

From Dockers to Call Centres – 100 Years of the IT&GWU

The seeds of the Irish Transport & General Workers' Union (ITGWU) were undoubtedly planted along Belfast's coal wharves, cross channel and deep sea docks in 1907. National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL) Organiser, James Larkin, arrived in the city from Liverpool in January and set about reviving the NUDL's Branches. Larkin's energy resulted in the Belfast Dockers' and Carters' Strike, one of the major events in Irish labour history. Although over 100,000, drawn from every community marched in support of the striking men, the authorities and employers played the sectarian card. Police and army were used to suppress and divide the workers. The strike was unsatisfactorily settled over Larkin's head by the NUDL's leadership who disapproved of their Organisers Irish adventures.

Disagreement resulted in Larkin's expulsion from the NUDL. In December, 1908, dockers from Belfast, Cork, Dublin, Dundalk and Waterford established the ITGWU, formally registering the union on 4 January, 1909. Larkin was General Secretary. In July 1911, James Connolly, was appointed ITGWU Ulster Organiser. Connolly organised Belfast's 'Linen Slaves', ably assisted by Marie Johnson, Ellen Gordon Grimley and Winifred Carney. Gordon was part of the DGADL (Don't Give a Damn League), an expression she used when asked what would people think of a woman involving herself in trade union activity. James Fearon of Newry, built up the ITGWU there.

After the 1916 Rising – in which Connolly involved the Union as the Proclamation was published in Liberty Hall and the Irish Citizen Army marched out from there – organisation in Ulster became more problematic for ITGWU. In Derry and Donegal, Peadar O'Donnell – later a celebrated author, organised textile, clothing and farm labourers. Workers in Caledon, County Tyrone and Monaghan's Mental Asylum were inspired by him to fight for better wages and conditions, both raising the Red Flag about their workplaces. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, William McMullen, a York Street shipyard worker, was ITGWU Belfast Branch Secretary. Elected to Stormont as a Northern Ireland Labour Party MP, McMullen became National Organiser in 1937, Vice President in 1939, and General President, 1946-1953, the only figure from Northern Ireland to lead the Union. Dan McAllister was another stalwart Branch Secretary who, with Winnie Carney, was heavily involved in Belfast's Labour College.



S.H.I.P.

SHARED HISTORY INTERPRETIVE PROJECT

'CENTENARY OF DEEP SEA DOCKERS TRADE UNION ITGWU' 1909 – 2009

SHIP celebrates the centenary of the Irish Transport & General Workers Union, founded by Jim Larkin after the legendary Dockers' and Carters' strike which convulsed Belfast in 1907.



All are welcome to join in the celebrations!



When the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association demanded basic human rights in the late 1960s, the ITGWU strongly identified with their demands. As violence escalated, the Union supported the NIC-ICTU's 'Better Life for All' campaign and calls to keep sectarianism from the workplace, and end to paramilitary activity and an emphasis on social and economic rather than security solutions. ITGWU General Officers Fintan Kennedy, John Carroll and Michael Mullen pressurised British and Irish Government, opposed internment and persistently argued for cross-community and cross-Border programmes, many of which have been achieved through many of the currently-developing institutions. In 1975, Paddy Devlin was appointed Ulster Organiser. He substantially increased membership, numerically and spacially, and targeted low pay and women's equality, winning significant precedent cases. Devlin's appeal was cross-community and, when he retired in 1985, he left high quality activists like John Cassells, Albert Jackson and Peter Jackson to carry on the fight. In Newry, Branch Secretary Martin King was subject to legal action when attempting to organise Norbrook Laboratories, matters ultimately being determined in the House of Lords!

When the ITGWU re-merged with the Federated Workers' Union of Ireland (FWUI) in January, 1990 to form SIPTU, one of the new union's eight Regions was Northern Ireland. It was the first time the Union had a dedicated Northern Ireland Committee. Derry's Jack Nash was the first Regional Secretary. Problems remained stubbornly the same: unemployment, low wages, social divisions. As peace has unfolded, SIPTU has maintained its presence with John King and Kevin McKinney providing service. The new appointment of Teresa Cregan as full-time Organiser indicates SIPTU's continuing commitment to its Northern membership.

In celebrating its Centenary, SIPTU is proud of its origins along the banks of the Lagan. It is equally proud that, from the beginning, it has stood for class politics, opposing sectarianism and violence, insisting on peace, progress on economic and social issues, respect and tolerance for all. After a hundred years battling for Fairness at Work and Justice in Society, SIPTU recognises that much still remains to be done. To make further advances, organisation and solidarity are required, with each member committing to being a history maker.

Francis Devine
Howth, March 2009



PROGRAMME FOR SHIP/ITGWU/SIPTU BELFAST CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS 1909 – 2009

| Date | Venue | Event | Time |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|----------------------|
| Wednesday 29th April 2009 | Belfast Harbour Commissioners Office | Launch of Centenary Programme and Dockers Photographic Exhibition | 11.00am/12.30pm |
| Friday 1st May 2009 | Dockers Club Belfast 7.00pm | Naming of Dockers Corner, Dock Street Belfast | 7.30pm |
| Friday 1st May 2009 | Dockers Club Belfast | Social evening & distribution of commemorative Dockers Centenary Badges | 8.00pm to late |
| Wednesday 13th May 2009 | Lord Mayors Parlour | Belfast Civic Reception ITGWU Centenary Ship Photographic Exhibition | 7.00pm |
| Thursday 21st May 2009 | Fortwilliam Golf Club Belfast | Centenary Golfing Tournament | 10.0am (tbc) |
| May 2009 Date to be confirmed | Belfast and Dublin | Book Launch of ITGWU Centenary Pictorial History | Time to be confirmed |
| July 2009 Date to be confirmed | Dockers Club Belfast | Commemorative Launch re-issue of Early Days in Belfast Pamphlet by William McMullen | Time to be confirmed |
| August 2009 Date to be confirmed | Belfast & Dublin | Book Launch '100 Years at Liberty Hall' | Time to be confirmed |

Deep-Sea Dockers Photographic and Artefacts Exhibition is available to Trade Unions, Trades Councils and Voluntary or Community Organisations during the Centenary Year. For further details contact mob: 07729 728181 or Dockers Recreation & Social Club Tel: 028 9074 2857

Golden Thread Gallery
84-94 Great Patrick Street
Belfast, BT1 2LU
Tel: 028 90330920
Email: info@gtgallery.co.uk
Web: www.gtgallery.org.uk

Gallery Opening Hours
Tuesdays to Fridays 10.30am – 5.30pm
Saturdays 1pm – 4pm

Please contact the Golden Thread Gallery for details of artists talks, panel discussions, workshops, multi-lingual tours, migrant workers advice clinics, etc.

Polish Cultural Evening featuring artwork, music, good food, drinks & sociability, 6pm - 8pm, Friday 22nd May, venue: Golden Thread Gallery.

Panel Discussion: The Absurdity of the Global Economy
7pm Thursday, 21st May, venue: Golden Thread Gallery

Employment & Welfare Advice Clinic for Migrant Workers, 6-8pm on Friday 15th May, venue: Golden Thread Gallery.

Panel Discussion: Perceptions of 'The Other'
7pm Thursday, 14th May, venue: Golden Thread Gallery

These projects will complement and connect with the annual Mayday celebrations. Group and Belfast & District Trades Union Council on a series of projects that celebrates the contribution of migrant workers and ethnic minority communities.

Agents *Absurd* will be linked with other Polish cultural events going on throughout Belfast and we are also joining forces with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions Migrant Workers Unit, Northern Ireland Council of Ethnic Minorities, Kropka.pl, Kameleon Youth

Heritage and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland. The Adam Mickiewicz Institute in association with the Ministry of Culture and National

The *Agent Absurd* exhibition is part of the 'Polish Season in the UK' being prepared by the Director of Galeria Arsenal, Białystok working with the Golden Thread Gallery's Director Peter Richards.

Simon has been curated by Monika Szwed, Josef Robakowski; Daniel Rumanecw; Jacek Malinowski; Agata Michowska; Tomasz Mroz; Gronowski; Zbigniew Libera; Jacek

works by The Azorro Group; Lukasz contemporary art from Poland featuring *Agent Absurd* - a major exhibition of

1st May – 7th June 2009
AGENT ABSURD



Join the largest May Day parade on the island of Ireland!

Take part in this uniquely pluralist parade for all workers and their families!
Celebrate Equality, Diversity & Solidarity!

Saturday 2 May

May Day March 2009
Assemble College of Art gardens, Belfast **11:30pm** for speeches. Guest speaker Jack O'Connor, General President, SIPTU.

March to protect and defend the jobs and rights of all workers. Join over 6,000 trade unionists and working people in the annual May Day march through Belfast city centre accompanied by brass, pipe and samba bands. All welcome!

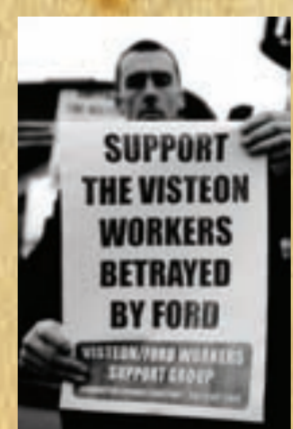
- Followed by:
- Family diversity festival in St George's Market 1pm – 5pm.
 - Live music! Children's art workshops! Face painting! Gourmet Food! Craft stalls and full bar!
 - Live music and entertainment from the mosaic of modern Belfast, including:
 - Breag – Irish language reggae, doing the main slot, preceded by Torann – a group of drummers to welcome in the Parade, a New Orleans style jazz band to start the day – with some Bollywood and Mexican dancers to provide the 'change over' entertainment!

Admission and all entertainment is **free** so bring the kids and all the family and **celebrate May Day.**

The Family Festival is hosted by the Belfast City Food and Garden Market.

ICTU, 4-6 Donegal St Place, Belfast, BT1 2FN
028 9024 7940 info@ictuni.org www.ictuni.org

NIC-ICTU gratefully acknowledge the support of:



IRISH CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS CELEBRATE MAYDAY



EQUALITY DIVERSITY SOLIDARITY



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www.ictuni.org and for free from www.ictu.ie
New edition out for May Day!

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| 1 st May | GTG | <i>Absurd Agents</i> a major exhibition of Polish art opens in Golden Thread Gallery |
| 2 nd May | Market | Trade March Route & St George's |
| 7 th May | GTG | Mark Thomas event |
| Last 2 weeks of May | GTG | Exhibition by in Golden Thread Gallery (See opposite) |
| Last 2 weeks of May | GTG and / or | Screenings/Projections of existing Migrant Worker Films |
| Last 2 weeks of May | t.b.c. | Advice clinics for Migrant Workers |
| Last 2 weeks of May | GTG | Fun Day |

This festival has evolved from a partnership between Belfast & District Trades Union Council (B&DTUC), the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) and the Golden Thread Gallery, the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM) and Kropka.pl to complement the May Day Programme as well as connecting with a major

part-funded by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute (Poland).

The exhibition (titled *Absurd Agents*) is part of a UK Wide Season of Polish Art and is

This festival creates an opportunity for the migrant worker community to celebrate, participate in and enrich existing trade union culture in Belfast.