



Employment Research Centre NewsFlash

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The New World of Work: Labour Markets in Contemporary Ireland, edited by **Gerry Boucher and Gráinne Collins**

There is little question that the way we work and live has changed in recent years. Two decades ago, 24/7 was just an unimportant fraction, the wrong answer to a question about circles. Now, 24/7 indicates that we are fully paid up members of a rapid, global economy with all the pressures of competition, time squeezes and instant fixes. Technology which was supposed to make our life easier has rather blurred the traditional boundaries between work life and home life making our life much more complicated. Furthermore, this new economy calls for new skills— skills like responding quickly to competing demands, being a 'team player' and jumping from task to task. And if the Irish can't provide these skills then there are plenty of people across the world willing to do so either in their country of origin or here in Ireland. In response to all these changes, the topic of being overworked and stressed has become a hot subject of discussion in workplaces, in the media, in medical journals and in homes. But many of these changes, while they are talked about by the dogs in the street

have not been investigated at an empirical level. A new book edited by Gerry Boucher and Gráinne Collins rectifies this.

Too often in Ireland the debate has been polarized between, fairness in employment is associated with socialism and the sluggish German model of capitalism and dynamic success with the US model. This book starts by looking at the facts – how are people working in Ireland and what effect does that have on their home and community life. Different chapters look at the work-life balance of mothers and fathers and the available to support to balance families. Chapters also look at what it's like to work in the new economy (information and communication technology sectors) and finds that the long hours are largely a myth but equally so too is the myth of being able to control your own time. A couple of chapters deal with individualisation of the workplace and the retreat of unionism. Both these chapters highlight an important role for unions but the difficulty in promoting trade unionism under the present government support of neo-liberalism. Various chapters also highlight how unfamily friendly these sectors are. While it is all very well being young in these sectors

many high-skilled workers report wanting to downshift when they have children. Other chapters look at the experience of immigrants in Ireland trying to access employment and lead a good life – these chapters paint a far from rosy picture, and the way asylum seekers are left to hang in the air without work or appropriate training is highlighted.

Ireland is at a juncture, the relentless drive of the corporate profit-imperative has swept up so many of us in a mindless labour treadmill -whose only reward seems to be more and faster-paced work. Irish people are starting to ask 'do we live to work or work to live?'. Is a high and rising GDP enough in itself or is GDP a means to an end. This book argues that Ireland has gone too far in supporting economic growth at any costs and must pull back and start putting the social infrastructures in place. Undoubtedly these social infrastructures support the economy but more importantly they also support the citizens of Ireland in trying to live their lives. The book therefore clears the ground to be able to start thinking what type of society we want to live in: a 24/7 economy, going around in ever decreasing circles or one in the round.

ERC NEWS

Recent conference papers and presentations by staff

Gráinne Collins:

'The institutional shaping of cleaning', The European Association for Evolutionary Political Economy, Bremen, Germany 10-12th November 2005

Christian Schweiger :

Journal article:

'The Role of the *Modell Deutschland* in the Enlarged European Union', *Debatte: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, 13 (2), November 2005.

Conference paper given:

'Au revoir Paris? The New European Policy Approach of the CDU/CSU', PSA German Politics

Specialist Group Workshop, Trinity College Dublin, 24 September 2005.

Ian Bruff:

Ian has written a ERC Observatory piece on how migration to Ireland reinforces rather than alleviates skills shortages in the software industry, see <http://www.tcd.ie/ERC/observatorydownloads/Migration.pdf>

Workshop announcement
**"Ireland's
New Workforces"**

Provisional date: Wed June 21 2006.

Abstracts 15/02/06 with acceptance by 28/02/06.

The detailed call for papers will be in the next newsletter.

What we learned this month: The Report on a National Acute Hospitals **Hygiene Audit** undertaken on behalf of the National Hospitals Office, Health Service Executive made for interesting reading. Two things stood out. First the Specialist Infectious Diseases Ward at the Mater Misericordiae, Dublin had one of the lowest scores for any ward in the country! The second, notable thing, which took far more digging was the relationship between audit score and whether the hospital was cleaned by contract cleaning companies, in-house or a mixture of the two. The results give no comfort to those who argue that the market always performs better, nor does it give any comfort to those who argue public service is better served by public servants. In an analysis by Gráinne Collins no discernible statistical difference was found in the audit score by type of cleaning. Some of the hospitals with the highest audits scores were cleaned in-house and some by contract cleaning companies. Ditto hospitals which had low audit scores. Admittedly audit scores tell us very little about the state of hygiene in an hospital (rather an audit measures things like the colour coding of plastic bags and whether things like toasters *appear* to be clean). However, if we are going to answer the question should cleaning be outsourced or not—we are going to have to look to other criteria—such as cost for the hospitals but also quality of employment, poverty and life-cycle issues for the cleaner. Let the research begin!

Project Updates

Critical

There is a series of events in November and December 2005 to present the findings from the CRITICAL project. The meetings will take place throughout Europe and in Australia, including Dublin on the 2nd December 2005. More information about these events can be found on the CRITICAL Roadshow webpages: <http://www.tcd.ie/ERC/criticalconference.php>

Migrants

At present the interviews conducted for this project - with migrants, human resource managers of software firms and representatives of state agencies - are being transcribed. The data will be incorporated into future presentations including the ERC seminar on the 21/11/05.

ERC autumn/winter 2005/06 seminar programme

21 November 2005

Ian Bruff (TCD)

Importing Skilled Labour to High Tech Ireland: The Social Production of Skills Shortages in the Irish Software Industry.

5 December 2005

Virpi Timonen (TCD)

Eldercare Work in Ireland: Public, Private and Informal Carers in the Community.

9 January 2006

Michael Doherty (DCU)

Participation Boutique or Talking Shop? Workplace Partnership in the Public Sector.

23 January 2006

Lee Komito (UCD)

Virtual Community: A Contradiction in Terms?



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