

Spy cameras, worthless pensions and censorship

Trinity College SIPTU

Workers Solidarity Movement

1995

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SPY CAMERAS and pensions that give you no money were on the agenda when the SIPTU members in Trinity College met for their annual general meeting in March. The college management want to install eight 'security' cameras on the campus, with a possible 24 more to be added in future.

Security guards fear that jobs will be replaced by electronic surveillance. Management denials are not believed given that six vacancies have been left unfilled. Just 23 staff are expected to cover the city centre campus around the clock. An additional fear is that staff could be spied upon, as could student protests.

The local SIPTU are asking for a detailed statement of who will have the right to monitor the cameras, who will have access to the recordings, and on what terms. They are looking for formal guarantees that the recordings can not be used in any inquiry into staff or student behaviour, where it is not directly concerned with a crime.

But, as the union newsletter says, "even with a lot of written guarantees and procedures in place, there is no getting away from the uncomfortable reality that the cameras would mean that 'big brother' is watching you".

PENSION ...LESS THAN A PITTANCE

Full-time staff get a pension equal to two thirds of salary. Part-time staff get nothing. A claim for the same pension rights in proportion to the hours worked has been on the table for years. Management, in keeping with government policy, want to 'co-ordinate' pensions. This means that the value of the social welfare old age pension is subtracted from the workplace pension. For part-time staff this will mean getting absolutely zero from Trinity after a lifetime of work as a cleaner, secretary or catering assistant.

A one-day 'warning strike for part-time pension rights last year was well supported, not only by SIPTU but also by other unions and some non-union staff. If proper pensions are not granted the mood is for a serious fight.

NO DEBATE WITHOUT PERMISSION

A motion to the meeting condemning the Industrial Relations Act and calling for a campaign to repeal it was proposed by the local union President, Jim Larragy, and seconded by WSM member Alan MacSimóin. While expressing his agreement with the spirit of the motion, Education branch president Jack McGinley quoted rule 62 of SIPTU which prevents a local section from even discussing an issue not directly related to their workplace unless they ask permission first! The meeting was then asked to vote on whether to vote on the motion. Amidst a lot of confusion the meeting narrowly voted to obey the rule book's censorship.

When SIPTU was formed through a merger of the ITGWU and the FWUI we were stitched up when we were given a ready made rule book that members had no input into. The only choice we had was to accept it in its entirety or to reject it, which would have made it impossible for the union to function or even legally exist.

A rules revision conference is planned for 1997. Oppositionists within the union should start identifying the worst rules and begin encouraging their branches to discuss what rules we want in what is supposed to be our union.

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