

Summer in London?

Here comes the Summer and with it the traditional increase in the numbers of young Irish people coming to Britain in search of work.

This year, as in other years, many young men are likely to turn to the building industry for their first job here. The promise of "good money" and "cash in hand" may sound promising but does it ring true?

Today in London the building industry is experiencing a recession with a consequent fall-off in the numbers of jobs available. Below AGIY highlights two main areas of concern that a young person should consider **BEFORE** deciding to work "on the buildings".

(1) HEALTH AND SAFETY

The outdoor life on sites is not all that it seems. In 1988 160 building workers were killed on sites; 4,000 died from occupational diseases and thousands more were seriously injured.

Tradesmen and labourers (those at the "dirty" end of the job) are at greater risk than site managers and site agents. Common accidents include falls from scaffolding, walls collapsing, machinery overturning or out of control, falls through roofs, poisoning by fumes, gassing, dangerous exposure to chemicals and electrocution. Most accidents are due to gross negligence on the part of employers and non-compliance with minimum health and safety regulations.

Amongst those killed or injured are many Irish people and often for those who survive the consequences include loss of limbs, back and strain injuries, bronchitis, diseases relating to dust e.g. asthma, cancers, arthritis, rheumatism ... in other words, ill health for life.

WHAT ACTION CAN BE TAKEN?

If somebody is worried about health and safety issues on building sites there are a number of things to do:

(a) contact the Health and Safety Executive Tel. 081 594 5522 - they will come and inspect the site;

(b) contact the local office of the construction trade unions UCATT Tel 081 622 2362 or TGWU Tel. 081 800 4281 and ask for an organiser to come to the site;

(c) contact the Construction Safety Campaign Tel. 081 732 3711 who are concerned about working to improve health and safety on building sites.

All of the above contacts can be made anonymously.

(2) GETTING PAID

A decent day's pay for a decent day's work might seem like fair play but that isn't always the way on building sites.

Skilled tradespeople can earn a decent living wage; for many newly arrived Irish people working as casual labourers can also mean being paid "casually". Sub-contractors or "subbies" are the usual employers of casual labour and very often they employ people "off the cards" or "on the lump". This means that the worker will probably get

paid "cash in hand", will be working unofficially and not registered as an employee of the sub-contractor. Consequently the worker will be without any legal employment rights and

- * is likely to get underpaid for his work or sometimes not get paid at all - some subs have reputations for disappearing **AFTER** the job has been done leaving workers unpaid;

- * will not get paid for sick days, bank holidays, when work is scarce, or the job gets "rained off" (i.e. weather not permitting work on the site);

- * will not be entitled to any notice of dismissal and is likely to be unable to join a trade union as "the lump" usually operates on non-unionised sites;

- * will not have his tax or National Insurance contributions paid on his behalf by his employer.

The **SECOND** most common way of working the lump is workers becoming "self employed" and using 715 certificates. The worker is then responsible for their own tax and insurance payments. For non-payment of taxes or fraudulent use of a 715 cert. the worker is liable for prosecution and/or a hefty fine.

This practice is outside agreement between the trade unions and building employers and again operates on sites that are non-unionised and where bad employment practice and poor observance of health and safety practice is most likely to operate.

WHAT ACTION CAN BE TAKEN?

As far as possible work on a unionised building site (there are some around!) where there will be a fair wage, proper observance of health and safety regulations, where the employer employs workers offi-

cially and "on the cards" and where tax and National Insurance is paid. Trade unions or local authorities may be able to help with the names of good employers.

If working for any other employer here is a checklist of things to find out (in writing if possible) **BEFORE** starting work:

- * **WHEN** do they pay? Is it weekly? daily or a week in hand?

- * **HOW** do they pay? Is it cash? cheque? or directly into a bank account?

- * **WHERE** is the job? On a site in London? or outside?

- * Will you be able to get a sub from your wages if you have no money to live on until your first payment?

ALL young people coming to London should be advised to open either a post office/building society or bank account soon after their arrival here. Post office and building society accounts are easier and quicker to open.

Those intending working on the buildings should especially open such accounts - otherwise they can end up paying a hefty % commission from their week's wages to their local publican for the convenience of cashing their wages cheque. This practice is not unusual and the "commisison" can be as high as 10% in some cases.

More comprehensive information on coming to London is available in AGIY's "A Guide to London for Young Irish People" - contact AGIY 071 278 1665.

AGIY would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Construction Safety Campaign and the Irish Chaplaincy in the compilation of this feature.

A Question of Numbers!

Last month's edition of AGIY INFO raised considerable interest amongst welfare/advice centres in its attempt to provide a "snapshot" of the numbers of Irish people using advice and information centres in London and Ireland in 1989.

While researching the article it became clear that agencies do not employ standard forms or methods of collecting statistical data on people using their services.

As a result of this AGIY believes there is scope to develop a standard statistical information retrieval system in conjunction with the "front line" agencies which would assist groups in identifying their clients needs and raise awareness amongst statutory and voluntary agencies about the resources required to meet these needs.

AGIY have therefore applied to DION in the current funding round to carry out a six month feasibility study to assess the possibility of establishing such a system.

** In last month's article on "Irish Users of Advice Centres" we would like to point out that the Camden Irish Centre figure of 2,897 users only referred to the numbers of different individuals interviewed by the Centre in 1989. In addition to this a further 4,052 interviews were carried out and the Centre also received 8,000 other enquiries from people using their services.

Office Premises Wanted

An Teach Irish Housing Association is urgently seeking new office accommodation. We ideally require premises of around 600-800 sq feet to accommodate 1/2 workers and close to tube/transport. If you can help please contact:

Mike Farrell,
An Teach Irish Housing Association
c/o Haringey Irish Centre
Pretoria Road
Tottenham
London N17 Tel. 081 365 1751

Free Food

The Barnsbury Unwaged Groups are offering a free demonstration of low cost, nutritious food and cooking for people on low incomes every Friday from 11.00 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. Free food will also be available at:

11 Barnsbury Road
Islington
London N1

Office Furniture Bargains!

Surplus office furniture and equipment in County Hall is being offered at reduced prices to voluntary and charitable organisations in London boroughs by the London Residual Body. It includes everything from office desks and chairs to filing cabinets and trays. For more info contact Samuda Bullen on 071 633 5845.

Agency Profile

SWAAP - The Service Workers Action and Advisory Project has been in existence since 1984. Arising out of the voluntary work amongst service workers of several of the founders, the Project was originally funded by the GLC. It is now funded by the London Boroughs Grants Scheme. The industries where SWAAP works (restaurants, hotels, hostels, contract cleaning, laundries and retail) have undergone rapid expansion in London. They are however characterised by low pay, negligible collective

bargaining and a high concentration of ethnic minority and particularly migrant workers.

SWAAP's aims are to provide an advisory and support service for low paid workers in the service sector and to encourage workers in these industries to realise latent skills, potentials and resources they have traditionally been unable to develop through lack of cohesive organisation.

Issues covered include sick pay, maternity rights, redundancy, hours and pay, dismissal, part-timers rights and trade unions. SWAAP has ten full-time workers, eight specialising in particular industries. The Project does not just wait for people to phone or call in but leaflets workplaces with information on employment rights. Leaflets are printed in SWAAP's printing press and customised to a particular industry/workplace. The Project has many links with community groups and welcome more. Further info can be obtained from Liane Groves Tel. 587 1947.

LIYF Fee Reminder

Enclosed with this Newsletter is a reminder to groups that it's that time of year again when subscriptions to the London Irish Youth Forum are due! The subscription goes towards the cost of servicing the Forum and charges are kept to a minimum. Subscription rates are Voluntary Organisations £20 and Statutory Groups £30.

London Irish Youth Forum

(LIYF)

The date of the next LIYF meeting is

Thursday 5th July 1990 at 2.30 p.m.

Irish Centre, 50 Camden Square, London NW1

The main agenda item will be:

Youth Homelessness - A Response

Speaker: Eleanor Button, National Development Unit, Centrepont Soho

AGIY INFO IS A SIX WEEKLY PUBLICATION. SHOULD YOUR GROUP WISH TO PUBLICISE ANY EVENTS, NOTICES ETC. SEND DETAILS TO EITHER JOAN OR DAVE AT THE ACTION GROUP FOR IRISH YOUTH ON TEL. 071 278 1665

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