

UNITY

Standing shoulder to shoulder



Rosa Luxemburg and Clara Zetkin

LYNDA WALKER

THE COMMUNIST Party of Ireland salutes comrades and friends in the progressive women's and labour movement on International Working Women's Day. We send special greetings of solidarity to the women of Cuba, to those in Venezuela, to the women of the world in the struggles for independence and democracy, to women in the war zones, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, and all of who are facing the might of imperialism.

We stand shoulder to shoulder with the women of Ireland, in particular with the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation in the Republic who took action in over low wages and concerns of safe staffing in the public health service, and nurses in the north who face a similar struggle.

We recognise that in the Republic restricted gains have been made for a woman's right to choose whether or not to have an abortion; but in the north women are still denied that right. We appreciate the reciprocal solidarity that women's organisations in the Republic are giving by coming to Belfast for the International Women Day march and rally on the 9 March. As they said on 25 May 2018 "The North is next!"

The World is ours – take it!

More people are becoming aware of the 8th of March, when International Working Women's Day was first officially proposed by Clara Zetkin in 1910 the question of class came into play then as it does now. Class relates to women's emancipation, just as it relates to national emancipation.

Winning the vote for women was only part of the struggle; the battle of ideology requires us to use that power to achieve a revolutionary change. Whilst we fight for better conditions and policies in the short term, we "*realise perfectly clear that this question can never be solved in contemporary society, but only after a complete social transformation*". Zetkin

A cursory look at women's day events in 2019 reveals actions that Zetkin would not relate to. From Dublin, to Edinburgh, London to Sydney you can find performances that reflect the world of the wealthy. I only give space to one example which epitomises them. With the slogan "*It's Your World - Own It!! Women in business are holding an IWD event in Dublin. Sponsored by Alliance Allied Irish Banks, Bank of Ireland, Osborne Recruitment, Toyota Sandford, RBK Accountants and Cosgrave Developments.*" This says it all.

A web page about international

women's day gives a 'history' of IWD including crediting Clara Zetkin as an initiator, but little else of her struggle against capitalism and imperialist war. It begins by telling us that, "*The day is not country, group or organization specific, and belongs to all groups collectively everywhere.*"

We take issue with this view; International Women's Day has been marked for over 100 years by women in the communist and labour movement. It belongs firmly with the mass of working class women, whether they are unemployed, service, industrial, agricultural, intellectual, or unwaged home workers.

Not surprisingly the web page has an advert for IWD, bunting, balloons, pens, leaflets and other such items. No wonder they want to make it appealing to all women. Money making has no borders.

The hijacking of IWD by big business and right wing organisations has sent communists back to reclaim the day as ours, to give it the official title that Clara Zetkin and other radical women gave it at the beginning of the 20th century *International Working Women's Day*. However whatever the title, we are at one with organisations who represent the struggles of working class women, we also reclaim the day by our actions, our commitment to the struggle for a better world for all not just the few.

On the 7 March CPI is exposing to the might of imperialist warfare in contrast to the spending on welfare, it is apt that we should dedicated this year to Rosa Luxemburg on the centenary of her death. Rosa along with her comrades in Germany was an anti-war activist during the 1914-1918 War. In 1916 she was imprisoned for two and a half years for this action, Rosa was a founder member of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), and was murdered by fascists in 1919, and her body was thrown into Landwehr Canal in Berlin. Since that time (and before) there has not been a year without war. Our women's day event will reiterate Connolly's words that: *our demands most moderate are, we only want the earth.*

North and South



It is only natural

LAURA DUGGAN

WITH INTERNATIONAL Working Women's day upon us it would be remiss not to take a closer look at one of the main issues still facing women in the workplace: the pay gap. While there is little doubt that the pay gap exists, detractors explain pay differences away by arguing that women earn less on average because they work fewer hours, and that female-heavy sectors are paid less than male-dominated ones so a pay gap is only natural and expected. Even the well-meaning reinforce this narrative by stating that girls should be encouraged study subjects that lead into the higher-paying science, technology, engineering

and mathematical fields rather than arguing that female dominated industries should be better paid.

The pay gap is not directly caused by employers paying women less because they are women: to be that overt in discrimination would be foolhardy and is plainly illegal. It is completely legal, however, to pay two workers in the same field different wages for other reasons. As long as it is not a written company policy it is not illegal to set the initial wage offer much lower for women, travellers, or any religious, ethnic or racial group the employer chooses. Employers can make the argument that Susan simply did not negotiate as well as Mark and therefore ended up with a lower rate of pay, without ever revealing that Susan was

The fight for abortion rights North and South is an unfinished revolution

KELLIE O'DOWD

AS WE MARCH to celebrate International Women's Day on the 9th March in Belfast, we will be joined by many activists from across the country that campaigned successfully to repeal the 8th Amendment from the Irish Constitution. Although seeking assurances from the Irish Government that provision would be put in place for women in the North, this frustratingly has not transpired.

In January 2019 the Republic of Ireland began offering abortion services for women who were under 12 weeks gestation. However, the requirement of a three-day "cooling off" period and a cost of €450 (€150 for initial consultation & €300 for follow up procedures (usually 2) makes it mostly prohibitive for NI residents. What happens to all Irish women who require an abortion post 12 weeks remains to be seen, but we can assume that they will still have to travel to England and beyond.

Since October 2017 women who reside in Northern Ireland can access

free abortions in England. The BPAS Central Booking System for NI residents (0333 234 2184) requires evidence that they are resident in NI (with a BT postcode) and be registered with a NI GP (with a BT postcode). They must supply the above detail to receive funded treatment and will be entitled to request help with travel and accommodation costs if they are in receipt of any benefits or have an income of less than £15,276. This still seems an easier and cheaper option than the one being offered in the South.

The confidence and supply relationship between the Tories and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) have gained Alliance for Choice some political capital in terms of female MP's of all political hues exposed to the misogyny of the DUP in parliament, eager to keep the lack of abortion access in Northern Ireland on the Westminster agenda. But we are under no illusions that after 50 years post 1967 Abortion Act, that they have become so incensed by our lack of rights that they feel it is time to act. If it was not for Brexit and the move towards

decriminalisation in England & Wales, this political opportunity would not be so expedient for these MP's. But we do see Westminster's difficulty as our opportunity and have done our best to optimise political pressure.

At home we are still trying to educate and empower women in communities to talk about abortion; but years of silence, stigma, mis-information and shame, are barriers that we as an activist organisation continually have to battle. We can win hearts and minds; the problems are getting over the doors of women's and community centres to have these discussions in the first place given the absolute fear and resistance to the subject matter.

As the political stalemate at Stormont will continue for the foreseeable future, Alliance for Choice will continue to put pressure on Westminster and educate and discuss abortion in Northern Ireland. We believe this is an unfinished revolution but women have risen up to demand reproductive healthcare on the island, and the fight is not over yet.

offered €5,000 less in the first place.

While it is true that women do work fewer hours on average, generally because of child caring responsibilities, this alone does not explain the gap, nor does uncritically blaming women for a lack of negotiation skill without examining the causes of this pattern. Both of these explanations assume that the problem of the pay gap is an individual one solvable on a one-on-one basis, rather than recognising that it is endemic.

Female plant and machine operators in a typically male dominated industry generally work more hours on average than their male counterparts (161 hours per month, as opposed to 160). When that's taken into account, the pay gap in

that sector actually grows which shows there is something at play other than women's choices or work habits.

A greater explanation of the pay gap is occupational segregation, the means by which people are pressured by gender roles and expectations into particular fields. A study of the US labour force in the 1990s suggested that segregation explains an estimated 53% of the wage gap. Even the most skilled wage negotiator cannot go into the female-dominated field of child care and expect to get much more than €9.82 an hour—a far cry from the living wage of €11.90. More than half the women in work in Ireland are earning €20,000 per annum or less, and most of these work in the services and caring industries.

Child care, home help and special-needs assistants are often very expensive services to obtain privately, and difficult to qualify for publicly, but women in these jobs are universally paid very low wages. Caring is an industry that most other workers rely on so that they can go to work themselves. It is socially necessary work.

The solution to the pay gap is not just to get more women into higher-paying fields but to demand respect for the fields that women are already in. Until socially reproductive work is properly appreciated and paid, until pushing men into childcare makes as much sense as pushing women into STEM fields, we have a problem with how we value social and caring work.

Fight back against exploitation



ROSEMARY HORTON

ON THIS INTERNATIONAL Women's Day the Communist Party of Ireland recognises that there are millions of women who struggle to identify with the concept of IWD. What does it mean to those who are homeless, living in poverty, sex slaves and drug addicts? A woman is not in a position to fight back when her life or that of her family is threatened, fleeing a war zone or religious persecution.

In Ireland the issues of poverty, homelessness, sexual and domestic violence are of great concern. In the North where reports and inquiries are being carried out into the latter issues the regional Government is suspended and so changes that are recommended by inquiries are in limbo. The reason for

the collapse of Stormont, the scandal surrounding the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI 'Cash for Ash') signed off by First Minister Arlene Foster, in 2012; mismanagement that cost the Northern Ireland Executive £480m, has been practically forgotten. Sinn Fein now have their eye on what they think is a chance for a Border Poll and a United Ireland and the Democratic Unionist Party have little interest in sharing power with Sinn Fein. The whole issue of Brexit has overshadowed the question of a regional government, and so effectively there is no one to hold to answer for the state of the affairs in Northern Ireland-except that is the Theresa May and the British Government, and they have stood back afraid of losing DUP support.

Brexit has become the catchall for

everything that is going wrong. The subject of the hard border is a red herring, determined by the EU, as they do not want to make it easy for Britain to leave. The fact that Theresa May is in fact pro-EU and typically conservative, i.e. pro capitalist, means that we are in an even more difficult situation getting the best for a worker's Brexit.

Where do women feature in this? As noted questions relating to domestic violence, justice changes relating to how rape cases are handled, from the Gillen inquiry, abortion law reform to name just some, are undergoing a laborious struggle, though some small gains are being made through the efforts of women's and trade union organisations. The question of women's work and wages remains a major problem of exploitation, zero hours, part time and contract work, all initiated by the EU are growing areas of struggle.

Some are looking for a border poll and Irish unification stating that "when it comes to a desire to remain within the EU, the island of Ireland is already united". In fact that not true, on the Ireland of Ireland there are thousands of women and men who stand with all the workers of Europe against the institutions of the EU, against the big business, the EU parliament and so on. There are thousands who are critical of the economic situation in the Republic, with 10,000 homeless people, poor health service, its Euro millions debt and so on.

Women Rise Up is this year's International Women's Day Slogan, never a more apt time to do so.



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