



BIAS BULLETIN

The Newsletter of Brent Irish Advisory Service

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Action group on unemployment

A NEW Irish community action group on jobs and housing — which will put its demands to local council and parliamentary candidates, and provide information to people in Ireland who are thinking of coming to Britain — is to be set up as the result of a community conference on unemployment, employment and training which took place at Kilburn Youth and Community Centre.

JOBS, like housing and other services, is one of the priority needs of the Irish community in north-west London. Economic recession and high unemployment in the construction, manufacturing and service industries — the traditional areas of employment for local Irish workers — has hit thousands of Irish people and families particularly hard.

Many unemployed Irish people have good education, training and skills but cannot find a suitable job. Others may need a second chance in further education or training for a new occupation. And a recent report on Irish youth in London showed that there is a very high level of unemployment among young migrants who arrive daily from Ireland.



The aims of the conference were to examine the problems and consequence of unemployment among Irish people; to present the opportunities available in terms of employment and training; and to examine how best to work with local authorities and other agencies in job creation.

The Irish Action Group's work will be in two main areas — pressing for retraining schemes for older Irish people and persuading young arrivals to seek work outside of the traditional areas of construction and heavy manufacturing.

The new organisation emerged at an all-day conference in Brent, north London — a borough with an estimated 5,000 jobless Irish. The Brent Irish Advisory Service helped organise the meeting, which was mainly attended by community and social workers.

Fr. Bobby Gilmore, director of the Irish Chaplaincy Scheme in Britain, told the meeting that the effects of unemployment are more acutely felt amongst the Irish community than by the indigenous population. He warned that the recent upsurge in emigration is proving to be "a brain drain that Ireland can ill afford". He accused the Irish education system of failing adequately to train schoolgoers in practical skills, thereby forcing many of them into a choice between the dole and emigration.

He also drew attention to the fact that almost 60% of the Irish-born community is now 45 years of age or over, with virtually one in four of pensionable age. "Many of these people have only recently had to face the prospect of no job", he said.

Maureen Hartigan, of the Irish in Britain History Group, accused successive Dublin governments of "implicitly encouraging emigration" as part of economic strategy.

LACK OF HOUSING

Shelley Adams, a worker with the Brent economy resource unit, drew attention to the lack of housing in the borough and estimated that, if 500 houses were built each year by the local council for the next five years, 1,300 people would be directly employed and £34 million of taxpayers' money would be saved.

Among the groups represented at the conference were BIAS, CARA, the Brent Trades Council, the London Irish Women's Centre, the Camden Irish Centre, Kilburn Polytechnic and the Irish Freedom Movement. Most have agreed to join the Irish Action Group.

Dónal Mac Craith of BIAS, the principal organiser of the conference, says that a large proportion of London's Irish jobless are in the building trade. He favours a positive programme of diversification by such people into other areas of employment.

"Many of the Irish jobless have excellent education, training and skills. Others may need a second chance in further education and training. The latter are the people we most want to highlight and help at this conference", he said.

Almost 80 people, representing local Irish community organisations, and all shades of political opinion, came to the conference, the first of its kind for north-west London's large Irish community. Conference workshops were held on alternatives to unemployment, anti-Irish racism, social security and training opportunities.

Mayo-born Tom Durkin, president of Brent Trades Council, said that Irish people must use their political potential to get more new jobs: "We must get together with other community groups to address the political parties, put our demands to them, and ask them what they are going to do about it."

Galway-born priest Fr. Bobby Gilmore, director of the Irish Chaplaincy Scheme in Britain, said that unemployment caused poverty which resulted in an "absence of choice" and diminished personal freedom. He felt that there was a need to motivate the young unemployed to take an active part in Irish life.

"My greatest concern is for the older generation," said Fr. Gilmore. "We need to cue them into opportunities for retraining in new skills and encourage them to consider different occupations."

Fr. Gilmore proposed the formation of an "action group" to educate the Irish Government and young people in Ireland about the problems of unemployment and to discourage insensitive migration, and to tackle the problems of Irish people who came here in the past and who might now need to be retrained for a new occupation. His proposal was unanimously agreed by all those present at the conference.

'Welcome to Ireland'

KILBURN's first ever Irish festival — called Fáilte Eireann (Welcome to Ireland) — organised by Kilburn public library in Salusbury Road in conjunction with local community groups, got off to a fine start with an evening of traditional and folk music.

The entertainment at the Kilburn Square Centre tomorrow is being organised by Brent Irish Advisory Service in Kilburn to celebrate the Irish people's rich heritage of traditional and contemporary music, song and dance and to say Cead Míle Fáilte (a hundred thousand welcomes) to their friends and neighbours of many lands and cultures.

Now in its eighth year, BIAS is a community development and self help organisation which provides practical assistance and welfare support within Brent's large Irish community, highlighting its needs and campaigning for adequate resources to meet them.

Thomas Davis's famous song "A Nation Once Again" and the sound of the pipes and drums of the local London Bantry Pipers started the evening.

The programme for the evening included folk-singer Billy Stevens and his group Lough Swilly, the Willesden-based Bantry Pipers, local Irish dancers and guest traditional musicians. The event was organised by the Kilburn-based Brent Irish Advisory Service and all proceeds will go to the organisation's welfare fund.

Support for mental health project

THE B.I.A.S. public meeting on mental health and the Irish Community, which took place at Kilburn Square Youth and Community Centre, attracted a large attendance from the Irish community in north-west London and from professionals working in the specialist area of mental health.

The meeting was called to highlight the mental health problems and the lack of support in the community for mentally ill Irish people, and gave members of the local Irish community an opportunity to discuss this issue and to offer support for the setting up of a mental health project.

More than 50 people went to the meeting, much more than were expected, and obviously showing the high level of interest and concern about the issue of mental health within the local Irish community today. The meeting was opened by Longford-born Colum Moloney, of Keslake Road, Queen's Park, chairman of the Kilburn-based Brent Irish Advisory Service.

Mr Moloney explained that the meeting was called to underline the need to appoint a specialist mental health worker for the Irish in Brent due to the high incidence of mental health problems in the Irish community. It was also to elicit support for the setting up of a mental health steering group to develop supporting services in the field of mental health.

Roscommon-born social worker Jean Lyons gave a report on the various problems affecting the Irish community and how these were detrimental to positive mental health. She explained that it

was not a comprehensive report due to the limited time available to her, but it showed the high incidence of mental illness in the Irish community and the need for the development of good preventive and community care services.

A wide-ranging discussion from the floor then took place. A number of people who had family members affected by mental illness felt a need for support in helping them cope with this problem. Some people who themselves had experienced the problems of

mental illness felt that there was a need for community support and acceptance.

There was a very positive response from the meeting, and a number of people who expressed an interest in developing a mental health project put their names forward to set up a steering group

BRENT Irish Mental Health Group, which was set up at a meeting in Kilburn Square Community Centre recently, is made up of nearly 20 volunteers who

came forward at a well-attended public meeting on Mental Health and the Irish community at the same venue in September.

Members of the group decided that their first priorities must include basic research into the nature and extent of Irish community needs in the field of mental health. It was agreed that adequate community resources, including a full-time specialist worker for the group, were urgently required.



CORK County councillor Noel Gollins (centre) who visited Kilburn *pictured at* Brent Irish Advisory Service with (far left) housing worker Jim Smith, volunteer Tony Donlan, student Jean Lyons and organiser Dónal MacCraith.

More help on way for emigrants

ONE of Ireland's major local authorities has agreed to provide practical help to its emigrants in north-west London largely as the result of efforts by a councillor who first came to Kilburn almost 30 years ago, and has returned on a holiday visit almost every year since then.

Dubliner Noel Collins is an Independent member of Cork County Council, representing Midleton in north Cork, where he is also the chairman of Midleton Urban District Council, and a Peace Commissioner. He was

born in Lusk, north county Dublin but has lived in Co. Cork for several years.

"After leaving school in Ireland in the peak emigration years of the 1950s, I came to London in search of work and first set foot in Kilburn in 1956.

"In 1962 I went back to Ireland, having spent some working years in Kilburn, but I like to make the occasional trip there to renew old acquaintances.

Mr Collins has always been interested in social welfare issues, and particularly in the problems of senior citizens. He has been the prime mover in getting Cork County Council to agree to assist

Irish emigrants in north-west London — believed to be the first local authority in Ireland to do so.

"They have agreed to receive a delegation from an Irish centre in London at the full council meeting," said Mr Collins last week. "But I would also like to see the Irish Government do more to help our emigrants, especially in the sphere of housing. Pensioners in particular need to be made more welcome.

"I would also like to see more co-operation between the different Irish welfare centres and all local authorities in Ireland to improve matters for those of our emigrants in need

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