The editor's decision is final. That's it!

YOUR VIEW

WIN €100

How do you like *Fórsa*?

WE HOPE you enjoyed this issue of *Fórsa*, the magazine for Fórsa members. We want to hear your views, and we're offering a €100 prize to one lucky winner who completes this questionnaire.



Simply complete this short survey and send it to Hazel Gavigan, *Fórsa* survey, Fórsa, Nerney's Court, Dublin, D01 R2C5. You can also send your views by email to hgavigan@forsa.ie. We'll send €100 to the first completed entry pulled from a hat.*

The survey

1. What did you think of the articles in the spring-summer 2019 issue of *Fórsa*?

- Excellent
- Good
- Okay
- Bad
- Awful

Comments _____

2. What did you think of the layout, style and pictures in the spring-summer 2019 issue of *Fórsa*?

- Excellent
- Good
- Okay
- Bad
- Awful

Comments _____

3. What were your favourite three articles?

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

4. What were your least favourite articles?

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

5. What subjects would you like to see in future issues of *Fórsa*?

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

6. What did you think of the balance between union news and other articles?

- The balance is about right
- I want more union news
- I want less union news

7. Any other comments? _____

Name _____

Address _____

Email _____

Phone _____

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- Free 24/7 legal advice helpline
- Free 24/7 confidential counselling helpline
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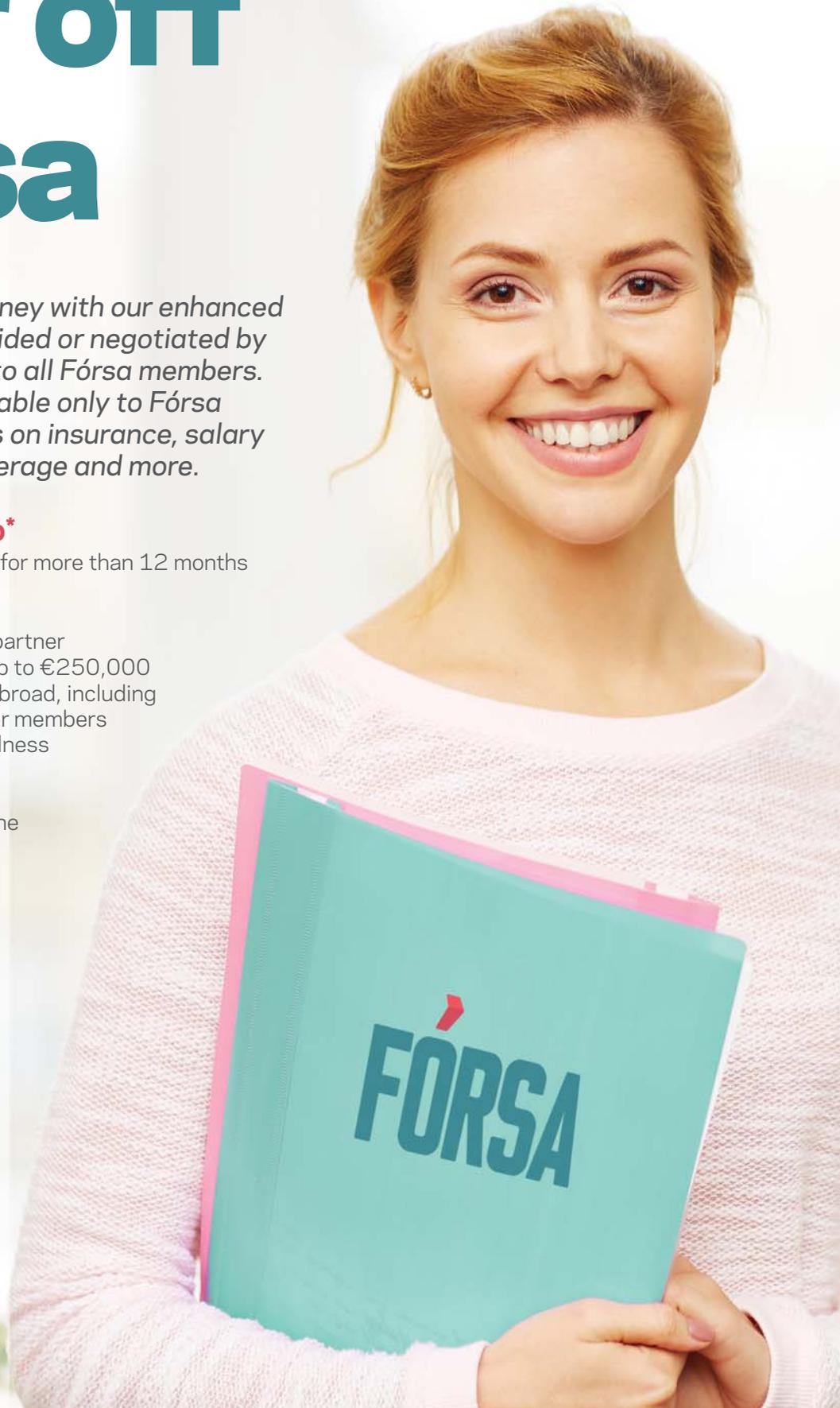
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- Gaeltacht scholarships for their school-age children
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