

Workers' Memorial Day.

We remember the lessons learned from the past, the outcomes and the strategies that enabled change, and those who sacrifice taught us well. But remembering only once a year, could dishonour in some way, what they achieved and who they were - when every day, we have an opportunity as leaders to embed the change, achieved in the past, into the present and future. That is the responsibility of remembrance.

I remember my ancestors on both sides of the Lockout, a century ago in Wexford. The Corishs' led the struggle for better pay and conditions on the outside, while my Great Grandfather Keating, a blacksmith, had to move out of his home, and move in on site in Pierce's Foundry to keep the furnaces going, so that when the Lockout was over, the workers could swiftly return to work and earning. History repeated itself a century later, when my brother's colleagues went in every day to Waterford Crystal, to keep the furnaces going, in the hope of finding a new buyer. Playing with fire in any era is dangerous. This week, those flames finally shone their light from the European Court of Justice for the Crystal pensioners. History is very close and memory is relevant.

The physical and mental wellbeing of all workers is important. A bogus tweet this week caused 105 billion to be wiped from the value of international markets in minutes. Markets which should be the ultimate in reasoned and calm analysis and driven by the facts, really only consistently display their true talent – their capacity to panic. How many workers would be put in a place of responsibility in any employment, based on their talent for panicking? Yet workers and society are subjected to that unstable mastery every day. It is tough living in a society now being directed to satisfy those who panic. There is a certain noble calm in remembrance.

Mental health is important. A cruel society or a bigoted workplace, can destroy lives physically and emotionally. Labelling people negatively as LGBT often constrains the many different attributes that make up each worker and colleague. Stigma is the cause of much ill health, despair and even suicide. It is a luxury no workplace can afford and no colleague can ignore or exacerbate.

The Trade Union Movement has a just and proud record of being to the forefront of protecting LGBT workers from discrimination, stigma and ill treatment, long before decriminalisation. In our Ireland of contradiction, we celebrate this year the 40th anniversary of the granting of the Freedom of the City of Dublin to a couple who could not legally marry then, Hilton Edwards and Micheal Mac Liammoir, and the 30th anniversary of the denial of the human rights of David Norris by our Courts. It is 25 years ago since the European Court of Justice found Ireland in breach of human rights in the Norris case, 20 years ago since decriminalisation, and five years ago since Lydia Foy won the right to a birth cert and still hasn't got it. Today we might be on the verge of marriage equality?

The Trade Union movement stood in solidarity on these and many LGBT issues, even before they

marched with a bunch of 'criminals' to Fairview Park, thirty years ago in 1983, to protest at the lack of sentencing for the murderers of Declan Flynn, an Aer Rianta worker there. The universal struggle for rights brings many different people together - working women, men, ethnic, political, faith, health and social minorities and LGBT people. The absence of respect for identity and rights in the workplace is a cancer that affects many workers and their wellbeing. Everyone must have the right to earn a living and to do so in a safe, respectful and decent environment. We must ensure our behaviour reflects and realises that ambition in our working lives. The struggle for rights unites people of all strands, and we all benefit from their brave actions.

Human rights are something you have the capacity to recognise in another human being. It is not a benevolent act by the privileged to grant rights to those who threaten their privilege the least. Two lesbian women knew that over a century ago. Eva Gore Booth, too long in the shadow of her revolutionary sister Constance Markievicz, and forcibly in the shadows, because she shared her life with fellow trade unionist, Esther Roper, knew a lot about well-being. Eva is one of our greatest Irish Trade Union activist role models. She left the lush parklands of Lissadell, Sligo for a terraced house in Manchester and a long life of activism for womens' and workers' rights and their well being. Her biographer, Sonya Tiernan, tells us that Eva was a suffragist, a peaceful negotiator of amazing impact and organisational skill. She challenged the dangers to workers' lives and livelihoods and won. In 1916 her revolution was to publish the first lesbian magazine 'Urania', bringing womens' lives further from the shadows and into the sunlight of recognition.

In impoverished times, Eva saw the key issue was the right to work. Some legislators then, who confused benevolence with equality, did not think women should work beyond 8pm in the evening, after all they had families to raise. That's well and good if there is a framework of economic support to replace the loss of a nightly wage. The 10,000 women who worked in circuses, theatres and entertainment's livelihood was about to be curtailed by a clause in the Dangerous Performances Acts of 1906. Eva didn't see this law, which allegedly arose from death and injury to tight rope walkers, as protecting anyone, but as a means of restricting women's right to work, as the protection was not being extended to men. She argued "the laws of gravity apply to men and women alike". 100,000 women could only work at night in bars. Clause 20 of the Licensing Bill 1908, sneakily would ban them from working at night. They and their families would starve, so Eva founded the 'Barmaids Political Defence League'. This lady, not only reached out to these women, but organised them into unions to ensure they had the right to work. She challenged the Government on this law and opposed the re- election of the newly appointed President of the Board of Trade on this issue. Even when as a woman, she could not vote herself, her campaign amongst the male electors in a by- election, saw Eva Gore Booth and Esther Roper organise huge rallies, where she spoke from the top of a coach in four, with her sister Constance at the whip. Constance was asked by a male heckler 'can you cook a dinner' to which she replied 'Certainly, can you drive a coach in four?' 'The Women's Trade and Labour Council' campaign, led by this devoted couple, defeated Winston Churchill, the President of the Board of Trade, in the Manchester

by-election of 1908.

One of the few daytime occupations open to women had been to work in the mines. What might be called Health and Safety today, was being cited only against women, who also needed these dangerous jobs. The tall and slight lady from Lissadell went down the mines herself, attached a harness to her back and dragged the heavy skips of coal physically through the tunnels for a week, to prove women could also do this physically desperate and dangerous work, in a time of few economic options for survival. Women continued to be employed there and she then continued to highlight the dreadful risks and foul conditions. She organised them, the textile workers, women's suffragists, and gave them an effective voice. She and Esther worked for change that would not impact on them directly, but would create a safer and fairer society for others. Gore Booth was the main Irish person to attend the trial of Roger Casement and led the campaign for a death penalty pardon, as nationalistic Ireland walked away from his heroism, when his 'black' diaries were published. It is not acceptable to laud the act and loath the activist. Gore Booth and Casement, who also stood against worker exploitation in the Congo, were true defenders of workers' rights and LGBT role models from history.

We don't teach this history of courage, selflessness and leadership by those who themselves were ostracised from society. This beacon of the solidarity between privilege and worker, to enable a better society remains forgotten, as an extraordinarily effective women's advocate and active trade unionist today. Her noble legacy was tainted by a century of shame, because of her love for Esther, which was a core dynamic in their struggle for human rights. They did not meet with the approval of even those who were the direct beneficiaries, of such a huge capacity to achieve change, in an unequal and unfair society.

There is diversity in the modern workplace. There is diversity in the past. The identity of most LGBT workers remains shrouded in the constructed shame of Church/State collaboration. As we remember them today, let us practice it tomorrow, to ensure a safe workplace for all workers, regardless of whom they are lucky enough to love. The Trade Union movement has supported the wellbeing of LGBT workers and their capacity to love from early times and many recorded this again in submissions to the recent Constitutional Convention on Equal Marriage.

Discrimination is like a boomerang, if you throw it out as being acceptable, it is bound to come back and hit you, as people perceive your own differences, in a negative way. You may never know the complete identity or motivation of those who fight for rights for all people. But you can assist in the removal of stigma, by respecting difference and honouring positive role models, past and present. I am proud to include Eva and Esther in this memorial, as their life work did so much to improve the safety and wellbeing of so many poor workers, in a time when few of the privileged even acknowledged the existence of danger, inequality or sexuality.

Our ambition as a society today must not be limited to the creation of a more profitable market, but to

prioritise the creation of a fairer and safer society. The new economy must be one which will not be panicked by a rogue tweet, but will be panicked by inequality, stigma, workplace danger and discrimination in all its negative forms.

Eva Gore Booth and Esther Roper, whose egalitarian passion and principled ability, defeated the might of the Establishment with their argument and skill, remain a beacon of hope in a much challenged modern society, being auctioned off as a mere marketplace. In remembering these great women, let us celebrate the complete identity of workers and their new families. Let their legacy no longer be 'locked out' of the history of the achievement of womens' contribution to the wellbeing of workers. They and all LGBT workers should be honoured by our active support for new leaders of equal courage, as we play our own leadership role and work for the wellbeing of all workers and our future society, so that in the near future, the panic button of the markets, will be the only thing endangered by redundancy.