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Travellers March against Shanty Towns

Workers Solidarity Movement

1996

Travellers and their supporters held a protest on December 10th last year. The march was against the Dublin local authorities' policy of herding Travellers into primitive temporary sites and forced removal of Travellers into these officially constructed shanty towns. Temporary sites have no electricity, no showers or baths, no fire precautions or public phones and are all situated in isolated areas or beside motorways, surrounded by high walls or mounds of earth. The following report was issued by the Dublin Accommodation Coalition with Travellers:

Local Authorities are responsible for bringing many Travellers to an early grave by forcing them into 'temporary sites' that lack the most basic facilities. These officially planned and sanctioned shanty towns contribute to the third world nature of Travellers' health profile. Only two out of every hundred Travellers live to see 65 years of age. The infant mortality rate is three times the national average.

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Local authorities are charged with the provision of decent healthy accommodation and they have failed miserably, and not only have they failed to provide it, they are deliberately sanctioning these 'temporary' site death traps and then herding, bullying, intimidating and evicting Travellers to force them into them. In the most heavy handed way, they are reneging on the spirit if not the letter of many court judgments using tactics that the Ku Klux Klan would be proud of, arriving at dawn to bulldoze Traveller men, women and children out of camps.

Thus spoke Thomas McCann at the protest march which was organised by the Dublin Accommodation Coalition for Travellers in Dublin city centre to mark the U.N. International Day for Human Rights. The march culminated outside the Dail with Santa delivering ten small white coffins, representing the temporary sites in the Dublin area, to the seat of power and responsibility.

In 1986 the ESRI said that 'the living circumstances of Irish travellers are intolerable. No humane and decent society, once made aware of these circumstances, would allow them to persist.' It's 1995 and not only do they persist, they're getting worse, said Gearoid O Riain. What does this tell us about Irish society? John Bruton and his government colleagues were all stressing recently, in another debate, the need to respect minorities in Ireland and the need to provide for minorities. We couldn't have said it better ourselves, John. Now let's start seeing some of this respect for Travellers.

Christmas is a time for peace and solidarity, a time for children and families, a time for reunions and celebrations. And it's time to focus on the living cir-

cumstances of one of Ireland's most excluded groups – Travellers. For many Travellers it's a miserable time, a time when the sense of not being wanted is most obvious. 1,200 Traveller families are living in appalling conditions, lacking basic facilities such as clean water and toilets.

It's time to stop evictions. It's time for residents' associations to live and let live. It's time for the government to set about achieving its own target of providing enough sites by the year 2000. It's time to speed up implementation of the recommendations in the Task Force report. It's time to stop herding Travellers into large 'temporary' sites which are unfit for human living. It's time for all decent citizens to show solidarity and support for Travellers' rights, said John O'Connell.