

HATCH 33

NEWSLETTER of THE LIMERICK CENTRE FOR THE UNEMPLOYED

Free Copy

Special Edition December 1997

Ten Years On



by *Peggy Hanberry*
(President, Limerick Council of Trade Unions and Chairperson, Board of Management LCU)

Ten years ago when the Limerick Council of Trade Unions established the Limerick Centre for the Unemployed, economic conditions were much bleaker than they are today.

The plight of unemployed people was largely ignored even by many within the trade union movement. However, at all levels of the movement there were

concerned trade unionists who felt that the movement had an obligation not just to defend the interests those at work but also to address the concerns of those without work through no fault of their own. It was acknowledged that many of the unemployed had themselves been trade union members and that they were victims of an economic process whereby traditional industries had given way to new technology-based industries which required new and different skills. Nobody seemed to have an answer to the growing unemployment crisis that was then taking place and it appeared that the unemployed were simply to be left to their fate.

As part of its contribution to tackling the unemployment crisis and providing some hope for the unemployed, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, at its 1985 Annual Conference, agreed to the establishment of a network of unemployed centres. These centres were to provide a range of services to unemployed people which until then were largely non-existent such as welfare rights information, affordable adult education courses, preparation of C.V.s and assistance with job seeking. The centres were also to be a focus for campaigning against the rising tide of unemployment and its consequences. In short, the centres were to be beacons of hope in a sea of despair.

The Limerick centre was one of the first to be set up and was formally opened in January 1987 by the then Tanaiste and Labour Party leader, Mr. Dick Spring, TD. Over the past ten years the services of the centre have continually developed both in terms of range and quality and have been availed of by thousands of people. The centre has also been to fore in campaigns and initiatives around issues relating to unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. The Centre has not existed in isolation from others involved in the fight against unemployment. Rather it has been actively involved with a wide range of organisations and bodies such as the Congress Network of Unemployed Centres, PAUL Partnership, the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE) and various community organisations throughout the city. The Centre has also established very positive links with many public and statutory bodies such as the Dept. of Social, Community and Family Affairs (formerly Social Welfare), FAS, Limerick Corporation, Limerick City VEC, the

Mid Western Health Board and the Limerick City Enterprise Board. I think that it is true to say that not only has the Centre become well-established but also well respected both at local and national level and over the years numerous groups and interested individuals both from throughout Ireland and abroad have visited the Centre to view its work at first hand.

Over the past ten years, many people have contributed to the successful work of the Centre. I would like to pay tribute to FAS for their continued funding through the Social Employment Scheme and in later years the Community Employment Programme. Tribute must also be paid to Deirdre Frawley and the Adult Education Committee of Limerick City VEC for their consistent support for the adult education classes which are a vital element of the Centre's work. It needs also to be said that the provision of a fine building by Limerick Corporation is the foundation upon which the success of the Centre rests.

We are indebted to all our local public representatives who have always shown great support for the Centre and readiness to assist its efforts whenever called upon to do so. Successive mayors have been most kind in attending and speaking at various functions organised by the Centre over the years. In this regard I am particularly mindful of the role of the late Ald. Jim Kemmy, TD in setting up the Centre and for all the assistance he gave us in the following years.

Due recognition must be given to the past and present members of the Limerick Council of Trade Unions and the local trade union movement in general for their support for the Centre since its inception. I must especially mention those who over the years have served on the Board of Management and express our sincere appreciation for all their time, effort and concern.

Over the past ten years the Centre has been well served through the dedication and commitment of its staff. I am particularly delighted to record that many former staff members have gone on to successful careers, due partly to the training and skills which they obtained while working at the Centre. I wish them continued success in the future.

I wish to acknowledge the excellent work of our first Director, John Ryan and the current Director, Joan Condon who has held the position with distinction for eight years.

In recent years the Centre has continued to develop its services. Particular mention must be given to our new computer learning centre which was opened last year and could not have become a reality without the very generous support of the Bank of Ireland and to the establishment of a Contact Point at the Centre for the Local Employment Service. Both these developments are of major importance and considerably enhance the work and prestige of the Centre.

Ten years on and the economic climate has thankfully changed for the better and there is much talk of the Celtic Tiger. However, unemployment, poverty and social exclusion are still features of our society and consequently the continued existence and development of the Centre remains a vital necessity.

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Hatch 33 - Special Issue

The Limerick Centre for the Unemployed is approaching the end of its tenth anniversary year. Since 1987 thousands of people have availed of the Centre's services. Well over two hundred individuals have worked in the Centre over the same period. The Centre has made an impact on the local scene.

It is therefore fitting that the end of the year should be marked by the publication of this special issue of Hatch 33. We have tried to capture the essence of the Centre since it was first set up. We are very grateful to all our contributors and we hope that you the reader will find their efforts interesting and informative. Unless specifically stated the articles reflect the views of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Centre.

We would like to thank the contributors, sponsors and all who helped in any way to bring this issue to publication. A special word of gratitude is due to John O'Regan of St. Mary's Integrated Development Programme and formerly an Education Officer in the Centre whose assistance was invaluable.

Most photographs are courtesy of the Limerick Leader and Limerick Post.

Editor: Pdraig Malone

A Special Word of Thanks

The Centre has over the past ten years been able to raise a considerable amount of money to maintain and develop its services. This would not have been possible without the generous support of many in the local business community who have assisted the Centre through the sponsorship of its fund-raising efforts. The Centre is very grateful to all those local businesses who in any way have supported its work. We wish all of them every success in 1998.

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Abandoned

I saw you at the railings
Along by Arthur's quay.
Slumped there upon the sidewalk
As I passed you didn't see.
The winter breeze blew through your
limbs
As you shivered in your stance
On Christmas Eve amid the lights
You scarcely drew a glance.

You're not a city slicker
Your home is lying still
Beside that crystal mountain stream
On a Ballyhoura hill.
The dream that you'd be part of
A city home complete
Has turned into a nightmare
On a Limerick city street.

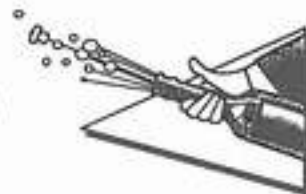
From the gutter you are watching
As the wino staggers by
And the sniffer with the glue bag
shuffles on his way to die
And the ceaseless tramp of people
As they're rushing to and fro
In a rat-race they call progress
That leaves little for to show.

And the headlong race to turn life
To pleasure from a drudge
Is marked by speeding traffic
As it covers you in sludge.
But my listeners may well wonder
Of whom it is I speak
Which of the many unemployed,
The poor and the weak - ?

But sure we know the Welfare State
Can now so ably hide
The poverty and misery
That
s around at Christmas tide
But even though it can't be seen
It's story can be told
In this verse about a Christmas tree
At Arthur's Quay unsold.

Joe Harrington

Congratulations



From Peter Cassells, General Secretary, Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)

I am very pleased to contribute to this 10th Anniversary edition of Hatch 33, the newsletter of the Limerick Centre for the Unemployed. The passing of each year re-affirms the commitment of the Congress Network of Unemployed Centres, and it proves to us that the Network is providing an invaluable service in all the communities of which we are a part.

It is important to recognise the crucial role of the Network in national participation, such as in the outcome of Partnership 2000, but also we need to congratulate the Centres for the work that is being done day by day. The Congress Network provides a link between unemployed people and employed people, it is a network of contact points that allows access to information, services and support that may not be easily available otherwise. I want to especially thank and congratulate the Limerick Centre in its tenth year of service to its community. Keep up the good work!

From Dick Spring, TD, former Tanaiste and Leader of the Labour Party who officially opened the Centre in January 1987.

I am delighted to congratulate the Limerick Centre for the Unemployed on its ten years of work. I wish it well in its continuing efforts on behalf of the unemployed and every success in the future.

From Mike Allen, General Secretary of the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (INOUE).

When the Limerick Centre for the Unemployed was first set up, I was working in the Galway Centre. Much of what I learned about how an unemployed centre should serve local unemployed people and campaign with them for their rights I learned in co-operation with the Limerick Centre. That mutual support and fierce debate have characterised my relationship with the centre through all the changes since.

Limerick is one of the handful of unemployed centres which was at the forefront of the unemployed movement ten years ago and remains in the forefront today. During the years when Ireland suffered the worst unemployment in the developed world and there seemed little hope, they kept the welfare rights, education and campaigning voice alive. Now as the economy starts to generate jobs, the Centre remains strong enough to redefine its role, through the Partnerships and LES, to ensure that the communities that were hit the most by unemployment get the benefit of the new jobs.

Since the first days of the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed the Limerick Centre for the Unemployed has played a key role in our survival and progress. The first Treasurer of the INOUE was a nominee of the Limerick Centre, and it was a rare year when our National Executive Committee included neither a representative of the Limerick Centre or the Limerick Trades Council. This year it includes both.

When the Limerick Centre and the INOUE were set up, we never imagined reaching our tenth anniversaries. Congratulations on reaching it, and my profound hope that we will not need a twentieth.



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As time goes by...

by Jackie Barry

Jackie started working on the CE scheme in the Centre in 1994 as an adult education officer. She is now works full-time in the Centre for the Local Employment Service. Here she reflects on her time at the Centre and on the role of the LES.

INTRODUCTION -

FROM HERE TO THE LOCAL EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

It only seems like yesterday that I first came in the door and never left unlike many of the staff. I often wonder as they come and go do they not realise I also had to start somewhere. It often amazes me that they do not realise that I worked on a Community Employment scheme and I learned so much from it. They often ask how I know so much, but they also have the resources available at the Centre to learn more. I would encourage them one hundred per cent to make use of the facilities there. Before starting in the Centre I was not aware of what goes on in the community. Working in the Unemployed Centre increased my awareness of a wide range of issues. That is simply how I became interested in community work. I was in the right place at the right time when the Local Employment Service was introduced at the Centre and I was delighted to have the opportunity to work full-time for the Service. After all, both the Centre and the Local Employment Service's policy would be to keep an open door for the unemployed person. The Local Employment Service integrated very well here as we complement each others work. This was important for me as if I had left the Centre I would have left a lot of what I had achieved and believed in behind me. Fortunately the Local Employment Service and what it stands for and what it is committed to doing for the unemployed person is a lot of what I believe in. I will just speak on some experiences I have had over the last few years.

IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS JACKIE

I would have been ashamed of my status of being unemployed. I didn't want money from the state for doing nothing but I had to survive. By word of mouth I heard about the Centre and called in. I had not got a clue of what went on in there. (They knew they were on to a good thing when they saw me.) I went in for Social Welfare advice and ended up working at the Centre. Believe it or not, I was as quiet as a mouse - Surprise, Surprise (They can't shut me up now). Believe me - its much harder being unemployed and looking for work than being employed. The service I work for now was not in existence. Probably why I fully support what it does for the unemployed person is because it was not there when I was unemployed.

AND THERE IS MORE !!!!!!!

Being involved in the Unemployed Centre gave me the opportunity of channelling my energy into the Adult Education area. I developed and formed many relationships with students by concentrating my efforts on them and helping them with c.v.'s form-filling for persons who were often illiterate, gathering information building links with other Community Organisations. There is so much to learn. My work involved Report Writing, Administration duties, Staff Training. All my past skills became very useful.. I was working more than I would have in a full-time job.

AND MORE

Believe me, I was not financially motivated when I started working on the Community Employment scheme at the Centre. The one problem I would have about CE is that it does not benefit single people to work on a scheme for the money. You have to look at the experience you can get and realise that it will stand to you. I enjoyed the job; my attitude to unemployment changed and I am very passionate about the work I do now.

MUCH MORE WAKE UP!!!!!!

I wrote an essay many years ago about unemployment. I actually did not know what I was talking about; I quickly learned the truth. Community work is an eye-opener where real people and real lives exist. I have seen so much and met so many people and I often wonder how they have survived through their life situations. They made an impact on me.

CHANGES LIKE THE WIND - SAID MANY GOODBYES

I have seen many changes since I started, I have been to many places. Staff change all the time. Sometimes I don't know who have started as staff or who are students. I would like to see more full-time jobs created in the Centre. Many staff went on to full time employment, many of whom had not worked for long periods of time. You are just getting to know people when they have to leave.

The atmosphere is created by the staff - the ambience and shared experience. They all come from different environments and backgrounds. Staff have the opportunity to to work in different areas, Social Welfare, Education etc. They are trained in these areas even if they had no experience. Staff often do not realise that they have a lot more talents than they think. If they never met one another, they would not have had the chance to form many lasting friendships. Knowledge of people and their lives gives you so much more than you could learn from a book. Believe me! (I will write three Volumes one of these days).

ISSUES - FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- It's great to see the benefits for lone parents of working on Community Schemes but I would like to see more improvements and options for married women and see more opportunities been made available to them.
- Over 60's not to be considered as being over the hill.
- Early intervention for young school-leavers is essential.
- Adult Literacy - more networking between communities and services to identify people and offer them support and assistance.
- Recent improvements at the Unemployed Centre have been very pleasing to the eye. About time... Modern Computer Room and computers available for unemployed persons, when I started at the Centre we only had a handful and four hands on one computer !!!!
- The introduction of the Local Employment Service means we can do more for the unemployed person for whom we exist. Persons unemployed for six months or more, dependent partner of a long term unemployed person, lone parents, early school leavers and persons with disabilities are the people we are there to listen to and assist on a one to one basis in their efforts to gain employment.

AND MORE AND MORE AND MORE... CLIENTS

Clients I have dealt with and build relationships with throughout the years have always made an impression on me. Different lives and different experiences... it has been tremendous for my personal development and attitude.

I learned not to be judgmental. Believe me, it not always the person who may look destitute that has real problems. It's often the ones that are well dressed and who look like "they have it all". It amazes me that so many people spend their life worrying at what other people will think. Pride often prevents people from asking for help

I have met people from all community areas - from all walks of life and I do not categorise them by where they come from. If a unemployed youth calls into me from Caherdavin, Castletroy, Moyross or Southill, I treat them all the same. A lot of lads try to live up to their parents expectations. It can be more difficult for a young lad coming from a working class situation with both parents working - to be unemployed. At least if one of the parents has been unemployed they will offer more support than pressure.

Believe it or believe it not, I could write so much more but I do not think they want an autobiography.

Looking forward to the future with optimism at the Local Employment Service.

Everybody has something to offer no matter where they are from. Helping people to help themselves is an attitude I believe in. Keeping a positive outlook is half the battle. There is something for everybody in a community-based environment. Information is power to the people. I hope we continue to be a voice for the unemployed. Calling into any Community Centre or LES office is *a step in the right direction ...*

REVOLT OF THE BOTTOM DOGS

David Lee



The group at 4 Upper Mallow Street, Limerick

Popular literature and films like Neil Jordan's *Michael Collins* tend to give the impression that the Irish Free State gained its independence solely through the violent actions of a small group of gunmen. This is hardly surprising, for traditionally the history of the period 1916-21 has been viewed from a narrow perspective and the historical 'memory' of the Irish people has been so constructed that consciousness about the events of the period are mainly confined to the deeds of the IRA and the political development of Sinn Fein. It is not generally known that the Irish labour movement played a very important role in undermining British authority in Ireland through actions such as nation-wide political strikes in which tens of thousands of workers participated.

The workers of Limerick played a particularly active role and in April 1919 the local Trades Council organised a two-week general strike against the imposition of an identity card system on the citizens of Limerick by the British Military, a move that was seen by the workers and people of the city as an infringement of civil liberties. The strike resulted in a compromise settlement whereby the

strike was called off and the military permit system was withdrawn a week later.

This event, known as the Limerick Soviet, was just one of a number of politically motivated strikes that Limerick workers were involved in. On 23 April 1918, for instance, there was a successful nation-wide Anti-Conscription general strike which effectively scuppered plans by the British government to introduce military conscription into the country. Two years later in April 1920, a two-day Political Prisoners Strike led to the release of 100 political prisoners held without trial in Mountjoy Jail.

Also in 1920 Irish railway workers refused to transport British Army munitions and armed soldiers and policemen. This Transport Munitions Strike lasted from May to December 1920 and Limerick railway workers, who were in the employ of the Great Southern & Western Railway company, were very much to the fore in this passive, but highly effective, campaign of civil disobedience. Their action caused a great deal of disruption to the deployment of British troops in the war against the IRA and the sacking of non-co-operative railway workers by the privately owned railway companies

resulted in a number of railway lines being closed down in Ireland, many of them in the Limerick area.

HISTORY PROJECT

To broaden public knowledge about these events the Limerick Centre for the Unemployed and the Limerick Council of Trade Unions decided in 1988 to sponsor a FAS research project into the history of the Limerick trade union movement during the period 1916-21. Local historian David Lee was appointed as supervisor of the project and he recruited twelve FAS trainees aged between 18 and 25 to carry out research and write articles for publication.

Research was carried out in a number of libraries in Limerick and Dublin and primary sources such as newspapers of the time, trade union documents and police reports were consulted. Among the masses of documentary evidence accumulated were copies of radical working class newsheets that had been written and published in Limerick during the period, the most prominent being a publication called *The Bottom Dog*.

The FAS trainees put in a tremendous amount of hard work into the project and after six months they published an educational pack called *Revolt of the Bottom Dogs* which outlined labour history in Limerick city and county during 1916-21 and examined the 'Troubles' from a labour point of view rather than a purely nationalist perspective. Suitable both for schools and the general public, the A4 sized educational pack consisted of an illustrated booklet containing historical articles; information sheets; maps and a poster.

Printed by the Limerick Leader, the publication was very professional in appearance and a great deal of attention given to layout, design and the selection of suitable illustrations. The quality of the written content was also of a very high standard and the publication dealt with topics such as The 1919 Limerick Soviet; Farm Workers in County Limerick; Labour and Nationalism; The Munster Fusiliers and more besides. In an endeavour to place the events in Limerick in a broader, international context the publication also carried a number of articles on the 1914-18 War and Revolution in Europe.



Dick Spring, leader of the Labour Party, cutting the tape at the official opening of the unemployed centre, Thomas Street, watched by the Mayor, Cllr. Jack Bourke, Cllr. Frank Prendergast, John Ryan, director of the centre, and the Bishop of Limerick, Most Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Newman.

Revolt of the Bottom Dogs is currently on sale in Celtic Bookshop, Patrick Street, Limerick, price £4.99

Those Were The Days

A Celebration of the Limerick
Centre For The Unemployed

MAY 25, 1996

Limerick jobless centres praised

Centre celebrates

OPENED in May, 1987 by Tanaiste, Dick Spring, the Limerick Unemployed Centre will commence celebrating its 10th anniversary in May.

The Trades Council-run centre was one of the first of its kind in the country and this week congratulating all those who previously or at present are involved with the running of the centre, Trades Council president, Peggy Hanberry said:

Over the years the centre has broadened its range of services to unemployed people and now employs 32 people under the Community Employment Programme, two of whom are full-time."

Tribute to the centre's personnel, Joan Condon and Padhraig Malone was paid by Trade Council secretary, Mary Kehelly



Pictured at the opening of the Limerick Unemployed Centre by the Leader of the Labour Party, Dick Spring were from left: Bill Davoran, Pres. LCTU, Deputy Frank Prendergast, and Deputy Dick Spring.



John Carroll, president, Transport Union, visiting the staff of the Unemployed Centre, Thomas Street, this week, with John Ryan, manager, Unemployed Centre; Tony Walsh, Reg Turner, Olive Brannan, Tony Colbert, Tony Darcy, Doloroes O'Mahony, Joan Broderick, Sandra Pentecost and Helena Close.

33 THOMAS ST. - A SOURCE OF HOPE

Limerick's home for unemployed

By DIANE FEENEY, USA

WHAT I expected on going to interview the Limerick unemployment centre was very different from what I actually found.

In the United States unemployment agencies are very stern ugly-looking buildings where fare too many desperate-looking people wait in line to speak to unpleasant people in glass cages.

The Limerick unemployment centre is a colourful ensemble of offices where one can find advice and friendly encouragement instead of meagre jobs and very small welfare cheques.

The big difference is that the unemployment centre is not an agency where desperate people come to look for jobs, but a centre which employs people who have themselves been out of work for at least 12 months, in the aim of coming to the aid of those still out of work.

With unemployment at 10%, the job issue is a serious one in Ireland. The dole or Irish welfare distributes £35 per week to more than 240,000 people.

Many people say that once on the dole, always on the dole. However the Limerick unemployment centre goes against this saying.

It is run by 28 people, all of which prior to this job had been on the dole for 12 months.

Its objectives are the promotion of workers co-operation as a means of combatting unemployment and furthering the cause of the unemployed and promoting educational opportunities.

The delegation of jobs, intimidation and embarrassment is not what can be found at this centre, but helpful, sympathetic people who will give valuable advice because they

have lived through unemployment.

Besides the support, advice, the centre puts out a monthly newsletter, which carries a variety of helpful and informative articles for the unemployed.

The most worthwhile aspect of the centre is however the free classes that are offered. They range from basic English and Maths to Computers, Photography or Swimming, and are mostly attended by unemployed who want to acquire skills while awaiting a job.

Their value is described by an educational counsellor at the centre: "the courses have given people a sense of purpose: they are getting up in the morning and coming to whatever is being offered. For example there were 3 men in a recent class on "Women Today"

Success

The success of the centre comes from the fact that all the workers know what it is like to be unemployed.

They are bitter when they speak of it, but are hopeful that they will find a new job once the 12 month period is up.

They are perfectly suited to help others and an atmosphere of friendship and mutual care emanates from the centre. The number of these centres is few however, 10 in all and

unfortunately because they are part union and part government funded many of the workers feel that if the government cuts aid, the centres will be the first to suffer from it.

It is a shame that places where good things are accomplished and real human sympathy is practised seem to be in danger of extinction.

"IF the axe is going to fall, give us a call" – that's the message from the Keep Limerick Working Campaign, now heading into its third week.

The response to the campaign, set up to help keep as many people in employment as possible in October, is very good.

The special Hotline for employers and employees alike, is buzzing. "We're getting 50 calls a day here, the majority from employers seeking advice", said Sheila Cullinane, Hotline operator and campaign PRO.

Many of the calls come from companies offering support, but others are from people in fear of losing their jobs. So far, says Sheila, the campaign is on target – zero job losses in the city during this month.

At present job boxes are placed in different locations throughout the city, where people can leave ideas on how jobs can be created.

Also a youth group is performing a short drama, explaining the campaign in factories around the city.

This week, Bishop of Limerick, Dr. Jeremiah Newman, said that he was happy with the progress the campaign is making, and hoped that the interest and support shown would be maintained for its duration.

The Hotline number is (061) 310888.



Dr. Michael Woods, T.D., Minister for Social Welfare (left) being welcomed to the Limerick Unemployed Centre in Thomas Street, Limerick, by Mr. John Ryan, director of the centre.



From Left: Fr. Michael Wall presenting a cheque for £2,000 on behalf of Dr. Jeremiah Newman Bishop of Limerick to Jim Wallace Chairman "Keep Limerick Working" Committee. Also include John Ryan Limerick Unemployed Centre.



The early days of the Limerick Centre for the Unemployed

Back in 1986 a faint recognition of the problem of unemployment was beginning to appear in the economic forecasts of the time. Peter Cassells, General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) wrote a document entitled "The Jobs Crisis" and in Belfast an Unemployed Centre was set up as a result of a resolution adopted by the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU in 1984. At European level the problem of long term unemployment was targeted for special attention through various programmes and European Community funding. It was against this background that an enabling motion was passed at the 1985 ICTU Conference to establish the Congress Network of Unemployed Centres.

At this time Limerick Council of Trade Unions were part of a partnership involved in running the Worker Education and Training Centre out in the University of Limerick. In this Centre the needs of unemployed workers had been clearly identified i.e. the need for adult education, the need for information and advice on welfare rights, the need for support systems and solidarity between employed and unemployed workers. Therefore, Congress asked the Limerick Trades Council to become involved in the pilot scheme to set up the unemployed centres nationwide. The Council rose to the challenge and began the preparatory work necessary for this venture.

The 1986 ICTU Conference was held in Belfast and I attended as a delegate. While there, I took the opportunity to visit the Belfast Unemployed Centre. I was really impressed with its work programme and the links it had forged with local communities. This visit helped to crystallise the project that Limerick Trades Council were about to get involved in. The help given to us by the Co-ordinator of the Belfast centre, Brendan Macken was invaluable. In the Summer of 1986 the Trades Council President, Bill Davoren and I visited Castlebar and were advised on the administrative details necessary to set up an unemployed centre by Michael Kilcoyne of SIPTU. The then Co_ordinator of the Galway Centre, Mike Allen (now General Secretary of the INOU) was always on hand to help us at this time.

The ICTU contact person for Trades Councils at that time was Tom McGrath and he was very anxious that the Congress Unemployed Centres would be set up within the agreed pilot scheme timescale. By July 1986 Limerick Trades Council had decided to embark on this project and set to work. The first task was to establish a board of management and get a suitable premises. With regard to the search for a suitable premises, I would like to acknowledge help given to us by Gerry O'Connell, the then Housing Officer of Limerick Corporation and the support and assistance we received from the late Gerry Joyce, also of Limerick Corporation. Another task was the appointment of a Director of the Centre and this position was taken up by John Ryan.

At this time there were three state agencies involved in the setting up of the Centre - AnCo, National Manpower Agency and the Youth Employment Agency (all of which later collectively became FAS). Each had to be dealt with to get funding for the employment scheme, funding for the infrastructure to run the scheme and for the running costs of the scheme. At this juncture I would like to pay tribute to the late Frank Cunningham, Area Manager of National Manpower at the time, for all the help he gave the then President of Council, Bill Davoren and I in steering us through all the complex administrative details that had to be dealt with. I would also like to express our thanks to Eamonn Doyle, who represented AnCo on the Board of the Centre, who was always available to advise and guide us in the early days of the project. It is worth pointing out that the Limerick Centre for

the Unemployed was the largest Social Employment Scheme that had ever been established in the area at that time.

I would like to pay a special tribute to the late Ald. Jim Kemmy, T.D. for all the help he gave us in setting up the Centre. He continued to maintain a keen interest in the work of the Centre over the years and indeed one of the last public functions he attended was connected with the Centre.

On two bitterly cold and bleak January days - Saturday 10th and Monday 12th - the first interviews for the SES project in the Centre were held. The number of people who turned up for these indeed established two facts: (a) there was an unemployment crisis and (b) unemployed people did not wish to be unemployed as some snide pundits were saying at the time (and as some still do). Unemployed people were willing to do anything within reason to overcome the situation in which they found themselves through no fault of their own. That was true then, it is still true now!

Having been appointed, the new staff did Trojan work in preparation for the official opening of the Centre on January 24th 1987. A special tribute must be paid to the first caretakers, Joe Lyons and John Falvey, who worked so hard to make the Centre presentable for the opening.

It was indeed a gala occasion. Mr. Dick Spring, T.D. cut the red ribbon and declared the Centre officially open. The late bishop of Limerick, Dr. Newman and Church of Ireland Bishop Empey blessed the premises. Mrs Turner and the late Doris Wilson provided delicious refreshments for all those present and we launched our new project with pride and determination. We were ready to forge real and practical links between the trade union movement and the unemployed.

Even though many photographs were taken that day, they seem, with the passage of time to have been mislaid and we have been unable to locate them. Perhaps this is just as well as it makes us remember in the minds eye and in folk memory all those people who helped to establish our Centre and are so much part of its history. Without the commitment of all our council members and former members, such as Cllr. Frank Prendergast and John McLoughlin, Limerick would not have been the third ICTU unemployed Centre established in the Republic. There are now 37 centres throughout Ireland, north and south, in the ICTU Network of Unemployed Centres. They all do essential work in serving the needs of the unemployed and their families through the provision of a range of services such as: welfare rights information, adult education courses, assistance with job seeking and access to leisure and recreation facilities.

The success of the Limerick Centre for the Unemployed is indeed a tribute to the mutual solidarity and support which has developed between statutory, community and voluntary organisations. Through the PAUL Partnership and other bodies the Centre continues to participate and be of assistance in the further development of the process of social partnership in order to benefit the unemployed and socially excluded.

Ni neart le cur le cheile.

Mary Kehelly
Secretary,
Limerick Council of Trade Unions & Board of Management
Limerick Centre for the Unemployed

THE DIRECTOR'S VIEW



Joan Condon, who has been involved with the Centre since its inception and who has been Director for nearly eight years, gives her views on the Centre's work to John O'Regan.

Since taking up the position of full time director of The Limerick Centre for the Unemployed in 1990, Joan Condon has been the public face of the Centre's activities and its efforts to better the quality of life of the unemployed. A Limerick woman by birth and formerly known as Joan O'Donoghue she has played an active

part in the daily life of the Limerick Centre for the Unemployed since its opening in 1987. Prior to her installation as Director Joan worked as Education Officer on an SES Scheme. "My background before I came into the Centre as an SES worker had been administration and accounts, also typing and word processing. So when I came into the Centre I was asked did I want to go into that area and I said no. I thought I wanted to do something different. The position of Education Officer appealed to me and I found it was a new life for me because I come from a school system which was very academic and which was not geared towards adults at all. Ireland was very far behind in the field of adult education at the time (late 1980's) and some of my sisters who lived in England would have gone as mature students to get degrees and even take Masters and there did not seem to be the same opportunities in Ireland to get back into education. I was here as Education Officer and I worked with Maura Walshe and I must say we worked very well together and I helped to set up new classes at the time".

Since opening its doors in 1987 the issue of adult education was an important aspect of the Centre's activities. The provision of free classes for unemployed people was a ground-breaking effort to give a much wider access to education for many unemployed people than before. Joan played her own role in bettering the service the Centre wanted to provide "We did the usual events like the art exhibition and the certs night. But even though we had computer classes there wasn't typing here, so I initiated typing and we started with old manual typewriters and old telex machines - what would now be the equivalent of faxes - which were very cumbersome but which did have a keyboard and which helped" One of the old telex machines was kept in the then art room (now the state of the art computer learning centre - courtesy of Bank of Ireland). "I would have used them in an office situation because I had various jobs in different offices. I worked as a temp for about a month at E.I. Shannon and there was a whole room given over to them and they were quite useful. One could have a conversation through typing and it was like the Internet that we have now". Looking back on her period as an Education Officer what did Joan feel she had achieved within that role? "I would have hoped I'd opened up the field of adult education for adults coming in who would have been quite frightened of the system. I would also have hoped that I would have, through my portrayal of it, shown that adult education is a two way thing and its not just the expert at the top of the class, and you the pupil down below knows nothing and gets all this information from the expert. I would have hoped that I would have imparted the fact that adult education is a two way thing and its non-threatening, it's not frightening, it's exciting"

The Limerick Centre for the Unemployed came on stream at a very important time. During the period 1986-1987 when a mass exodus of young people to England to look for work was in progress and also qualifications played a large part in gaining employment. For many people out of work for

a long time, the very presence of a meeting place where they could come and also get information on social welfare issues and receive a sympathetic ear was in itself a bonus. The fact that it could also through its educational programme enable them to go on to further education or re-educate them for the changing workplace was one of the great achievements for the centre. Joan herself feels that the Centre was breaking new ground during that time "That whole area was so new at the time because before this if you were out of work not only did you loose a job, you also lost contact with people, you had no set routine, and you got more and more demoralised. Places like the Centre I think opened up a whole new world in that you were valued even though you were unemployed, you were given responsibility for your job and it was up to you with guidance to do the job and do it well. You were given freedom to grow and also there was some place to come and have a laugh and a chat with somebody and you weren't being judged, you weren't being seen as someone who was an unemployed person without a job, you were valued as a person that there was more to you than just being unemployed. I think that was the strength of the place and for people working here they would have been full of enthusiasm coming into a job. It was interesting work as well".

The situation under which the Centre is run by people employed on CE(Community Employment) Schemes is one thing Joan would like to see changing in the future "Unfortunately the Centre is still being run exclusively as a CE scheme which I think is one of it's weaknesses. Community Employment has improved greatly with the introduction of training. The Centre has always had training for people but now there is money there for people to access training and there are more places for people to go when they are finished. Unfortunately for most people it just means that there is a year's work and I know there under the CE Programme if you are over 35 and three years unemployed that you can go on and stay in the Centre for 3 years. But we are only allowed to retain 10% of those under 35 for a second year and we have to think of key areas like social welfare advice, administration and adult education. I think the second year people are just taking ownership of the job - they are doing a brilliant job - and suddenly the thanks you give them at the end is "I'm sorry but you're out you have to go and look for a job" I do understand that Community Employment is about acting as a springboard to get into full-time employment but I do think that we should have core staff and a certain amount of our staff should be full time people. You could work with both and I do think that it shouldn't be totally dependent on community employment". Many people who have worked in the Centre's education, and social welfare office to name two have during their time built up relationships with people looking for help and advice and in this way they learn some very important professional communication skills. It would be hoped that at some stage in the future that the key areas be given openings for full time work.

Over the last two years one of the highlights of the Centre's calendar of events has been the opening of the Computer Learning Centre, with computers donated by Bank of Ireland. In July 1996 Minister Willie O'Dea opened the new facility which has enabled students to further their educational and employment prospects. This shows how the Limerick Centre for the Unemployed has upgraded and improved its educational facilities within its 10 years of opening its doors at 33 Thomas Street. Joan Condon acknowledged the input that the Board of Management and the Trades Council have given to the Centre in its 10 years of activity so far. She also acknowledges FÁS for their involvement in the project since its inception. The Limerick Centre for the Unemployed has given not only a gathering place for the city and county's unemployed but also a source of hope to enable them to map out their own future with confidence.

Write On

by Liz Hepburn

My writing sessions in the centre have been up and running for the past five years. I hesitate to call them classes because nobody can be taught creative writing. Participants are nurtured, guided, encouraged, goaded and generally tormented by me into improving their work, going public with it, exploring good poetry and prose, and developing a good and realistic opinion of their own writing.

Creative writing is a very shy talent and those who are blessed with it are equally cursed with the most fragile ego imaginable and initially are terrified of criticism. I often picture them scribbling away in the dark when everyone else sleeps, ashamed of this affliction... until they discover that they are not unique after all.

There is great laughter in the group, with lively and provocative discussions on various issues. Absolute silence is demanded while a student reads, and kind, constructive criticism is encouraged and elicited from his or her peers.

Occasionally the group dynamics are very strong, as was the case two years ago when Ellen Moore, Teri Murray and John Johnston started 'Pen Friends' as an offshoot of the class, and published 'Scratches on the Wall'. Ellen has moved to the United States and 'Pen Friends' is now inactive. However, Terry has written two plays since then, and Emmanuel Clancy is soon to bring out a book of poetry -

and I take great pleasure in being associated with them and others whose time is yet to come.

This year I had the unmeasured joy of twice meeting Limerick's most renowned writer, Dr Frank McCourt, that delightful man who has put Limerick on the world stage with 'Angela's Ashes'. He is quiet and dignified with an appealing ordinariness and at his workshop in the Kilmurry Lodge he was very encouraging toward emerging writers.

The staff at the centre deserve a few words of praise, especially the friendly kitchen staff who keep us in coffee, the education office where they are extremely obliging, and Pdraig Malone for his patience with all our demands, reasonable or not. All the aforementioned are the ones with whom we come into regular contact, but there is a regular buzz of students and tutors going about the business of learning something new, or rebuilding forgotten skills.

I enjoy my sessions in the centre, as writing is a lonely occupation, and it is good to mix and exchange ideas with people of the same ilk, and I hope to have many more new students in the years to come.

Biographical note

Liz Hepburn facilitates Creative Writing classes in the Centre and in Adare. She is a journalist and writer of short stories, book editor and proof reader. She has worked with various groups in the past few years.

THE WORK OF THE CENTRE - ONE MAN'S VIEW

I first enrolled at the centre for the unemployed in 1990 for the photography class which I found very stimulating.

I vividly recall the thrill when I took out from the chemical tray my very first print; it was of a bare, desolate-looking tree out in the island fields which came out very well and I still have it today.

I then did something else that I had always longed to do but never had got round to; I learned to type.

On becoming fairly competent, I very nervously took the next step; computers. Now, I had always thought that to operate one of these hi-tech machines, you had to be a genius, which the Lord knows that I am not, but I persevered under expert tutelage and surprise, surprise, one day I pulled my own material out of the printer.

Now the creative writing class called and the friends that I made there I still have and value today.

From this class emerged a group of people who formed 'Pen Friends' and wrote and published an anthology of short stories and poetry which was presented on invitation to president Mary Robinson in her home on Wednesday, 24th January 1996. a great day for all and an occasion to remember forever.

I also worked at the centre as a fundraiser, a hard but interesting job.

The centre is a marvellous place with friendly, helpful staff and it enables people who have been out of the work-force for a long time to regain their confidence; I know it did for me.

The number and variety of courses has expanded enormously since the early days and I would encourage anyone to get involved as there is something for everybody, all for £1 fee.

The skills obtained here could definitely help to gain employment and are invaluable.

There is a creche available and only a nominal fee is charged

An excellent free advice service is in operation and hundreds of clients have had help with their social welfare and rent problems amongst other things, all matters being strictly confidential.

So, long live the Limerick Centre for the Unemployed, Thomas St.

I'm glad you were there!

John Johnston

HATCH 33

Hatch 33 is the newsletter of the Limerick Centre for the Unemployed which covers the work of the centre and related issues. Articles do not necessarily reflect the views of the board and management of the Centre

Ald. Jim Kemmy, TD



Jim Kemmy played a vital role in setting up the Centre in 1987. Through the years he always proved a good friend to the Centre and showed a keen interest in its work on behalf of the unemployed and less well off of Limerick.

Indeed, one of his last public functions was to address the annual certificates presentation evening for our adult education students on June 12th last. His words of encouragement and his sense of humour on the night were very much appreciated by all.

He remained for the whole evening happily mixing with students and staff. This is the way we will always remember him.

The death of Jim Kemmy has robbed working people and the unemployed of a true friend. We deeply mourn his passing.

Joan Condon

Where are they now?

When leafing through the annals of of the last ten years of the Limerick Centre for the Unemployed, the question asks itself; what happens to people who attend classes or work at the Centre, where do they go when the classes are over or their time on the scheme is finished. After the party there is a life to be lived and the following is where some of the class of 1990 are living or have lived since they walked in and out of the front door of 33 Thomas Street.

Jackie Barry - In 1994 Jackie returned to the Centre to work as an adult education officer and now is the receptionist with the LES office in the Centre - Declan Carey's girl Friday!

Derek Barry - Jackie's brother and adept with computers. He too returned to Centre in the mid-1990s to work in accounts and help set up the computerised wages system. With his City and Guilds 418 behind him he is now working with Esat Digiphone in Castletroy.

Mary Hickey - Mary is known to all at the Centre as regular participant in the Art class. Coming all the way in from Newmarket-on-Fergus without fail, Mary has found the Centre a source of hope and encouragement.

John Johnston - From the Centre to Rehab Care via the Umbrella Project the irrepressible flying Scotsman has blazed a trail in his own life and can be found on 95FM's sports reports giving his tips for the day.

John O'Regan - From the Centre he went to St. Mary's Integrated Development Programme where he edits The Parish News and has recently been working on their Internet Web Site soon to be unveiled (www.Smmdp@iol.ie).

1987 - 1997

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 *Mary Kehelly (Secretary)
 *John McLoughlin (Treasurer)
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 *Seamus Quinn
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 Patricia Kennedy (Adult Literacy Scheme)
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 Tony Darcy (Welfare Rights)
 Dave Lee (Education)
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 Gerry O'Mahoney (Recreation)
 Ray Porter (Recreation)
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 John Falvey (Caretaker)
 Mary Bourke (Reception)
 Joan Broderick (Reception)
 Mary Moore (Canteen)
 Phyllis McNamara (Canteen)
 Oliver O'Driscoll (Administration)
 Eleanor Murphy (Administration)
 Mary Spellman (Publications)
 Paula Cannon (Publications)
 Sandra Pentecost (Publicity)
 Tony Colbert (Publicity)
 Karen Quinlan (Creche Organiser)

Lucy Downey - After graduating in Business and European Studies at UL, Lucy briefly visited the Centre en route to her current employment as a teacher in H.S.I.

Sheila Cullinane - A familiar face to all the students of reflexology and aromatherapy. But before embarking on a study of these arts, Sheila worked as Administrator in the Centre in 1988.

Gus Quinn - Gus, a well known musician at traditional sessions around Limerick, worked in the Centre as a fundraiser in 1988. He has also been involved in taking photography classes in the Centre around the same time.

Cormac Neil and, or as he is better known "Sett", was briefly in the Centre as a Student in 1990 before taking work as a sound engineer. He is now tour manager with The Cranberries.

Mike Miller, another graduate of the Centre now works for CARI.

Bernie Ryan - education officer at the Centre in 1990. Later studied Ki Massage, alternative healing and psychotherapy. She is now a practising counsellor and psychotherapist.

Betty Walshe, a founder member of Gingerbread now runs her own business.

These were just some of the people who passed through the doors either in passing or for longer periods. Each has forged their own individual path since then, but for some fleeting moments the Limerick Centre for the Unemployed was part of their lives.

The Budget - Payback time for the Rich

Finance Minister, Charlie McCreevey's much heralded and long awaited first budget turned out not to be something of a damp squib, not to mention a bitter disappointment, to the unemployed and low paid workers. Given the continuing high economic growth rates and the obvious prosperity all around us, it was expected that a real effort would be made by the Government to begin to address the real disparities in our society. However this was not to be and instead the Budget was, according to most commentators, a bonus for the rich and the high earners.

For the unemployed the budget was particularly disappointing. A £3.00 increase in the single rate for Unemployment Benefit and Assistance payments and only an increase of £1.50 for adult dependants was all the Government could rise to, while for yet another year there has been no increase in the child dependants allowance. It has

been repeatedly said by Government supporters that these increases are above the rate of inflation and that they now bring such payments above the rates recommended by the Commission on Social Welfare Reform (CSWR). It should, however, be pointed out that inflation is now at almost its lowest ever and that eleven years have past since the Report of the CSWR.

Both the trade union movement and organisations representing the interests of the unemployed along with other concerned bodies such as the Combat Poverty Agency made repeated calls on the Government to target tax cuts at the lower paid. Such a policy was advocated in order to boost the earnings of people on low pay and to encourage the process of welfare to work. Instead of adopting this approach, the Government chose to reward the better off in our society as if they were solely responsible for the current economic progress.

The creation of 5000 extra places on the Back to Work Scheme and 1000 extra on Community Employment and the Job Initiative are welcome. However, the commitment to more substantial social inclusion measures is, to say the least, scanty. The National Anti-Poverty Strategy is only mentioned in passing in the Minister's speech and in such a way as to suggest that it may not be high on the Government's list of priorities.

Despite all the talk of the Celtic Tiger there are still huge social problems in our country requiring urgent action. There is still an unemployment figure of just under 240,000 and for many people poverty is an everyday reality. If the problems of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion cannot begin to be seriously tackled at a time of economic prosperity, then what chance is there when the inevitable economic downturn happens.

P.O'M.

NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE

Statement from Joan Condon, Director, Limerick Centre for the Unemployed on ICTU position on national minimum wage.

The ICTU submission to the Government Commission on a National Minimum Wage is very welcome as it sets out very clearly the issues involved from the viewpoint of low paid workers and the unemployed.

As Ireland's unprecedented economic growth continues there have been many assertions from employers organisations that "high social welfare payments" are a disincentive to work and that accordingly the unemployed

are refusing to take up available employment opportunities. However, the truth is somewhat different; it is the very low wages on offer in many sectors that constitutes the barrier between welfare and work. It is quite unreasonable to expect people to work for a little more or even less than they would receive on social welfare. The answer to the problem lies not in reducing welfare payments or forcing the unemployed to take up very low paid work. Rather it lies in the introduction of a statutory minimum wage which will ensure that those going from welfare to work are rewarded with a real improvement in

their standard of living. In their submission the ICTU spell out clearly why they believe that £5.00 per hour is a reasonable minimum wage and we in the Limerick Centre for the Unemployed agree with this figure.

The fruits of our economic growth must be spread throughout society. It is unjust and intolerable that while so many in Ireland are enjoying ever greater wealth and affluence, tens of thousands of unemployed people and low paid workers are living in or on the edge of poverty. If some employers cannot agree to pay decent wages at a time of widespread economic prosperity then it is clear that they never will, unless forced to do so through the instrument of a statutory minimum wage.

A decent national minimum wage provides a long overdue opportunity for low paid workers to boost their standard of living and in a modest way to benefit from the economic boom. It also opens up the prospect of having a significantly positive impact on the problems of unemployment and poverty through providing a real reward for work in the form of a genuine improvement in living standards and a reduction in social exclusion. It must be introduced without undue delay.

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