

# We are Workers not Slaves

The story of the  
**GAMA** Struggle



TÜRK ÇALIŞANLARI / TURKISH WORKERS  
DUŞENLME GRUBU / ACTION GROUP  
**GAMA**  
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**GAMA-**  
BÜTÜN  
ÇALIŞANLARA  
SENDİKANIN  
REKLİMİ

By Mick Barry



# **We are Workers not Slaves**

## **The Story of the GAMA Struggle**

**BY MICK BARRY**

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EXPLANATORY NOTE: All quotes from ex-GAMA workers included in the pamphlet have been translated from Turkish.





## CHAPTER 1

# Gama in the Land of the Celtic Tiger

**T**his story begins in the late 1990s. The Fianna Fail/PD government had been put into office in the summer of 1997. The Celtic Tiger economic boom had been underway for a couple of years and the government was belatedly planning to implement major publicly financed projects. This represented a ramshackle attempt to modernise creaking infrastructure and stop gridlock from impeding economic growth. This plan was to become known as the seven-year, €48 billion National Development Plan.

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment was Progressive Democrat leader Mary Harney. Along with Fianna Fail Finance Minister Charlie McCreevy, she epitomised the politics of the new administration - right-wing, pro-big business, neoliberal.

Mary Harney went on a trade mission to Turkey in August 1998 and appealed to Turkish business to come to Ireland and invest in the land of the Celtic Tiger. The South of Ireland was well on its way at this time to becoming the most globalised society in the world.

One of the hallmarks of capitalist globalisation is the free movement of capital across borders to exploit labour and maximise profit. Globalisation would bring massive foreign direct investment to Ireland in the late 1990s, just as today it is steadily eroding Ireland's industrial base as investment flows to China, India and Eastern Europe. The common theme between investment flowing in and out is big business moving to wherever maximum profit can be made.

One of the companies listening to Mary Harney's appeal and seeking to maximise profit was called GAMA. GAMA Construction, the largest construction company in Turkey, had been founded in 1970 and had extended its operations to Iran, Iraq, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Azerbaijan, Libya and many



other countries. It was now one of the top 100 construction companies in the world.

GAMA heeded Mary Harney's appeal and arrived in Ireland in mid-2000. The Turkish multinational brought hundreds of Turkish construction workers with them to Ireland. Coming from outside the EU, these men needed work permits in order to work legally in the Republic of Ireland.

These work permits were supplied by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. However, under the terms of the Irish work permits system, the permits were controlled by the employer, in this case GAMA. This meant that the fate of these workers in a foreign land was controlled by the whim of the Turkish multinational which, in this case, went so far as to take charge of organising the workers' on-site accommodation and their food.

The accommodation often constituted barrack-like dormitories, usually situated on the building sites and often with six men to a room. Many of these men were fathers with young children, yet they were often only able to go home once a year for perhaps two or three weeks. The work permits policy of the Irish state was to greatly facilitate GAMA in their plans to super-exploit the men.

With a workforce roughly 80% migrant and 20% Irish, GAMA set to work. For a government keen to cut costs on the National Development Plan GAMA soon proved its "competitive edge".

After building the privately-owned Huntstown power station in Dublin, GAMA built the Ballincollig bypass in Co. Cork for €71 million - €15 million less than the next highest bidder for the job. Incredibly, the bypass was finished a full six months ahead of schedule. The contract for the Ennis bypass in Co. Clare was then given to GAMA. The Turkish multinational pledged to build it for €120 million - €5 million less than the bid from the second lowest bidder.

The Fianna Fail/PD government had another reason for being grateful to GAMA. The bargaining power of Irish construction workers had been strengthened by the boom, but GAMA by its actions put pressure on other construction companies to cut costs and "compete" with them. This created the potential for a "race to the bottom" with competitive tendering and a driving down of the wages and conditions of construction workers employed by other firms.

But if GAMA was doing the state some favours, the state was not slow to help GAMA in return. GAMA did not have to pay the state full PAYE or PRSI contributions. This was under the terms of an exemption scheme that also applied to other businesses. However, it later emerged that 70% of the exemptions (1,324 out of 1,867) were for GAMA's workers - a break worth approximately €15 million for the company.

GAMA also got a major concession in that it did not have to pay PAYE income

tax for the Turkish workers. The Minister for Finance explained this in a reply to a parliamentary question about GAMA's tax arrangements on 8 March 2005: "...there is provision in the income tax code for a remittance basis of taxation for Irish resident taxpayers who are foreign domiciled. Under this provision, which has been in existence since 1918, such non-domiciled persons pay Irish income tax only on that part of their income which is remitted here."

Simply put, if GAMA paid the bulk of the workers' wages outside Ireland then no income tax was payable. As it subsequently turned out, it was not the GAMA workers but the company that had been benefiting hugely from this arrangement.

Moreover, it was to be learned later that 1,000 work permits were issued to GAMA by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment between January 2004 and early 2005, despite the existence of a ban since April 2003 on issuing such permits to companies for construction workers.

Inevitably, questions began to arise as to how GAMA was able to do jobs so much faster than the competition and for so much less. The obvious question was: is cheap labour the reason? Complaints were made to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment by a rival construction company and by a trade union (Building and Allied Trade Union, BATU) and questions were asked by several T.D.s, prompted in the main by GAMA's jealous business competitors.

The Department "investigated" the complaints by asking GAMA to produce documentation which they duly did, the ace card being several audits by PriceWaterhouseCoopers, a prestigious multinational accounting company. No workers were interviewed nor were any serious attempts made to interview them by the Department. Replying to concerns expressed by a Fianna Fail T.D. in May 2003, Mary Harney wrote: "...allegations against GAMA (made by competitors) regarding exploitative treatment of Turkish employees have been found to be without substance as have allegations regarding pay levels in breach of legal norms."

## Unions

Concerns also arose in trade union circles. After initial resistance in late 2000, GAMA agreed to make their workers trade union members, the bulk of them being signed up to SIPTU. This gave GAMA a certain "cover" as a "legitimate" operator.

SIPTU official Adrian Kane organised a meeting with GAMA workers in the midlands a couple of years after GAMA's arrival in Ireland. Incredibly, GAMA were allowed to provide the Turkish interpreter for the meeting! Needless to say, no complaints were made at the meeting by the workers, who were obviously also very nerv-



ous of company spies. Subs were deducted at source by the company and paid to the unions. SIPTU itself would have been paid at least several hundred thousand euro in subs by the GAMA workers before the controversy broke. A more serious investigation was organised by the TEEU. However, all that could be proved were some minor irregularities in GAMA's pensions arrangements.

An officer of the Building and Allied Trade Union (BATU) made representations to the Department about GAMA. Many BATU activists voiced concerns. Their attitudes stood in contrast to BATU General Secretary Paddy O'Shaughnessy who was quoted in *The Irish Times* on 12 February 2005 after the controversy first arose in the Dail: "We have been doing good business with GAMA. They pay the appropriate rates and stick to agreements." This quote refers to the rates and agreements made with Irish workers.

GAMA was lucky that they set up in Ireland in the fourteenth year of social partnership arrangements. These arrangements were based on the idea that employers were the "social partners" of workers and trade unions. The first social partnership arrangement between government, employers and unions was put together in 1987 under a Fianna Fail government led by the corrupt Taoiseach Charles Haughey and was designed to cut across a mass street movement protesting against health cuts.

Although most Irish workers benefited to some extent from the "Celtic Tiger" economic boom that took off in the mid to late 1990s, the social partnership agreements were used by governments to transfer the balance of overall wealth away from workers and people on welfare towards big business and the rich.

Although many self-employed people have incomes and lifestyles similar to those of PAYE workers, the following statistic clearly indicates the increased share of national wealth that began going to profits. In 1993, wages equalled 53% of Gross National Product whilst profits and the earnings of the self-employed equalled 38%. Within ten years, profits and the earnings of the self-employed were up to 49.8% and wages had fallen below that to approximately 47.7%. This was despite the fact that there were an extra 600,000 people in the workforce.

The 47.7% figure compares unfavourably to Luxemburg's 58.5%, Sweden's 57.1%, the UK's 56.1%, Denmark's 54% and Germany's 53.2% (Department of Finance's *Budgetary and Economic Statistics 2005* and Eurostat's *Gross Wages and Salaries survey 2003*).

This shift in wealth resulted from the trade union leaders turning their backs on using workers' industrial muscle to improve workers' standards of living. Furthermore, union officials became drilled in a "partnership mentality" as the years went by. Huge sums of union members' money was and is spent sending union officials on weekends, courses, lectures and programmes that promote the "benefits of



*The Tynagh power plant in Co. Galway which was built on the back of slave wages*

partnership" and inculcate a "partnership mentality". This mentality serves to lessen distrust of the bosses. Allowing GAMA to provide interpreters for union meetings just about sums up the "partnership mentality". Social partnership and the social partnership mindset were of great assistance to GAMA in overcoming suspicions about their operations in their early days in Ireland.

GAMA seemed to have warded off the criticisms towards the end of 2004. It was a big operator on Ireland's construction scene. It was a member of the Construction Industry Federation and was represented on the executive of the Dublin Chamber of Commerce by M Hakan Karaalioglu who sat alongside well-known business people such as Maurice Pratt. GAMA's achievements were lauded and it was awarded prizes. A little over four years after its arrival in Ireland, it was becoming part and parcel of Ireland's capitalist establishment. Then, a small industrial dispute broke out on a housing project in South County Dublin.



## Enter the Socialist Party

**D**aniel O'Connell Snr., Daniel O'Connell Jnr. and Alan Donnelly started their protest on top of the 200-foot high tower crane in Balgaddy near Lucan in west Dublin on 3 November 2004. Carpenters and members of BATU, they had been employed by GAMA which was the main contractors on a housing project for South Dublin County Council at Balgaddy. The men had a dispute with the sub-contractor who employed them and who had left them with three weeks arrears in wages as Christmas approached. The gardai were called after the men took their action.

The spectacular nature of the workers' protest won the dispute a high level of media coverage. The three men ably argued their own case in the media. Daniel O'Connell Jnr., however, went further and told the press about conditions for GAMA's Turkish workers on site: "About 300 of them live on the site and get just €2.50 an hour. The place is like a concentration camp. The company is breaking all the health and safety rules", *Irish Mirror* 4 November 2004.

The Socialist Party would soon come in contact with these strikers and the exposure of GAMA's regime of exploitation would develop from there.

Five months previously, South Dublin County Council had received a shock when the voters of Tallaght Central put Socialist Party candidate Mick Murphy top of the poll and into the Council chamber to represent them. The Socialist Party is a Marxist organisation in the tradition of the pioneers of the Irish labour movement, James Connolly and James Larkin. It was founded in Ireland in 1974 as the Irish section of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), an international socialist tendency.

We took the name Militant Tendency, joining the battle then taking place between Left and Right within the Labour Party. The Militant Tendency won support from workers and young people North and South and stood for workers' unity, winning support in both Catholic and Protestant communities. Expelled from a rightward-moving Labour Party in 1989, we re-organised as Militant Labour.

The collapse of the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in 1989/90 provoked a crisis in the Left internationally and most Labour Parties, Communist Parties and trade union leaders moved sharply to the right and concluded that there was now no alternative to the capitalist market.

Militant Labour had never subscribed to the view that the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were "socialist". Our analysis was that, although capitalism had been ended in those societies, they were ruled over by monstrous bureaucratic elites. We stood for the overthrow of those elites and their replacement with democratic socialist societies run by the working class in the interests of the working class. This vision of how society could be run meant that we were able to maintain a socialist analysis against the general trend in the early 1990s.

We were not alone in doing this, although, in truth, there were not many others, in Ireland or internationally. However, of the groups that maintained a socialist viewpoint, we were the most successful in making our politics relevant to broad layers of working class people. This was shown, for example, in the mass campaign against double taxation water charges which we led in Dublin in the mid-1990s.

We were able to translate this base into a significant level of electoral support as indicated by the near-election of Militant Labour activist and anti-water charges campaign leader Joe Higgins in the Dublin West bye-election of 1996. Carving out this base of support in the working class and the continued march of the Labour Party to the right prompted us to change our name to the Socialist Party in 1996.

The Socialist Party does not view itself as a party which merely does things "for" working class people. One of our hallmarks is to organise and assist the organisation of working class people. This flows from our view as to how society can and will be changed. The Socialist Party is of the view that a mass movement of working class people is essential to achieve socialist change, and that the point of holding elected positions is to use them to assist in raising the consciousness of working class people.

Workers often best get a sense of their own power in a strike situation. A strike can demonstrate that the workers are potentially the strongest force in society - if one job can't proceed because we say so, the system couldn't proceed if we all said so. For reasons of simple class solidarity as well as for this reason, the Socialist Party has a track record second to none in providing assistance to workers in struggle.

Mick Murphy, as the local public representative for the party, headed down to the picket line to talk to the men. The pickets quickly filled him in on the dispute, but also on the situation with the Turkish workers. Language had been a barrier to communication but they knew the Turks were treated very badly and one of the Turkish workers had, some time before the strike, written "600" in the dirt with a stick. They suspected this meant they were being paid €600 a month.



## MIGRANT AND IRISH WORKERS

If the Turkish workers were being paid €600 a month, this was a very serious matter for both Turkish and Irish workers. For the Turkish workers it was a serious matter for obvious reasons. But for Irish workers it was serious too because if companies could be allowed get away with this, it would be used as a device to start a "race to the bottom" and to drive down pay and conditions for Irish workers also.

The government and employers have encouraged a major influx of foreign workers to Ireland in recent years. They do this for two reasons: to cope with labour shortages in a booming economy and to use immigrant labour as a tool to drive down wages and conditions generally. Some workers mistakenly identify immigrant labour as the root of this problem. This attitude serves to divide workers and make it easier for employers to exploit immigrants and Irish workers alike.

Socialists point to the fact that the root of the problem is the employers' greed and drive for increased profits. We advocate the unionisation of immigrant labour and the maximum unity between immigrant workers and Irish workers in improving conditions for both.

It is significant that the struggle of the GAMA workers was in many ways to start on a picket line organised by Irish workers. From the very start, the Socialist Party was to stress the indivisible interests of Irish and migrant workers in fighting exploitation of this kind.

Proof regarding wage rates was needed and Mick Murphy set out to check the situation. He raised the issue at the 8 November meeting of South Dublin County Council but did not get very far. He wrote to GAMA and received reassurances on 16 and 25 November.

Managing Director M Hakan Karaalioglu's 16 November reply stated that GAMA paid Registered Employment Agreement rates, that "it is imperative our employees are happy and well cared for at all times" and informed Mick that SIPTU's "Know Your Rights" poster was displayed prominently in all GAMA canteens (GAMA's reply of 25 November is included as Appendix 3). Mick spoke to SIPTU construction official Eric Fleming who said he could not confirm GAMA's rates and asked Mick to keep in touch.

On Saturday 17 November, some Socialist Party members went to Balgaddy at 8.00 pm to see if they could meet some of the GAMA men at the local shops. They approached a group of four and asked whether any of them could speak English. One replied in perfect English. Mick mentioned the BATU dispute and started to ask about the wages paid to the Turkish workers.

Mick Murphy takes up the story: "The man with the English immediately grabbed the other three and they ran off as if I had a gun in my hand. Looking back I think he may have been one of the supervisors - he was much younger than the other three." This episode made Mick very suspicious and he set about trying to find someone who could speak Turkish to help him in the work.

Meanwhile, the issue was raised again in South Dublin County Council on 13 December. Mick Murphy stated at the meeting that he could not get adequate assurance from anyone about these men's rates of pay. Once again, concerns were promptly dismissed.

The Labour Party Mayor Robert Dowds informed the Council that he had organised a fact-finding mission into GAMA's Balgaddy operations. Dowds had organised this "fact-finding mission" with another Labour councillor, Eamonn Tuffy. Any criticisms they had were for Mick Murphy. They reported back that GAMA had no case to answer.

Councillors representing all of the other parties joined the County Manager and Mayor in condemning Mick Murphy's remarks. The minutes of the meeting state: "Mr J Horan, County Manager, in reply to comments made by Cllr. Murphy again put on record that this Council have no issues with the contractor named by Cllr Murphy and on behalf of this local authority he wished to totally disassociate the Council with any comments/allegations made in relation to the Contractor."

A decision had to be made around this time as to whether Mick would continue to devote significant time to the investigation. Checks had been made with GAMA, the Council and several trade unions - all had drawn a blank. Efforts to discuss with the workers had foundered on the barrier of language.

Mick asked Socialist Party T.D. Joe Higgins for advice and Joe, who shared Mick's suspicions about GAMA, encouraged him to keep at it. The Socialist Party branch in the area agreed to this and decided to put some resources in to assist Mick. This decision to keep up the investigation proved a turning point in its own right.

In November, Mick Murphy had looked up Baki Uzunkaya, a Turkish man with a left-wing activist background now living in Co Carlow. Baki's mother-in-law was the MANDATE shop steward for Dunnes Stores in Kilnamanagh and Mick had met Baki several years previously on a visit to the house.

Over the Christmas holidays, a letter for GAMA workers was drawn up, welcoming them to Ireland, informing them of their wage rights, and offering them three contact numbers (Mick, Baki and Socialist Party activist Lisa Maher). Lisa's name was included as it was felt that the men might trust a woman more. Baki translated this leaflet into Turkish (copies of this leaflet in English and Turkish are included as Appendix 4).



On 22 January 2006, six Socialist Party members went out to Balgaddy with the leaflets to try to meet GAMA workers at the local shops again. Mick had been in touch for some time now with Vivienne Traynor of RTE News who recognised from an early stage the importance of this story, and an RTE camera crew joined the walk-about. However, despite splitting into three groups and walking around for two hours, no Turkish workers were found.

Four days later, Mick Murphy decided to try again. He had a job-related meeting in Abbeylaxey that morning but drove over to Balgaddy at 7.30 am to do an hour's work on the GAMA issue on the way. Again, Mick takes up the story: "By 8.10 am it was obvious that the site was in full flight. I decided to take a look around the back. Remember this is late January and I am dressed for a meeting. There was a 12 foot hoarding, completely sealed up. But just as I was about to turn back, a dumper truck came out through the door in the hoarding at the other end. I made off in that direction, walking into some deep muck along the way. I crossed the opening without being spotted and waited for the truck to return. I flashed the leaflets at the driver and he took a bundle.

"He drove on a few yards, stopped and had another look. He then gave me a double thumbs up and drove on. His thumbs up gave me a great lift! Up to that moment I had no idea what way these men would react to the material.

"I walked back towards my car. While walking along the front of the hoarding, I decided that I might be able to throw bundles of leaflets over. It was lower at the front - about 8 foot. Imagine the sight for the passing traffic - a big bloke in a suit, muck up to his knees, shouting in at Turkish men and throwing bundles of leaflets in every 20 yards or so. I drove off to the Rathcoole service station, used rolls of loo paper to get cleaned up and headed off to the meeting."

A few hours later Lisa Maher's phone rang. It was a group of Turkish men who had very little English. Lisa told them to ring Baki but the men said "No Turk, no Turk" - they were very nervous that a Turkish stranger might be an agent for GAMA. But the caller ID was there on the phone. Mick and Lisa knew Baki was completely trustworthy. They passed the number on.

Late that night, Baki rang Mick. He had just spent two hours talking on the phone to a GAMA worker we will call X as we do not wish to identify to GAMA the man who first broke the story. As the conversation had progressed, Baki had slowly won the man's confidence. X told him about the hourly wage being paid to the Turkish workers. Food and accommodation were being paid by the company. On top of this, workers were being paid €2.20 an hour.

### Chapter 3

## "I Wish to Raise One Major Scandal of Immigrant Worker Exploitation of Massive Proportions"

This was sensational news. Five years previously the Fianna Fail/PD government had been forced by public pressure to introduce a national minimum wage. The minimum wage then stood at €7 an hour. The Registered Employment Agreement (REA) for the construction industry stated that the minimum rate for operatives in construction was €12.96 an hour. GAMA was, it seemed, paying less than one third the national minimum wage and just over one-sixth the REA rate for the job.

Over the next ten days or so, X's story was confirmed. X and another worker Y drove down to Carlow with Mick Murphy to meet Baki and Vivienne Traynor. A separate meeting was arranged with a second caller, Enver Alan, who was to go on to play an important role in the initial phases of the organisation of the GAMA workers (the meetings had to be separate for security reasons). The independent evidence of X and Y on the one hand, and Enver Alan on the other, backed up each others' stories up entirely.

Bank statements from the Turkish bank Ishbank and handwritten payslips all told the same story - the men were being paid €2.20 an hour. GAMA's accountant Haluk Evraham used to come over from Turkey once a month with a laptop computer, workers used to go into an office to see him one-on-one and he used to write by hand on sheets of paper the hours worked and the pay calculations. The men had been paid



up to €250 cash per month for day-to-day expenses and the remaining monies had been paid into separate Turkish accounts (one in Turkish lira and one in euro) that the men's families could access back home.

Evrahim's slips and the accounts were correlated and matched up. More than this, the secret of finishing the Ballincollig bypass six months early emerged as well. The men were being worked up to 84 hours a week whenever weather permitted, with €3.30 an hour for overtime and €4.40 for Sunday work.

The Socialist Party, a small organisation with slender resources in comparison to the forces we were up against, had managed to do what the state with all the powers at its disposal and the trade union movement with all the resources at theirs had been unwilling or unable to do - find clear proof of GAMA's lawbreaking and slave labour operation.

This was not just down to hard work. More than anything, it was down to politics. The state did not, to our knowledge, know the details of this operation. However, when it was given previous opportunities to investigate, the investigations were a sham. And why wouldn't they have been? GAMA was playing a very useful role for the capitalist establishment and the less questions asked the better.

And what of the unions? Nearly two decades of "social partnership" had taken its toll. If the bosses were our "partners", why would you investigate them as though you would your mortal enemy? The idea that an employer could be involved in exploitation on a grand scale may have seemed fanciful to some, but did not seem an unrealistic prospect to socialists or genuine fighters for working people.

When Connolly, Larkin and Irish working men and women built the unions, they were built through struggle, sacrifice and a campaigning approach and mindset based on distrust of the class enemy. It is the Socialist Party that carries on this campaigning approach. It was this approach that broke through GAMA's wall of lies.

## A WORKERS' T.D. ON A WORKER'S WAGE

Socialist Party T.D. Joe Higgins had been kept informed of developments since late 2004. He would soon start to play a key role in the GAMA story. Joe had been elected to Dail Eireann as the first Socialist Party T.D. in 1997. He had carved out support among working class people in Dublin West through years of campaigning work and had done this since 1991 as a Councillor.

It was his role, however, as Chairperson of the Dublin Federation of Anti-Water Charges Campaigns, a campaign which battered the Fine Gael-Labour-Democratic Left coalition government of the mid 1990s and deployed the weapon of non-pay-

ment to defeat the hated double taxation water tax, which carried him over the line and into Dail Eireann.

Many radical left-wingers have been elected to Dail Eireann and other parliaments internationally down through the years. Very often, these parliamentarians go "soft" and move to the right over a period of time. This is not surprising given the pressure exerted by the ruling class on these representatives through "public opinion" manufactured through a millionaire-controlled media and through the conservative bureaucracy at the head of the workers' movement. The high wages paid to parliamentarians (T.D.s currently receive nearly €90,000 a year before expenses) act as an extra tool to smooth down a left-wing T.D.s' "rough edges".

This did not happen with Joe Higgins, however. This is explained by Joe's more than 20 years' experience as a leading figure in a Marxist party at the time of his election, his grounding in and serious approach to socialist politics and ideas, and his outstanding personal qualities including refreshing modesty for a parliamentarian, contempt for privilege and strong sympathy for the underdog. His day-in-day-out work with Socialist Party members and other activists in the working class movement and communities is an important factor too.

Joe has also been helped by his membership of a party which treats its councillors and T.D.s as representatives of its ideas rather than as stars or celebrities and by the party policy of having "workers' T.D.s on a worker's wage" - i.e. living on the average worker's wage and donating the rest back to the party and to other workers' organisations and campaigns. This is not just a policy which Joe accepts, but one for which he has argued and supported in the party.

Joe quickly began to be seen, not just as a T.D. for Dublin West but as a T.D. for the working class of the whole country. Even conservative newspapers would often remark that Joe was the "real opposition" to the Fianna Fail/PD government. Joe's steadfast approach was shown in 2003 when, along with Socialist Party Councillor Clare Daly, he was sent to Mountjoy Jail for a month rather than provide anything other than full support for working class communities campaigning against double taxation bin charges.

Joe Higgins and Mick Murphy, in consultation with leading Socialist Party members, decided by the first week of February that there was enough information and proof to blow the GAMA scandal wide open on the floor of Dail Eireann. Joe's speech in the Dail on 8 February 2005 created a sensation (full report of Dail debate, Appendix 2).

"I wish to raise, in particular, one major scandal of immigrant worker exploitation of massive proportions. There is a major foreign-based multinational construction company employing approximately 10,000 people, 2,000 approximately in this





Enver Alan, Baki Uzunkaya and Joe Higgins T.D. at the Mayday rally in Dublin 2005

state, which has secured massive local authority and state contracts here. This company imports workers from their home base, who do not speak English, controls their passports and work permits, accommodates them in company barracks, demands an extent of hours that can only be called grotesque and, incredibly, pays unskilled construction workers between €2 and €3 an hour basic pay and skilled workers somewhere over €3 an hour. In short, this is a modern version of bonded labour. The instigator is Turkish-based Gama Construction Ireland Ltd."

The Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, looking more than a little taken aback, replied that the matter would be raised by the new Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment Micheal Martin with his Department's labour inspectors. He asked Joe to hand over any evidence he had.

Joe replied: "I want the Minister to take personal charge with the Secretary General of the Department because it is a serious allegation. This is not a fly-by-night operation from the boot of a car. This is a major company financed by major state public contracts. I will therefore keep a close eye on it. The rights of immigrant workers are paramount as are the rights of Irish workers who are undermined by this."

## Chapter 4

# Investigations and Intimidation - The Cracks Open Up

**T**he *Irish Examiner* newspaper, which gave the GAMA story more coverage than any other daily, was to report later (24 March): "In Leinster House, and even in union circles, the whispers had it that Mr. Higgins had overstepped the mark and abused parliamentary privilege by making such sensational allegations."

GAMA certainly tried to give that impression. The company's solicitor Richard Grogan went on RTE News the next night defending the company and dismissing Joe's allegations as groundless.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's labour inspectors would now conduct an investigation. A lot would depend on who they said was right and who was wrong. What kind of investigation would they conduct? What role would they play?

Under the Fianna Fail/PD government the labour inspectors had been hampered by being starved of resources. There were 22 labour inspectors in the state, charged with defending the legal entitlements of a workforce which had nearly doubled in just over a decade and which now stood at nearly two million strong.

The attitude of the government towards the labour inspectorate was indicated by the fact that their numbers were less than the number of health inspectors employed to enforce the smoking ban (41), the number of agricultural inspectors (200) and the number of tax inspectors (700). Most dramatically of all, the contempt of the government for the labour inspectorate and workers' rights was shown by comparing their numbers with the number of dog wardens employed by the state (50).

According to union officials, Finance Minister Charlie McCreevy, soon to announce himself an admirer of the economic policies of Margaret Thatcher, suggested the employment of a measly extra complement of eight labour inspectors in the summer of 2004 only to be persuaded by Mary Harney to reduce the extra complement to four!



In 2003, the labour inspectors had been able to carry out 7,168 inspections resulting in 20 prosecutions. By 2004 this had been reduced to 5,160 inspections and 14 prosecutions. Now, an investigation fell into their laps which their bosses could not be seen to skimp on. Senior inspectors, led by Edward Nolan, met Joe Higgins and Mick Murphy in the Department offices in the days following the Dail revelations. Joe and Mick set up meetings for the inspectors with the Turkish workers that weekend. The inspectors met with X and Y, and separately with Enver Alan, over the weekend 11- 13 February 2005.

With a labour inspectors' investigation underway, GAMA stepped up the atmosphere of intimidation on the sites. Workers were warned to speak to no-one and dark hints were dropped that failure to obey would result in workers being sent home or even in GAMA being forced to leave Ireland. X and Y were interrogated when they went back to Balgaddy after their trip to the city centre.

The seriousness of the interrogation was indicated by the text message they sent Baki the following day: "Brother our names given to them. Who gave our names. This right now Y and Myself under the heavy pressure. Please stop this and sort this out some how. Answer me."

This kind of pressure and intimidation was to become a recurring theme in the months ahead. The return phone call was to be the last contact with Y and Y for over a month. The Socialist Party now set about trying to get more evidence for the inspectors. Over the next week members of the Dublin South West branch leafleted GAMA's Ballymun sites. Members of the Limerick branch were asked to leaflet the Ennis site and Mick Murphy and Lisa Maher set about trying to get the leaflets into GAMA's biggest site at Tynagh, Co. Galway. Once again, audacious campaigning methods were used.

Mick relates: "Before we left Dublin we tracked down Daniel O'Connell from the original dispute and borrowed a GAMA high-vis coat. We bought a hard hat in Ennis on the way to Tynagh. Portumna was the nearest Garda HQ. I cued that number up on my phone in case there was problems and Lisa was to call it if I was not back in 20 minutes. I put on the coat and hard hat and walked in the Tynagh gate. If stopped, I was there to collect water samples.

"While walking around the front compound I walked past a security man on patrol and said hello. I sussed out the main changing room and made straight for that, putting the leaflets into boots, wet overclothes' pockets, lockers, etc. It was a huge changing room and there were some Turkish workers in there changing. They took leaflets also. When they were all gone after about five minutes I walked out the gate and up the road.

"When I calmed down, myself and Lisa talked about how it went and decided

that we would just drive straight in there now and ask for the mens' quarters. No sooner had we pulled up in the car inside the front gate and there were cars, jeeps, etc. coming out of everywhere. We were politely asked to leave, which we were glad to do.

"We spent the next few hours around the local villages and shops looking for GAMA workers. In all we met just over 20 men in shops, mending fences for local farmers, working on doing up the GAA grounds in Tynagh, etc. At one stage when we were handing out material to the men at the GAA ground, the Manager came flying up in his big car and got between us and the men. When you consider that GAMA had been in the news for a few weeks this was a major lapse of security by the local management and they reacted like they were in the world of trouble."

## CAT AND MOUSE

Over the next week, more GAMA workers from Ballymun and Tynagh contacted the Socialist Party. The labour inspectors arrived at Tynagh on Wednesday, 2 March and a two-day game of cat and mouse ensued. The inspectors booked a hotel so that they could interview GAMA's workers off-site. They then gave GAMA a list of workers they wanted to interview. Unknown to management, this list included a number of workers who had contacted Baki and wanted to tell the full story of GAMA's exploitation.

The company was seriously concerned about the off-site interviews. If the truth was to emerge, the implications were potentially huge. They told the inspectors that two of the workers on the list were ill and would be unable to attend for interview. These two men had recently been to Mecca - under the Islamic code such a man is forbidden to tell a lie! The men then contacted Baki to say that they were not sick and in the end testimony was given.

The company had organised some men to give the company line. Some of these were "company men" and some of them testified under duress. And so it went for two full days.

The first serious crack to show in GAMA's defences on the national stage since 8 February came the day after the two-day trip to Tynagh. On Friday, 4 March GAMA issued a statement admitting that hundreds of workers had been underpaid by 8% for a period of 2004. They claimed that this was an administrative error and suspended three staff.

Acting as paid apologist for GAMA, solicitor Richard Grogan said: "The company was advised by me that it had one opportunity and one opportunity only to give a full and complete disclosure, and that failure to do so at this stage would put the



future of the company in Ireland at serious risk." GAMA were attempting to admit to a little wrongdoing by mistake in order to hide wrongdoing by design on a grand scale. But with the national media posing the question "who will blink first, GAMA or Joe Higgins?" it was a serious blow to the company.

Micheal Martin immediately froze GAMA's work permits and forbade the company from sending any workers back to Turkey pending completion of the Inspectors' report. This showed how sensitive the government was to public criticism, which was growing as more evidence emerged. GAMA was very much on the back foot now - within weeks their public face, Mr. Grogan, had parted company from GAMA.

On the same day as GAMA's admission, the labour inspectors travelled to Tullamore, Co. Offaly, to meet four ex-GAMA workers working for an Irish builder. That night two men (Metin Kaplan and Ramazan Atalay) ran away from Tynagh fearing for their safety, having told the truth to the inspectors. Socialist Party members drove down immediately and looked after them until accommodation was organised for them in Co. Kildare, supplied by a small builder appalled at GAMA's behaviour.

They were later joined in the house by Alishan Urcan and Zafar Kaplan. The four occupants of this house were shortly to make a journey to The Netherlands which GAMA will never forget.

By Monday 21 March, the inspectors' report was complete. Despite the report not yet being published, the *Irish Examiner* was able to state that it confirmed several whistleblowers had come forward to confirm Joe Higgins' allegations in detail, that the inspectors were very concerned over unsatisfactory pay slips and that the report called for further investigation by the Director of Corporate Enforcement and possibly the Revenue Commissioners.

The report was very bad news for GAMA and when the issue was raised again in the Dail on Wednesday 23 March, it was clear which way the wind was now blowing. When Joe Higgins first made the allegations on 8 February, the Ceann Comhairle Rory O'Hanlon interjected: "I advise the Deputy that it is not appropriate to name a company in the House when it is not here to defend itself."

But now the Ceann Comhairle didn't bat an eyelid when, after holding up bank statements and payslips which showed Turkish workers receiving €1,000 for 330 hours work instead of the €4,200 minimum due, Joe Higgins said: "What in fact we have is a master fraud by a major entity in the corporate scene in this country, a grand larceny of workers' wages amounting to millions of euro each month and tens of millions over the last year alone."

The politician who had invited GAMA to Ireland, Tanaiste Mary Harney, could only reply by saying: "If the report bears out what you are saying - and I'm not in any way casting doubt on what you are saying - then it is a total disgrace and all the forces



*Bertie Ahern and Mary Harney encouraged companies like GAMA to come to Ireland in the hope they would drive down labour costs in this economy*

of the state will have to be brought to bear in relation to this to make sure that it cannot happen again".

Mary Harney's words about "all the forces of the state" should be remembered when we come to see what the state actually did from this point on after years of negligence on this matter. However, the most interesting comment in the Dail debate was made by Joe Higgins. He said: "When the investigation began, the Turkish workers were coached, under severe duress, to say that the money went to accounts in their name in Finansbank in Holland. They had to be coached because no other worker knows or knew" of the existence of such accounts.

The general public had never heard of this obscure commercial bank. It was, however, about to become the focus for the most audacious move of the entire campaign to date.



## Chapter 5

## Taking It To the Bank

Imperialism is the term given to the exporting of capital from the advanced capitalist countries to less developed regions of the globe, where it is then used to exploit local raw materials and cheap labour to the benefit of the big corporations and the dominant capitalist powers. It was now clear that GAMA had exported cheap labour to a relatively advanced country in order to benefit from the huge margin between "Third World" wage costs and "First World" prices.

Bringing workers to a foreign country for extended periods ran the risk of information on their real pay rates and conditions of employment leaking out. That is why GAMA had segregated the Turkish workers from other workers to the greatest extent possible; why the sites and accommodation were controlled so tightly and why an atmosphere of fear and intimidation had been fostered. Nevertheless, the full extent of the audacity and organisation of GAMA's machine of exploitation was only now about to become clear.

The Socialist Party's National Conference was held on the Easter weekend of 26-28 March. Here, the Party's National Executive discussed a proposal from Joe Higgins to organise a trip to the Netherlands with the four ex-GAMA workers from the Co. Kildare house to see if they had money in accounts at Finansbank.

Whether there was money there or not, advantages would accrue from a trip. If there were no accounts, the argument GAMA had wanted to communicate to the labour inspectors would be shown to be based on lies. On the other hand, if there were accounts the workers would benefit, possibly greatly, and GAMA would have some extraordinarily difficult questions to answer.

Despite the significant costs that would accrue to the Socialist Party, the National Executive decided that the trip should be made, but kept very secret so that GAMA would not be alerted. Joe phoned a surprised Minister for Foreign Affairs Dermot Ahern who agreed to meet him in Drogheda, Co. Louth, on Monday 28 March.

Joe said that he needed visas and documentation for the four men to go to the

Netherlands. It was a measure of how concerned the government was at the prospect of the GAMA scandal reflecting poorly on it that the Minister agreed to the request and Joe was contacted that evening by Department officials.

The next two days were spent making frantic preparations for a trip involving getting non-EU nationals from one EU state to another. Apart from organising all the visas and paperwork at the Irish Department of Justice and the Dutch Embassy, Metin and Ramazan needed a Garda escort back onto the Tynagh site to collect their passports.

A group of nine - Metin, Zafar, Alishan, Ramazan, Baki, Jamal (translator), Joe, Mick and *Irish Examiner* journalist Michael O'Farrell - flew out to Amsterdam from Dublin on Thursday 31 March at 6.30 am. They were met at the airport by a member of the Socialist Party's sister organisation in The Netherlands. From there, the group went to Finansbank for 10.30 am, where RTE had a Dutch camera crew waiting to capture the moment. The bank turned out to be in the south-eastern suburbs of the city, an impressive multi-storey building in a commercial district.

The bank was a commercial bank. There were no customers going in and out. The unannounced arrival of the delegation caused some surprise at the reception desk. Not even sure that there was such a thing as a Finansbank GAMA account, the delegation asked to speak to the manager of the GAMA account!

## GIGANTIC FRAUD

The manager who came to speak to the group was Haakan Tezel. The delegation informed him that there should be accounts in the bank belonging to the four men. Mr. Tezel must have been very surprised by the visit but his appearance was very calm, he took the four passports and disappeared. He came back after about 20 minutes and handed the men bank statements!

The statements showed that monies had been paid into each of the four accounts, differing amounts depending on the numbers of hours worked by each man. €24,000 had been paid into Metin's account, €10,000 into Zafar's, €10,000 into Alishan's and €4,500 into Ramazan's!

Mr Tezel produced documentation in English which authorised the bank to open accounts in the name of each of the workers and separate documentation which authorised the monies to go immediately to an account called Ryder Investment. The day after each lodgement, the monies were shipped out again to this mysterious account.



However, the monies belonged to the Turkish worker account-holders and they could call on the monies that had been paid into their accounts.

The initial reaction of the men was not one of delight, but one of anger. How many GAMA workers had families to feed at home who could have done with this money in the recent past? How many children were denied college education by dint of not having access to this money? How many family members could have used the money for health care when they had needed it?

The workers remembered that they had signed a raft of documentation written in English before boarding flights to Ireland. It was clear that these documents had "authorised" GAMA to pay wages into the accounts - accounts the workers knew nothing of.

The documentation had also authorised the monies to go then to the Ryder Investment account. The documentation produced by Mr. Tezel had been signed by the workers. The workers had obviously not understood what they had been signing at the time and had been afraid to ask questions for fear of losing their jobs.

The delegation left the bank and told Mr. Tezel that they would be back the next morning to transfer the money to the men's accounts in Turkey. The group quickly calculated that the sums in the accounts were roughly equal to the REA rates for 48 hour weeks minus the €2.20 an hour paid to them in Ireland, minus deductions for food, accommodation, and so on.

They calculated that if the accounts of GAMA workers past and present were here, there could be as many as 2,000 accounts and that these must hold tens of millions of euro, perhaps as much as €40 million. Overtime payments - the difference between 48 hours and 84 - were not held in Finansbank and these massive sums did not exist anywhere other than in GAMA's profits.

Mr. Tezel had had to concede that no statements had ever been sent out to any of the workers. He also had to concede that it was "unusual" that not a single account holder amongst thousands of account holders had even once contacted the bank about the accounts. Finansbank itself clearly had more than one or two questions to answer.

And what of Ryder Investment? Could anyone seriously doubt that this was GAMA under another guise - and that the money had been pumped back into the GAMA business empire?

The intricately-woven web of concealment, plus the fact that not only was GAMA's current workforce completely unaware of the accounts but so too were men who had finished working for GAMA months or even years ago, showed clearly that GAMA never intended to reveal the accounts and that the money had been stolen from the workers.

The news was broken when Sean O'Rourke interviewed Joe Higgins on RTE Radio 1's lunchtime bulletin. The Amsterdam revelations were a major item on RTE's News that evening. GAMA's greed and the delegation's daring became the talk of the entire country. It was clear to one and all now that GAMA had been involved in fraud on a gigantic scale.

The monies were transferred to the Turkish accounts held by the men's families the following day and the delegation flew back to Ireland. The trip was best summed up by Michael O'Farrell. Writing in the *Irish Examiner* on 6 April he described what had happened as "audacious direct action rarely seen in Irish politics". He added: "The discovery of up to €40 million in lost workers' wages.... has set in train the most extraordinary labour movement story of recent times in Ireland." That story was about to enter its most momentous chapter yet.





## Chapter 6

# Strike!

If the news from Amsterdam had a big impact in Irish society, then it had a massive impact on the GAMA workers! Word of the money that had been robbed from them swept through the compounds and the "fear factor" began to be melted by the workers' anger.

A meeting had already been organised for Dublin's Teachers' Club for Sunday afternoon, 3 April. This was due to be a small meeting with a select group of key, trusted GAMA worker activists. The Socialist Party felt that the meeting should now be opened up a bit and asked the activists to bring some other people with them.

The party also agreed to raise the idea of strike action with the workers. This had been discussed by activists in the campaign as a possible future option for more than six weeks. Now was the time to give the idea a serious airing.

It was clear from early on Sunday morning that the meeting was going to be "opened up" more than a little bit - sure enough, more than 200 workers showed up on Sunday afternoon! There were about 90 workers from Balgaddy, 75 from Ballymun, and about a dozen each from Ennis and Tynagh and ex-GAMA workers. Only six of these workers had ever had previous face-to-face contact with Baki or Socialist Party members.

The atmosphere at the meeting was electric. Baki put his activist experience to good use, storming into the meeting, shouting in Turkish and being greeted by thunderous applause from the workers present. Joe Higgins opened the discussion. He explained about the Finansbank accounts. He recommended that people go back to their sites, discuss the issues with the other workers, and come out on strike Wednesday.

A decision to take industrial action is a very serious decision for any worker at any time. How much more so when you are a stranger in a strange land working for a powerful and vicious employer who controls your work permit? Nevertheless, the

meeting embraced the proposal for a strike and moved the dates forward by deciding to strike in Dublin from the next day (Monday) and outside Dublin the day after.

The strike was to be indefinite. The key demands were for access to the Finansbank money, payment of the overtime owed and for full payment for the fixed-rate workers (it emerged that there were approximately 25 workers, including surveyors and drivers, on fixed rates of €800-900 per month with no Finansbank accounts.)

The meeting established the Turkish Workers Action Group. All GAMA workers active in the campaign were automatically members of TWAG. The Socialist Party proposed, and the Turkish workers instinctively agreed, that the dispute should be organised and run by the workers themselves rather than leave control of it in the hands of union officials.

There was criticism of the unions of which they were members (many workers were only just discovering that they were members of unions) for lack of action down through the years. The vast majority of the workers were members of SIPTU. Some were members of the carpenters' union UCATT and others of the plasterers' union OPATSI. The feeling was that their unions should be put under pressure to deliver real support.

The workers elected a strike committee made up of four or five representatives from each site. Joe Higgins, Mick Murphy, Baki and Socialist Party activist Kevin McLoughlin were also elected to the strike committee.

At a later stage two Irish union activists - neither of them members of the Socialist Party - were co-opted to the committee. They were Paul Hansard, a member of SIPTU, and Daniel O'Connell Jnr. of the Balgaddy crane occupation, a member of BATU. From this point onwards the campaign was led by the TWAG and their democratically-elected strike committee.

The active participation of hundreds of GAMA workers in strike action brought the campaign to a far higher level than existed before. The Socialist Party had played an essential role in preparing the ground for the strike, and continued to play a key role in the leadership of the strike, but the action of the workers themselves put the company and the government under unprecedented pressure and gave the campaign a high profile presence on the streets.

A small incident at the meeting illustrated the huge change in the consciousness of the workers. A photographer from the *Irish Examiner* newspaper was present and wanted to take a picture of the attendance to accompany the report in the next day's paper. Socialist Party members present were wary of this proposal, knowing the understandable fear of the men up to now in identifying themselves and their views to the company.

The issue of the photograph was put to the meeting for discussion. The answer



that came back was unequivocal. We are not afraid to show our faces! GAMA is the one that should be ashamed to show its face! The photograph appeared the next morning.

That night, seven GAMA workers who had attended the meeting were forced out of their accommodation on returning to Tynagh. They were left out on the road for hours in the driving rain. The local gardai were called on behalf of the workers, and the workers were again refused entry to their accommodation before being put up for the night in a bed and breakfast. They were refused entry to the site again the next morning and travelled up to Dublin, where they stayed from that point on.

The next morning, Monday 4 April, GAMA's sites at Ballymun and Balgaddy were shut down by strike action. The workers were due to assemble at the Spire in O'Connell Street at 10 am but actually arrived much earlier. The men must have presented an extraordinary spectacle to the people of Dublin as they travelled to work that morning!

Kitted out in their colourful GAMA high visibility coats, wearing hardhats, many of them smoking like troopers, and gathered around the spire in big numbers, this wasn't your usual Monday morning O'Connell Street spectacle!

## "VUR VUR"

Shortly after 10 am the crowd began their march to the Dail. "Gama - Ali Baba" (fairly self-explanatory) and "Vur Vur Inlesin, Gama Bizi Dinlesin!" (roughly translated as "Shout loud so GAMA can hear you!") rang out on the streets of Dublin. These chants would be heard many times in the weeks to come.

Never before had Dublin's streets seen a protest like this - hundreds of immigrant workers marching together and chanting in their native tongue! Commenting on the day's events, Joe Higgins said: "For the first time in Ireland, Turkish workers have found their voice. They will keep using it now until they get justice."

Afterwards the workers marched together to Liberty Hall, to a room opened up to them by SIPTU official Eric Fleming at short notice, to discuss the next steps. After more than four years' union membership, this was the first time these men had ever stepped foot inside their union's headquarters.

The men who had been expelled from Tynagh arrived in the middle of the meeting and got a massive round of applause from the others. From that point on, they were to stay at the off-site Ballymun compound. The meeting decided that the workers would travel en masse to Tynagh the next day to try to overcome the company intimidation and persuade the Tynagh men to support the strike.

The Turkish workers from the Balgaddy and Ballymun sites met up again the

next morning to travel to Tynagh in rural south-east Co. Galway, in order to discuss with the workers there and to try and bring them out on the strike. A significant minority (about 25 of 70) of the Ennis workers also walked off the job for the first time that morning and headed to Galway. This was despite being told not to return if they walked off the job.

If Tynagh could be brought out on strike, GAMA could be quickly brought to their knees. This was a major power station, GAMA was the contractor, GAMA had a contract to supply the electricity when the station was built, and the company would incur financial penalties from the Energy Regulator if deadlines were not met.

The buses to Tynagh were paid for by the union. Loaded with GAMA workers, each of whom was given a small SIPTU backpack with a packed lunch inside, the buses arrived in Tynagh in the afternoon. RTE and TV3 camera crews were there. The gates were locked and there was a line of barriers in front of them as well as about a dozen gardai.

It was clear that the Tynagh management weren't too keen on the Tynagh men being allowed any discussion with their brothers! SIPTU officials asked the Tynagh management to allow the Tynagh men to come out and talk. They asked that a delegation be allowed in to talk to the Tynagh men. Both requests were refused. One of the strikers, Murat, later revealed that the Tynagh workers had been due to finish their shift at 4 pm that day but that the hours were unilaterally extended by the management.

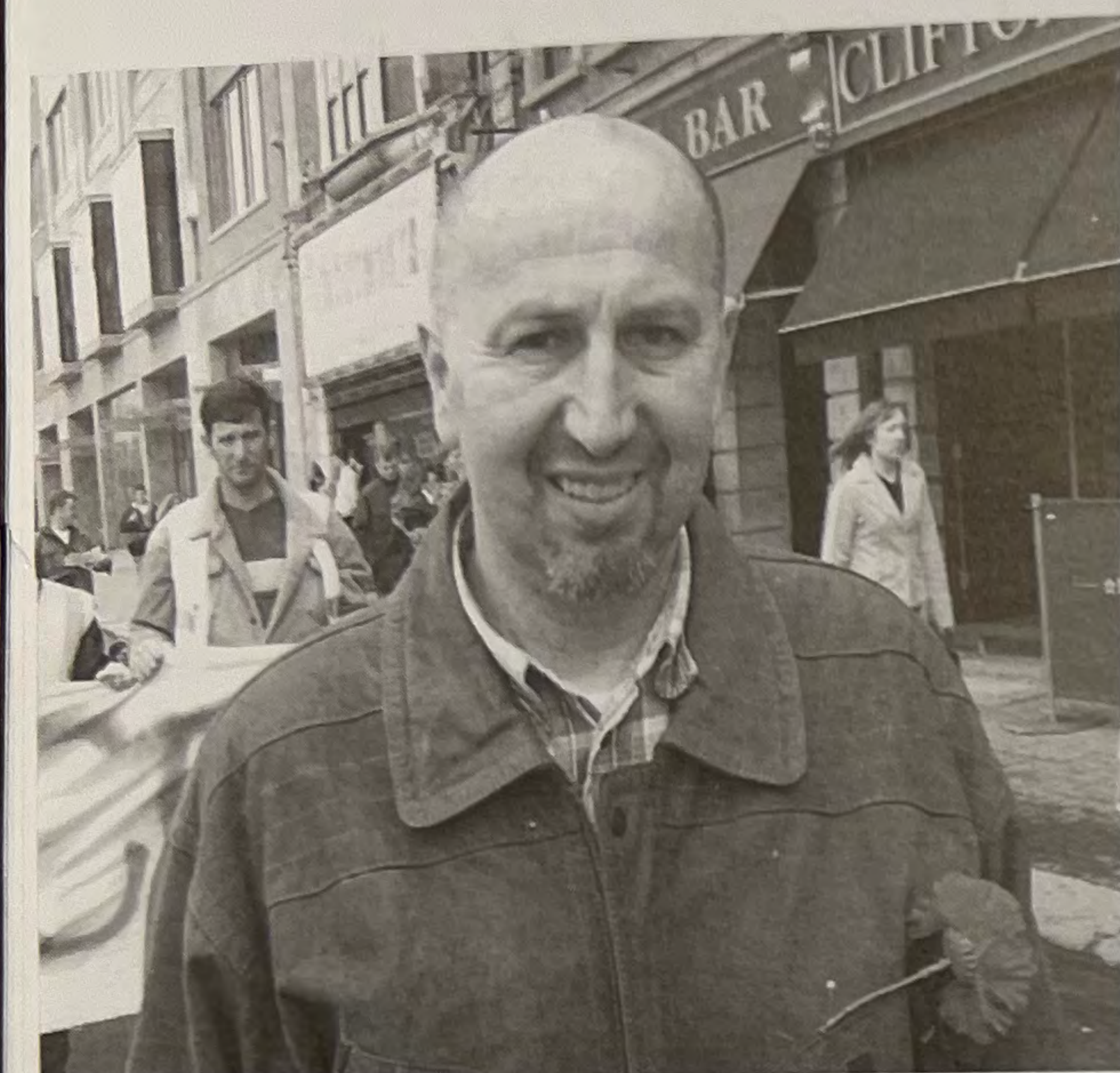
The Tynagh management also put the "fear factor" to work. Seven determined men had been booted out of their jobs and the compound itself on Sunday night. There had been no decisive reaction then. It was obvious from phone calls and text messages that there was significant discontent among the Tynagh workers over the Finansbank accounts. But a decisive reaction was needed now.

A small group of workers, about seven in all, came out to discuss with their striking colleagues. In taking this step they knew that they would not be allowed back. The strikers stayed for five hours in a steady downpour chanting and trying to persuade more workers to come out. But there was no decisive reaction and they never came.

A possible restricting factor was the fact that there were a lot of managers at Tynagh. Here, managers had greater specific weight and influence compared to other GAMA sites. Also, the REA rates were now being paid to workers. Despite the fact that this was a direct consequence of the Socialist Party investigation, this might have created a certain attitude that "half a loaf is better than no bread" and ironically might have been a factor in keeping the workers inside the gates.

The buses left for Dublin in the dark, after tea and sandwiches organised by the union at a hotel in Ballinasloe. As the workers (among them the men dismissed from Tynagh that day) arrived back to Dublin at 3 am it was clear that this promised to be





*Above: Baki Uzunkaya played an important role in establishing links with his fellow Turks who worked at GAMA*



a longer and even harder struggle than perhaps some had thought would be the case.

Talks with the company took place on Thursday 7 April. A five-hour meeting between the TWAG committee and SIPTU on the one hand, and representatives of the company on the other, took place in Liberty Hall. GAMA made no significant concessions, but the most significant thing about this meeting is that GAMA was at the table at all. This was the first time GAMA had ever sat across the table to negotiate with their workers in Ireland and their representatives.

On Friday 8 April sister organisations of the Socialist Party affiliated to the CWI put pickets on Turkish Embassies in Stockholm, Berlin, Jerusalem, Brussels, London and Vienna. The Turkish state and GAMA are connected by many threads and the pickets demanded that the Turkish state put pressure on GAMA to concede the workers' demands. These actions illustrated that the internationalism of the socialist movement is not just a "lofty aspiration" but is of practical benefit to workers' campaigns.

A mass meeting was held in Liberty Hall on the same day, Friday 8 April. This meeting included the Ennis workers who had all managed to get back into their compound despite the threat of eviction and a small group from Co. Cork who had been doing snagging work on the Ballincollig bypass. There was a good mood at the meeting. Despite the setback at Tynagh, the men felt that the first week of the stoppage had gone well.

Mass meetings were to become a feature of the GAMA strike, providing the ranks with the latest information, giving the ranks a say and a vote on all key decisions and keeping the strike leadership in touch with the mood and the pressure of the membership. This contrasts sharply with the way trade union bureaucrats tend to run strikes and shows Socialist Party influence in how the strike was run.

Given the nature of the dispute, Joe Higgins would play a central role at these mass meetings, reporting on the latest news regarding the pressure mounting on the government and the state and providing feedback on the media profile of the dispute and the reaction to it from working class Irish people. Joe was not only the parliamentary representative of the campaign but played a central role in the day-to-day organisation of the work.

The language barrier was a huge issue. For years it had been an important factor in keeping the GAMA scandal quiet and preventing real organisation of the workers. The campaign was determined now that it would not be a barrier to successful work. However, overcoming this problem involved a huge amount of work and consumed enormous energy. Every meeting took at least twice as long as a meeting with Irish workers would have taken. Everything needed to be translated - from English to Turkish and from Turkish back to English.

The campaign had the great good luck at this stage to have met Macha, a Turkish man with Irish citizenship, who did a lot of translation work for the meetings. Like Baki, Macha wasn't just a formal translator - his language skills were allied to a good understanding of both the workers and the politics of the Socialist Party and he played an invaluable role in the campaign.

GAMA had gone to the High Court on 31 March to seek an interim injunction on the publication of the Labour Inspectors' report pending a full High Court hearing on their argument that the report should be left unpublished. On 1 April Mr. Justice Clarke granted their request. Mr. Justice Clarke would end up being just one of several High Court judges who looked favourably on GAMA's legal arguments and effectively censored the work of Edward Nolan and his team.

The role of the different class forces was clear to see. On 31 March the Socialist Party and the workers had travelled to Amsterdam to reveal GAMA's regime of exploitation. The very next day a High Court judge had made a ruling which helped cover it up.

After the Friday mass meeting, the workers marched to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment demanding the immediate publication of the labour inspectors' report and handing in a letter to the Minister. This demand would become a recurring theme in the workers' campaign for justice.



## Chapter 7

# Workers' Action Forces First Breakthrough

**B**y the start of the second week, unofficial strike pickets were in place on the Balgaddy and Ballymun sites. Large numbers of Turkish workers shared the rotas and the mood on the picket lines was good with Turkish music and dancing a feature.

The attitude of GAMA's Irish workers to the pickets was good. The Irish workers respected the pickets and stayed away from work even though the strike was not yet official and they were significantly out of pocket by not going in to the job.

This illustrated an important point about the GAMA dispute - the respect for their struggle shown by ordinary Irish working class people and the almost complete absence of racist or prejudiced attitudes towards the men.

This solidarity was shown in a variety of ways - horns honked in support of pickets, waves of support from shoppers as the men demonstrated in the city centre, food, cigarettes and money brought down to the Ballymun picket line by local women, a support social organised for the men in Ballymun, well attended by the local community, and so on. This was all in spite of the fact that the men had been segregated from Irish society in company compounds.

The reasons for this support are important from the point of view of learning lessons as to how to fight racism. First of all, the men clearly demonstrated the justice of their case - even the most committed racist would have had a hard job winning support for any argument that the strike was bogus or unjust.

Secondly, the men had the advantage of fighting their campaign as workers. Exploitation is an experience many Irish workers are familiar with and the Turkish men won support on the basis of class solidarity.

Last, but not least, the GAMA men, assisted by the Socialist Party, consistently stressed that they were fighting for the interests of all working people. Joe Higgins continually made the point that if GAMA could get away with paying slave wages, it would undermine the wages and conditions of all construction workers, Irish and migrant alike.

In turn, the class struggle waged by the GAMA men was to raise Irish people's awareness of the exploitation of migrant workers more than any number of academic papers or newspaper articles, however worthy, ever could.

With the help of the Irish workers' solidarity, the Balgaddy site was totally shut down and all but a skeleton crew was out in Ballymun. Enver Alan and Mustafa Eken played a key role among the Balgaddy men at this stage as did Mesut and Serdar Ivak at Ballymun. Socialist Party members played a key role in assisting the organisation of the picket lines, especially Paul Murphy and Lisa Maher at Balgaddy and Michael O'Brien at Ballymun.

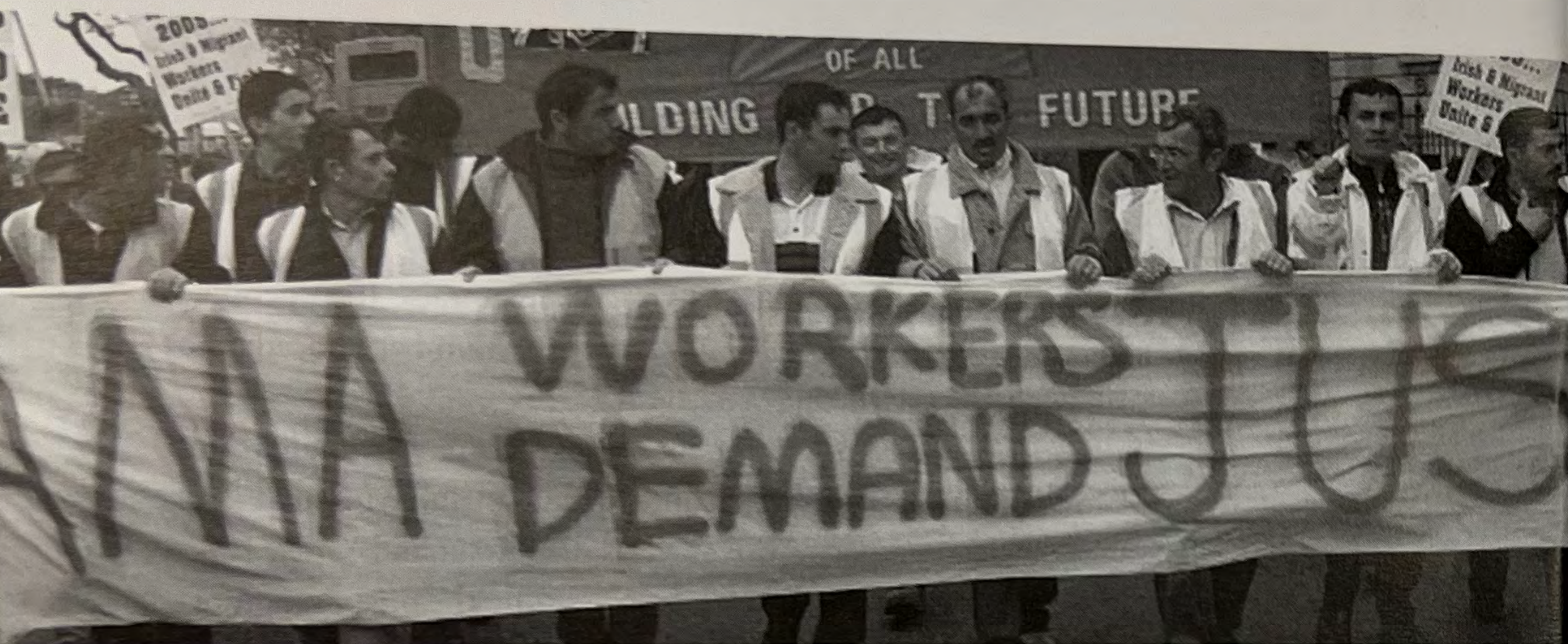
The pickets played an important role in putting GAMA under pressure by totally shutting down one of their four current projects in Ireland and massively restricting work on another, thereby hitting the company in the pocket. In Ennis, a significant minority of the men were refusing to work and although pickets weren't placed, the stance taken by these men and their continued presence in the on-site accommodation had a certain pressurising effect on GAMA also.

Alongside pressurising GAMA, applying pressure on the government and the Irish state was an absolutely crucial tactic for the campaign. GAMA and the Irish state were tied together by many threads (contracts for state projects, tax deals, work permits and so on) and by mobilising public pressure on the government, the state could be forced to lean on GAMA for concessions.

This pressure on the government was turned up on Tuesday 12 April when the industrial and political arms of the campaign were used together to powerful effect. Hundreds of GAMA workers met that morning in Liberty Hall, before heading out to distribute 7,000 leaflets to construction workers on all building sites in the city-centre area. These leaflets urged the construction workers to show solidarity and join their protest march to the Dail, where Joe Higgins planned to question Taoiseach Bertie Ahern on the dispute later that afternoon. A small but significant layer of union activists joined the protest.

The Turkish workers' march was noisy, colourful and far more festive than the traditional Irish labour movement demonstration. A rally outside the Dail was addressed





by Joe Higgins as well as T.D.s from the Labour Party and the Green Party and by Independent T.D.s.

At the end of the rally, the Turkish workers danced traditional Turkish dances on the Kildare Street "dancefloor", inviting Joe Higgins to join in before hoisting him shoulder-high. It wasn't exactly the traditional way for a Dail deputy to arrive at the gates of Leinster House for a parliamentary debate! Forty Turkish workers went through the gate with Joe to watch the debate from the public gallery.

Joe Higgins told the Dail, and by extension the country, that the strikers had received a maximum of €250 a full four weeks ago and had not been paid since. They had had to be given bus fares just to come into town. Challenging Taoiseach Bertie Ahern to look the workers in the eye when answering, Joe Higgins asked: "How could such a vile machine of shocking exploitation be transferred intact by GAMA to Irish sites and how could the company get away with this exploitation for four-and-a-half years?"

Others were now beginning to use GAMA as a stick with which to beat the government. Labour Party leader Pat Rabbitte - whose Councillors on South Dublin County Council only four months ago were criticising the Socialist Party investigation and giving GAMA the all-clear - criticised the investigations made when Mary Harney ran the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, saying "enquiries were con-

ducted and yet you gave a clean bill of health to the GAMA practices".

The government was very much on the defensive. Micheal Martin announced the appointment of 11 new labour inspectors. The Taoiseach pledged to do everything in the government's power to retrieve the Finansbank money.

Later in the week a two-hour meeting between the TWAG and Minister Martin was held and Joe Higgins returned to the attack in the Dail telling Mary Harney that she had to bear a "very heavy responsibility" for what had happened. Harney replied: "I had no act, hand or part in bringing this company into this country. I regret very much the circumstances that are emerging. I would not stand over it. It is a disgrace." Michael O'Farrell commented in the *Irish Examiner* on Friday 15 April: "The haste at which many are leaping to defend themselves contrasts sharply with their laissez-faire approach to GAMA in the past."

## €20 MILLION

The pressure on the company and the state began to tell that week as money from the Finansbank accounts began to be transferred to the workers' personal bank accounts in Turkey. This was a huge victory for the workers. Workers who had been in Ireland for three years had up to €45,000 transferred - wages which three weeks earlier they did not even know they had. More than €20 million was transferred to approximately 660 workers over the next couple of weeks. The strikers all benefited, but their sacrifices also brought dividends for the men who had stayed at work.

The GAMA struggle was forcing the country's largest trade union, SIPTU, to provide real assistance. The power of this union, so often used to promote "social partnership", cut across workers' struggles and underpin right-wing governments, was, under pressure from the workers, being used to good effect.

However, the workers, quite rightly, kept the dispute firmly under their control through the Turkish Workers' Action Group committee and mass meetings. In so doing, they gave a glimpse as to how the unions can be put under pressure by workers and made to fight on behalf of working people.

As the Finansbank funds began to be transferred, the company decided it would now concentrate its efforts on absolutely refusing the workers their overtime payments. The sums owed in unpaid overtime, time-and-a-half plus double time for Sundays, were greater even than the sums in the Finansbank accounts.

The workers, in turn, would decide to carry on their fight to win this demand. Murat later explained what the workers had had to do to make up this overtime



money: "We used to work from 8 o'clock to 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock....sometimes 2 o'clock in the morning."

The pressure on the government and the state was kept up with a visit on Thursday 21 April to Lanesboro, Co. Longford, to picket the official opening of a €250 million ESB power station that had been built largely by GAMA slave labour. Three years earlier at the sod turning for the nearby power station at Shannonbridge, Co. Offaly, the Minister for Finance Brian Cowen had told RTE News that there was "no truth whatsoever" in the claim that GAMA workers were being underpaid.

Now his words came back to haunt him as GAMA workers turned up in force to back up the words of Joe Higgins that "this very important piece of Irish infrastructure was built on the back of the most shameful exploitation." The protest was covered in that night's RTE News as was the old news clip of Cowen's blustering denials.

Shameful exploitation clearly wasn't going to touch the hearts of the men and women on the High Court benches. After a week-long hearing, outside which the Turkish workers organised daily protests, Mr. Justice Kelly ruled on Friday 22 April, that there should only be a limited release of the labour inspectors' report.

The Fraud Squad, the Revenue Commissioners, the DPP, the Director of Corporate Enforcement, the Competition Authority and the Garda National Immigration Bureau were to receive copies, but the media and the public were not. Publication of the report was to be prohibited until a full hearing of the case, which would not begin until 10 May. Publication of the report at this stage in late April would have greatly helped the workers' campaign.

The report wasn't published, however, at this or any other stage of the campaign. Judgment was not given until 14 June and the High Court's ruling was that the report should be quashed (i.e. rendered null and void) on the basis that the Minister in seeking publication exceeded the power given to him in legislation. The government is currently appealing this ruling to the Supreme Court.

All the High Court judges who ruled in GAMA's favour on this issue would have had to read the inspectors' report themselves and therefore were fully aware of GAMA's shocking regime of exploitation. Yet, again and again, they chose to frustrate the demands of real justice.

The state goes to great lengths to portray itself as "neutral" in the clash between competing class interests. Marxists, however, have always argued that, far from being an unbiased referee, the state, in the final analysis, represents the interests of the ruling class.

This position was best explained by Marx's collaborator Friedrich Engels: "Because the state arose from the need to hold antagonisms in check, but because it arose at the same time in the midst of the conflict of these classes, it is, as a rule, the

state of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which, through the medium of the state, becomes also the politically dominant class, and thus acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class..." (Engels, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*).

Serious workers' campaigns, such as the GAMA strike, tend to show up the state in its true colours and this was shown with the men's experience of the High Court. If the GAMA workers had depended on the High Court to vindicate their rights, they would have found this institution of the establishment giving far more comfort to their exploiters than to themselves, the victims. Two years previously, 22 jailed anti-bin tax campaigners shared a similar experience of the "neutrality" of the Irish courts. Mere weeks after the GAMA dispute concluded, the Rosspoint Five would share that experience too.

Around this time, it became clear that the GAMA struggle was lifting the lid on widespread exploitation of immigrant labour in Irish society as more and more cases of abuse came out into the light. Beautician Salvacion Orge from the Philippines was employed on a 6-month contract to work on the Irish Ferries' ship, *Isle of Inismore*, between Rosslare and Pembroke in Wales. Recruited through a Singapore-based recruitment agency (named, fittingly enough, Sharp Management) Salvacion was paid a salary of €354 a month for working a 12-hour day, seven days a week with three days off per month. Her hourly pay rate worked out at just over one euro an hour.

Polish and Lithuanian construction workers employed by McCann and Sons on a housing development in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, were found to be paid €4.31 an hour before deductions. When the men asked to be paid the construction minimum rate, they were sacked and told to leave their accommodation. Olena Bunbyakevich was employed by Carrickacroy Mushrooms as a picker, working 90 hours a week on piece rates the equivalent of €3.50 an hour - half the minimum wage.

These cases - and others - demonstrated that GAMA was not an isolated example, one rotten apple in an otherwise pristine business barrel. In fact, GAMA was merely a particularly ruthless example of the worldwide tendency of bosses to maximise profit at workers' expense. The only difference between GAMA and most governments and big corporations in the world today is (in some cases) one of degree. The neoliberal agenda (low pay, attacks on workers' wages, pensions and conditions, an anti-union stance, undermining of secure, full-time employment, privatisation, and so on) is shared by them all.



## Chapter 8

# Return to 1913

In 1913 the owner of the *Irish Independent*, William Martin Murphy, in alliance with 404 other employers, tried to starve the workers of Dublin, organised under the leadership of Jim Larkin and James Connolly, back to work rather than allow them join and be represented by a trade union. Food ships had to sail into Dublin port stocked with supplies donated from the families of trade unionists in Britain and soup kitchens had to be set up at Liberty Hall to feed the families of the locked-out workers.

Now, 92 years on and in an era of so-called "social partnership", GAMA, albeit on a far smaller scale, tried to replicate the tactics of William Martin Murphy with the aim of breaking the strike. On Friday 22 April, GAMA threatened to stop paying workers if they did not end the protests. SIPTU described the threat as "very sinister". Then, on Monday 25 April, GAMA removed 230 workers from the payroll, threatened to evict striking workers from their accommodation and stopped the supply of food to the men.

This represented a serious attempt to smash the strike and needed to be responded to very quickly and effectively. The first step was to highlight the scandal and let the whole country know what was going on. The media were alerted and a protest march organised that day to GAMA's gleaming corporate HQ at Santry in Dublin.

The next step was to organise an alternative supply of food for the men. SIPTU agreed to cover the cost of feeding the strikers. In Ballymun this was a relatively straight forward task because the men's accommodation was separate to GAMA's building site. An account was opened with the retailer Musgraves and SIPTU covered the monies due at the end of the week.

In Balgaddy things were a little more complicated. Lisa Maher had, since the start of the strike, played a role of helping the men with practical day-to-day difficulties. If, for instance, the men had medical complaints, Lisa organised the supplies from the pharmacy and got reimbursed at the end of the week by SIPTU. Now her role was to

change to that of bread delivery woman.

Lisa takes up the story: "We decided there and then that we would get food to the men, no matter what. SIPTU made some money available, we contacted the bread man for Balgaddy and he agreed to meet me every morning at a pub carpark. I went every morning to meet him and squeezed 100 loaves into the back of my car and drove the bread to the men in Balgaddy."

The first morning Lisa went out to the site she was refused entry by security men. Only after reversing the car, revving and making as though to ram the gates were the gates opened up. There were no problems after that morning. She concludes: "Through it all they were very well fed and every morning when I arrived they had my olives and boiled eggs ready for me at 6.30 to 7 am. They were a great bunch of men and it was a great struggle."

In Ennis, GAMA kept the attempt to starve the workers going for weeks. Arrangements were made to have food provided by a local Abrakebabra shop. The bills here came to €11,000 but SIPTU were given a 30% discount by the businessman involved. GAMA's hard line had won the workers fresh support in some surprising quarters!

The third step was to light a fire under the government to force it to put pressure on GAMA to back down. Joe Higgins asked Taoiseach Bertie Ahern in the Dail whether he was ashamed to be the "so-called leader" of a country where this could happen. The Irish Congress of Trade Unions sent a letter to the government calling for emergency social welfare payments and accommodation. The government knew full well that GAMA's actions had provoked deep revulsion among ordinary Irish people. Not the least reason for this deep revulsion was working class folk memory of the events of the 1913 Lockout.

On Wednesday 27 April, the Taoiseach replied to Joe Higgins' stinging Dail questions by stating: "I hope the company will not dare to evict those workers on stoppage who it provides food and accommodation for....such actions would not be acceptable." The vigorous response of the campaign to GAMA's actions and threats were swift and successful. On Friday 29 April, the company restored the food supply in Ballymun and Balgaddy. The threat of mass evictions was never implemented.



## Chapter 9

# Hundreds Leave, Determined Minority Fight On

**T**urkey is a country with a long history of military dictatorship and military involvement in political affairs. Military coups took place in 1960, 1971 and 1980. As recently as 1997, a civilian government resigned on the say-so of the military. The 1980 coup, organised during the formative years of many of the GAMA workers, witnessed 30,000 arrests in the first few months, including those of many trade union and student activists, and the banning of strikes.

Because of this kind of experience in Turkey, many GAMA workers felt that a "democracy" such as Ireland would act quickly to correct the injustice that had been done to them. The failure of the state to act strongly and decisively to tackle GAMA came as a big disappointment to these men. The state had failed to uncover GAMA's four-and-a-half years of exploitation from mid 2000 to early 2005. Now that the exploitation had been exposed, the state still failed to act decisively.

In capitalist Ireland the gardai would not hesitate to arrest a lowly shoplifter but GAMA's bosses, who had committed crimes of exploitation on a vast scale, were not only still free but the highest courts in the land were giving them protection as the workers were left to struggle, impoverished, on the picket lines.

Friedrich Engels had explained many years ago how big business can rule and rob, not merely through dictatorial regimes, but also through "democratic" ones: "Another reason why the omnipotence of 'wealth' is more certain in a democratic republic is that it does not depend on defects in the political machinery or on the faulty political shell of capitalism. A democratic republic is the best possible political shell for capitalism, and once capital has gained possession of this very best shell, it establishes its power so securely, so firmly, that no change of persons, institutions or parties in the bourgeois-democratic republic can shake it." (Engels, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and The State*).

The state ultimately represents the interests of capitalism and cannot be relied upon to take the gloves off and decisively see through a battle against big business interests. Socialist Party members had stressed this point with the Turkish workers on many occasions, pointing to the workers' own power as the key to advancing the campaign.

But life experience is usually stronger than the power of political argument and the illusions that many of the men had in capitalist "democracy" became a big factor in the disappointment and demoralisation that began to take hold towards the end of the first week in May.

Intimidation was a factor too. Sedat Toraman - who stayed with the strike to the very end - was later to relate how a gang had approached his sister-in-law back home claiming that he was engaged in illegal and terrorist activity in Ireland. His elderly parents had been visited by a delegation of so many GAMA representatives they had been able to fill a minibus. GAMA's representatives told them that their son had joined illegal activities and asked them to tell their children to return or "bad things would happen to them". The talk of "terrorist activity" implied Turkish-based groups.

When you consider the regime that exists in Turkey, it is no surprise that many men received phone calls from their relatives urging them to come home. Nor was the intimidation confined to Turkey. On 23 April, the gardai had to be called at 4.30 am to stop men from being physically attacked at the Ennis compound and on 12 May the Ennis strikers had to move lock, stock and barrel to Balgaddy to escape the climate of fear and menace.

Of course, intimidation had failed to break the strike in the early days when hopes were highest, but now that tiredness and a degree of demoralisation crept in, it began to take its toll on the resolve of many men. Added to the feeling that GAMA was still strong and unlikely to concede the overtime pay; that the struggle had dragged on a long time; that the men were in a difficult situation far from home; and that significant gains had already been won, a mood began to develop among some workers to struggle no longer.

A discussion began among many of the men as to whether or not to end the strike and settle for what had already been won. GAMA intervened in this discussion with behind-the-scenes offers. Strikers who were prepared to quit were offered pay for April, a free flight home and a letter, signed by four GAMA managers, which read: "Because you voluntarily stopped this illegal protest and decided to go back to Turkey you will not be sued for financial loss and there will be no criminal complaint against you" - a letter that has to be seen in the context of the intimidation campaign against families back home. GAMA was prepared to put a lot of work into pushing this offer in order to save themselves millions of euro in unpaid overtime.



Despite the success of blockades on Gama sites which had been organised at the end of April, and the fact that the Dublin May Day march was organised on the theme "Justice For Migrant Workers" and became a de facto support rally for the strike, some strike committee members negotiated secretly with GAMA management without a discussion on the strike committee. They encouraged workers to accept the GAMA offer and to leave Ireland on flights organised by GAMA.

A heated debate broke out at a strike committee meeting on Tuesday 10 May, as opposition emerged on the committee to the secret negotiations. Shortly afterwards some strike leaders and some workers accepted the GAMA offer and went home.

A mass meeting in the Sherriff Street youth centre on Wednesday 11 May, voted to continue the strike, but also to begin negotiations about a return to work. However, in the days that followed a second, larger group of GAMA workers, no doubt affected by the exit of the strike committee members, quit the strike and went home to Turkey. Between the two groups and people who had drifted away even before this exodus, nearly 200 of the original strikers had now gone home.

The withdrawal of such a significant bloc of strikers, including talented strike leaders, was a real blow for the campaign. However, a very important development then took place. Eighty five workers decided to fight on. This difficult decision, along with the emergence of several new leaders for the strike, proved to be of great significance. Every campaign reaches a point, when the first flush of enthusiasm is long past and difficulties seem to be to the fore, which has elements of make or break. The decision to fight on was in many ways the making of the important new breakthrough which the workers were soon to win.

The strike became official (after a 231-2 vote cast on 5 May by GAMA's Turkish workers and also by GAMA's Irish workers who had refused to pass pickets). On Tuesday 17 May, strikers received a payment of €125 each and a hardship fund was set up. But with the numbers now having been cut by two-thirds since the strike's start in early April, it was clear that industrial pressure on GAMA was a lesser factor now and that political pressure on the government and the state held the key to whatever success would be had.

## Chapter 10

# "STICK WITH THE KEBABS"

**O**n Wednesday 18 May, Joe Higgins was in the Dail criticising Fianna Fail for their plans to privatise Aer Lingus when a heckler shouted out to Joe that he should "stick with the kebabs".

This comment would have been an embarrassment for the government had it come from the mouth of a backbencher. Instead, it had been uttered by a Minister of State, a junior government Minister. What was even more embarrassing for them was that the Minister in question was the Minister for Development Co-operation and Human Rights.

The Minister for Development Co-operation and Human Rights, Conor Lenihan, comes from a very well-known Fianna Fail family. His father, Brian Lenihan, was Tanaiste to corrupt former Taoiseach Charlie Haughey. His aunt, Senator Mary O'Rourke, was later to inform a Fianna Fail selection convention that her supporters would "work like blacks" to ensure that she won a seat.

Ireland's capitalist establishment like to think that they have left the days of gombeenism far behind; that they are a modern, cosmopolitan post-Celtic Tiger elite who can show a liberal face to the immigrant workers they want to attract here and a sophisticated image to the world beyond. The fact that someone like Conor Lenihan can be made Minister of State for Development Co-operation and Human Rights shows that they are a long, long way from overcoming their narrow worldview and their backwardness.

Joe Higgins was quick to pick up on the remark. He said that the comment ill-behaved the Minister of State for Development Co-operation and Human Rights and made a connection between the remark and the GAMA campaign before leaving the Dail to rush over to Liberty Hall for a TWAG meeting.

The media picked up on the exchange and controversy grew, forcing a deflated Conor Lenihan to slink back into the Dail chamber and make a half-hearted apology in front of four T.D.s: "During the Order of Business I made remarks that I now regret having made. I regret the remarks made and regret sincerely if any offence was caused."



But the "apology" did not defuse the controversy. The Associated Press sent the story around the world under the headline "Ireland's Racist Jibe - Irish Government Minister Apologises For Making Racist Statement About Turks". The government now tried to spin the story to indicate that Lenihan's comments had appalled them. However, the *Irish Examiner's* columnist Earwicker noted on Saturday 21 May, that "the shock experienced by a lot of his Fianna Fail colleagues in the chamber was a delayed reaction. Most of them were heaving with mirth at his humour."

Meanwhile, over at the TWAG meeting it was clear that something was up. The phones were hopping with news of developments and Joe was called outside to go on RTE Radio 1's lunchtime news with Sean O'Rourke, where he used the opportunity to re-focus attention on the plight of the GAMA workers. Joe said that he did not want an apology for himself but that there should be an apology to the GAMA workers; that the Minister should resign if he had been referring to the GAMA workers; and drew a connection between Lenihan's comments and the government's inaction on the issues of concern to the workers.

The reaction from the general public put the government under pressure. Eighty percent of callers to the Liveline radio show demanded Lenihan's resignation or sacking. A Turkish-born Irish citizen told the *Irish Times*: "I am very disappointed, angry and upset for myself and my community. Irish people over the years have got upset, and rightly so, when they were called Paddies and Micks, especially in England. Now we find people here referring to us like a piece of meat. It is offensive."

The next day SIPTU and the Turkish Workers Action Group called a press conference. This was designed to express the anger felt by the GAMA workers at Lenihan's remark but also to once again ratchet up the pressure on the government on the GAMA issue. The press conference was a major media event.

Rafet Gokturk spoke for all GAMA workers when he said that Lenihan's comments were a "big insult" and that he and his colleagues had been "very offended" by it. They were already struggling against injustice in Ireland and trying to vindicate their rights: "And while we are in this difficult situation along comes a Minister with responsibility for human rights and aid to foreign countries and makes this kind of remark as if we were just a piece of meat."

An excellent report was prepared for this meeting by SIPTU indicating the scale of GAMA's theft on the overtime issue and adding to pressure on the government.

Over the next couple of days, Conor Lenihan became an object of scorn and ridicule in the media and in Irish society. The cartoonists had a field day at his expense. A cartoon of Lenihan roasting on a spit even made it on to the front page of *The Irish Times*. True to Fianna Fail tradition, he never resigned. But his stupid comments definitely put the government under increased pressure to resolve the ongoing dispute.

## CHAPTER 11

# Victory

On Thursday 19 May, the day after Conor Lenihan's outburst, at a press conference called by the TWAG to respond to the Minister, Serdar Ivak, now a leading figure in the strike, raised the idea of a "more drastic action" to promote the workers' cause. He informed the media that a number of the men were considering a hunger strike. The fact that such an idea was being discussed showed both the determination and the desperation of the men.

The Socialist Party did not advocate, indeed, argued against, such a tactic. Nevertheless, the fact that it had been raised, along with the ongoing fallout from the Lenihan controversy, no doubt served to concentrate government minds on resolving what was now nearly a seven-week dispute fought out in the full glare of publicity.

SIPTU and the TWAG had been involved in exploratory talks at the Labour Relations Commission (LRC) on 2 May, and on 11 May workers had agreed to fullscale LRC negotiations on the basis of certain guarantees. Now came an important move from the state with an offer of LRC talks on 23 May.

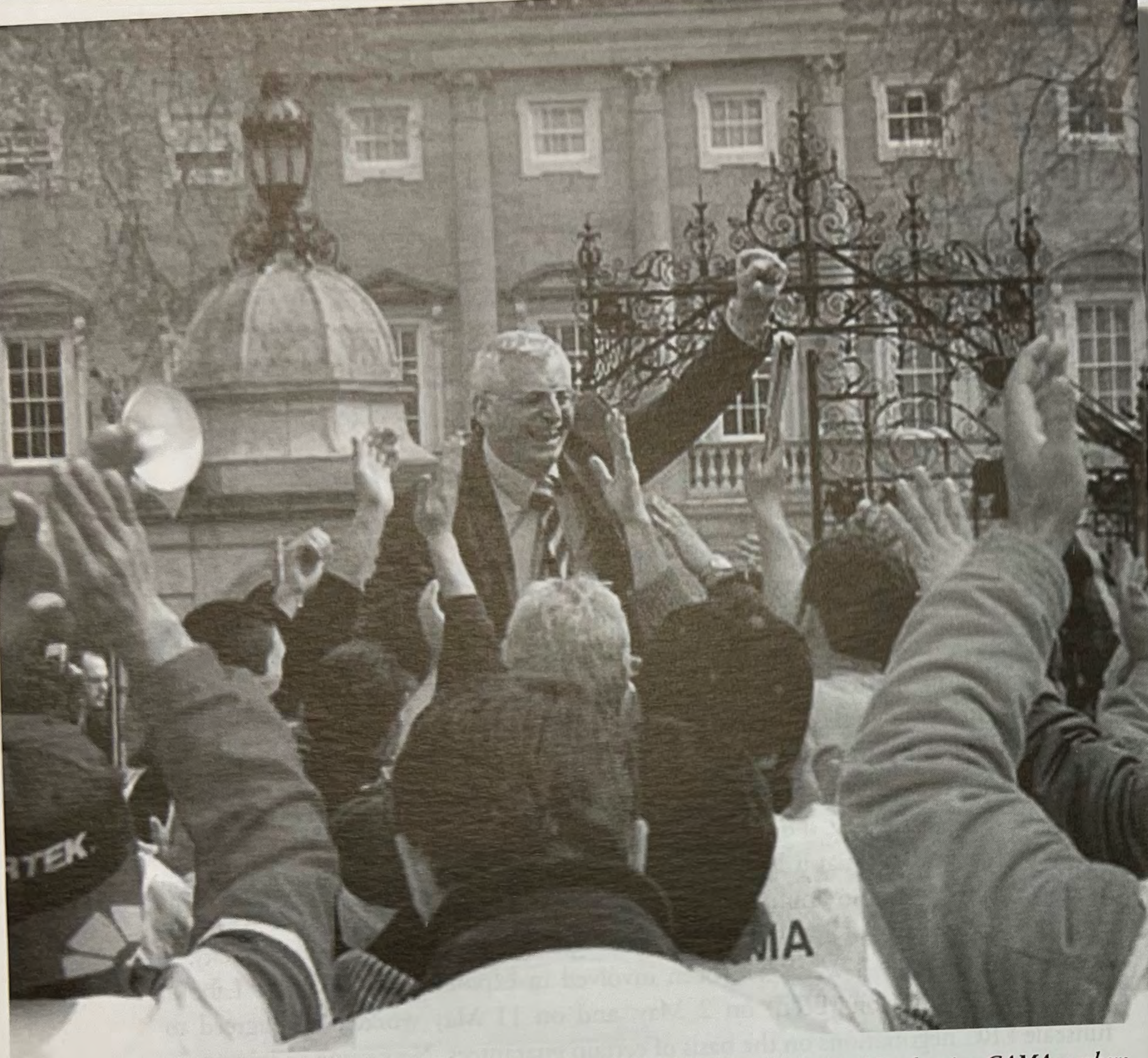
The LRC proposals to resolve the dispute emerged the next day: the company was to provide proper payslips, a proper system to record working hours, and a return to work at REA rates. The return to work was to provide a basis for continued talks on the outstanding issue of unpaid overtime.

This proposal was unanimously rejected by the strikers. They were rightly concerned that GAMA would use a return to work on the various sites as a way of splitting the men up before stalling on any negotiations. And, in truth, there was no enthusiasm for returning to work for GAMA - most men had, in reality, decided at this stage not to go back to work again for the company that had robbed them blind.

Concerned that the two sides would now go back to the trenches, the state stepped in immediately with the offer of talks at the Labour Court, the most senior industrial arbitration court.

The Socialist Party would never advocate that a strong strike would call off pick-





*Joe Higgins being held aloft outside the Dail by cheering GAMA workers*

ets in order to go to the Labour Court. The Labour Court generally hands down rulings that are favourable to the employers. When it does not, it does so in order to give the appearance of fairness and neutrality. Like any other organ of the state, it is not a body that should be trusted by workers.

However, the situation here had to be looked at concretely. The strike had gone about as far as it could go. Nothing already gained could be taken back by the Court, the only question was: what concessions, if any, could be won? On this score, it was felt that the case the men had made, the struggle the men had waged for the overtime payments, and the degree of public support they had won for their demands would make it difficult for the Court to send the men away either literally or virtually empty-handed. What was there to lose? On Wednesday 25 May, the pickets were lifted and the Labour Court hearing began. The campaign was assisted by the experience of

SIPTU negotiators, including Noel Dowling, in this forum.

On Friday 27 May, the analysis that it would prove difficult for the Court to dismiss the claims of the GAMA workers was proved correct. The Court proposed that the 85 GAMA workers would receive €8,000 overtime for each year worked and an ex-gratia payment of one month's salary on completion of contracts in Ireland. The fixed-rate workers would get the same deal as other workers.

With the average period worked in Ireland for a GAMA worker being 17 months, the ruling was worth an average of €13,000 per man! This represented only a fraction of the monies due to the men, but nevertheless was a very significant advance on what had pertained before the Court hearing.

Joe Higgins was right when he stated that the Court's ruling represented a "stunning vindication" of the workers' campaign. SIPTU official Noel Dowling was also right when he said: "It is an industrial relations settlement rather than justice. The system in this country would not allow for justice for workers who cannot afford to hang around for 18 months or 2 years."

The settlement proposals were accepted by the workers by a big majority that same day and were accepted by GAMA the next day 28 May. SIPTU officials travelled to Tynagh and ensured that the Tynagh men were included in the overtime settlement.

The conservative leaders of the trade union movement argue that "social partnership" and moderation are the way to improve the workers' lot. This formula has delivered wage increases of a few percentage points a year for many years as bosses made record profits in the Irish economy. These same leaders scorn the ideas of Marxism as "impractical". The results of the GAMA strike showed who was practical and how a well-organised struggle which utilises workers' power is the key to winning rights, concessions and reforms.

The campaign and strike action had won the following:

- Amounts varying from €4,000 to €55,000 per man in unpaid wages from the Finansbank accounts;
- €13,000 average per man in overtime payments;
- Unpaid wages and unpaid overtime for the fixed-rate workers;
- The REA rate for the job, €12.96 per hour, on all GAMA sites - nearly six times what had previously been paid.

These gains were very real for impoverished Turkish workers. Serdar later explained that the Finansbank money was like "winning the lotto". He bought a house and a car for his family with the money. Murat bought a house and put aside some money for the future education of his children.

The Socialist Party advised the strikers to return to work and make GAMA a



union job, not only in word but in deed as well, thereby providing the only sure guarantee of union rates and conditions being paid and adhered to. But the workers were not prepared to go back and work for GAMA and that is understandable given what the company had done and what they had forced the men to go through.

The point, however, still retains its validity for the trade union movement, which should strive to make GAMA and all other jobs union jobs with union rates, rights and conditions.

On Monday 6 June, a hugely enjoyable victory barbecue was held in Ballymun for all the strikers and their supporters. That Saturday 11 June, most of the strikers went home to Turkey by charter flight, waved off at the airport by supporters.

What they built by the sweat of their brows while in Ireland - roads, houses, power stations - will benefit generations to come. What they achieved between 4 April 2005 and 27 May 2005 may prove more important again - an example that will live for many years to come for both Irish and migrant workers alike.



*Martin Turner's cartoon on the front page of The Irish Times humourously depicts the position of Conor Lenihan after his "stick with the kebabs" blunder*

## Chapter 12

# Aftermath and Lessons

In August 2005, less than three months after the ending of the GAMA dispute, it emerged that the National Roads Authority (NRA) had awarded GAMA the contract for the 16 kilometre, €50 million Castleblayney by-pass in Co. Monaghan.

A motion at Monaghan County Council on 5 September, calling for the contract to be revoked, was shot down by the six Fine Gael and four Fianna Fail Councillors present. The award and the vote happened at a time when the Fraud Squad and the Revenue Commissioners were still meant to be investigating GAMA's operations. So much for the seriousness of the state and its political representatives in rooting out exploitation!

But the most significant event to have taken place in Irish society in the aftermath of the GAMA dispute is the struggle that took place at Irish Ferries in late 2005. In 2004 Irish Ferries had replaced Irish crew members on one of its vessels, on trade union rates of pay, with crew from Eastern Europe paid much lower wages. The trade union leadership, including the SIPTU leadership, allowed these changes through.

Now in late 2005, the company tried to do the same thing on their other ships. But this time the response was very different - strike action, occupation of ships and mass trade union demonstrations on the streets against the company policy. This policy - the policy of wage competition and the "race to the bottom" - was backed by the big business establishment. This was shown by the support given to the company by IBEC and by Independent Newspapers, reflecting a view that slashing wage costs was the way to "compete" with China, India, and other cheap labour economies in a globalised world.

What had changed within a year? Why the different response from workers? No doubt there were many different factors, but equally there can be no doubt that a key factor was the dramatic demonstration given by the GAMA campaign and strike of the dangers of a "race to the bottom" and the big impact this had on the consciousness of working people.

The mass demonstrations of 9 December, the largest trade union demonstrations in Irish society since 1980 with more than 100,000 on the streets, offered the prospect of a workers' victory. Had the trade union leaders followed up with the organisation



of a 24 hour general strike, Irish Ferries would have either been forced to withdraw its plans or follow through on its threat to shut the company.

A decision to shut the company could have brought forth the demand to take the company into public ownership to defend jobs and conditions - a demand which a mass movement would have had a realistic chance of winning against a government gearing up for the long run-in to a general election.

Scandalously, the SIPTU leadership rejected this option and signed up to a rotten deal within days of the demonstrations. This deal involved accepting the minimum wage (then €7.65 an hour) as the pay rates for East European crewmembers hired through an agency to replace 500 workers who had earned more than one-and-a-half times that wage before the dispute began. This brought savings to the company of €11 million at workers' expense.

The SIPTU leadership clearly feared the consequences of an escalation of the dispute. An all-out battle against the company and the government would have left "social partnership" in tatters - it had to be saved at all costs and the price was paid at Irish Ferries. Contrast the results won at GAMA, with a socialist and a rank-and-file worker leadership, with the ultimate result of the Irish Ferries dispute under the leadership of a right-wing trade union bureaucracy in thrall to social partnership! The contrast poses sharply the need to transform the unions.

Meanwhile, in the aftermath of the Irish Ferries dispute, Labour Party leader Pat Rabbitte said that a new work permit system to control the number of people coming to work in Ireland from outside the state, including the EU, may be necessary. "The time may be coming when we will have to sit down and examine whether we would have to look at whether a work permit regime ought to be implemented in terms of some of this non-national labour, even for countries in the EU...there are 40 million or so Poles after all, so it is an issue we have to look at", he said.

Many years ago Pat Rabbitte would have described himself as a Marxist - this disgraceful playing of the "race card" showed he had travelled a long way from Marx's rallying-call "workers of all countries, unite!" It is incredible that seven months after the GAMA dispute he was now raising the idea of an even harsher work permits regime for workers.

Rabbitte's cynical attempt to pose as the champion of Irish workers at the expense of immigrant labour serves the interests of neither. Attempts to identify immigrants as the problem in the "race to the bottom" throws sand in the eyes of Irish workers, hiding from them the reality of who is actually organising the race, i.e. the employers. This plays into the hands of the employers and facilitates them in their campaign to drive down wages and conditions for Irish and migrant workers alike.

The alternative to Rabbitte's approach is shown by the GAMA campaign. The

way to halt the "race to the bottom" is to ensure that every worker is in a union, that that union is pressed to represent the workers well, and that all workers are paid the rate for the job. When East European or Turkish workers or workers of any other nationality are paid the rate for the job, no employer will have an incentive to employ them in place of an Irish worker or a worker of any other nationality.

Showing a political understanding far in advance of the Labour Party leader, Serdar told the Socialist Party: "Not only Turkish or Irish workers should unite but all workers in the world should unite. The bed that the bosses sleep in and the armchair that the bosses sit on are produced by the workers but the workers have nothing. That's the way in the capitalist world and all workers should unite."

As this pamphlet is being written, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) leadership have just negotiated new "social partnership" proposals entitled "Towards 2016". Part of the deal being proposed is an increase in the labour inspectorate to 90 and its removal from under the control of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. Also included in the deal is new legislation to deter employers from making people redundant to replace them with cheaper labour and penalties of up to €250,000 for breaches of employment law.

However, these changes can only apply if a company proposes compulsory redundancies. Therefore, ICTU's claim that these changes will stop further Irish ferries type scenarios are false - the redundancies at Irish ferries were "voluntary", not compulsory therefore this new legislation wouldn't have been applicable!

These changes result from struggles waged by workers at GAMA, Irish Ferries, Doyle's Concrete and elsewhere, to a far greater extent than from the negotiating skills of the ICTU bureaucrats. However, to sign a de facto no-strike deal in return for these concessions flies in the face of the key lessons of the GAMA dispute, i.e. that the state cannot be relied upon to vigorously implement its own labour legislation and that militant trade unionism is the best way of ensuring actual implementation of workers' rights.

What is needed to halt the race to the bottom is a break with social partnership and the establishment of action committees in every city, town and county bringing together activists from trade unions and the communities. These action committees would identify exploitation, make connections with exploited workers, organise those workers into unions and force the employers to pay proper rates or face strike action, including solidarity picketing.

The unions must also ensure that language is no barrier to the organisation of migrant workers. This is a key lesson of the GAMA dispute. Union organisers must be employed who can speak the most common languages used by migrant workers (Polish etc.) and translators must be available who can speak some of the less common ones.



The Socialist Party is in favour of organising Left opposition groups (broad lefts) in all trade unions to fight from within to change the unions, making them more democratic and equipping them with a fighting, campaigning approach and programme. We advocate that broad lefts should fight for the election of all trade union officials so as to make them accountable to the union membership.

Trade union officials who cannot or will not fight to advance the members' interests should be replaced. Broad lefts should also fight for trade union officials to live on the same salary as the workers they represent. Trade unions should not be gravy-trains for ambitious officials and an official on a worker's wage will obviously be more in tune with the pressures and needs of the membership. Besides, trade union officials are likely to fight harder for wage increases for the members if they will benefit from corresponding increases!

Last but not least, we advocate a fighting programme for the unions which should include rejection of social partnership, opposition to neoliberal policies, and for a national minimum wage of €12 an hour tax free without exemptions in the South and £6 an hour without exemptions as a step towards the European Decency Threshold of £8 an hour in the North. Such a programme should also include a 35-hour week without loss in pay and the establishment of new mass parties of the working class, based on the unions, to challenge the market and the bosses' agenda of profit before people.

Broad lefts would have significant potential to grow in the new, stormier period opening up in Irish industrial relations in this era of globalisation, neoliberalism and the race to the bottom. A trade union movement reclaimed by the working class and returned to the fighting traditions of Connolly and Larkin would be an powerful force for change in Irish society.

The Socialist Party also advocates that all public construction contracts should be carried out by direct labour and that the building and construction industry should be taken out of the hands of the profiteers and into public ownership under the democratic control of the working class.

Profiteering in construction has given us not only the scandal of GAMA but many other scandals too, not least the scandal of new houses being sold for an average of €400,000 in Dublin and nearly €300,000 throughout the rest of the South.

The real cost of building a house (building labour costs plus building material costs) means that most houses could be built for around €100,000 and no ordinary houses should cost more than €150,000. This could become a reality if construction was taken out of the hands of the profiteers and profiteering in land was tackled in a serious way.

The Socialist Party, through the GAMA campaign and other campaigns such as

the anti-water charges campaign, has shown itself to be a serious and capable fighter for reforms for working people. We support the fight for any reform, no matter how small, which benefits the working class. However, whilst fighting for reforms we are opposed to "reformism". By this we mean the idea that reforms in and of themselves, can solve the problems facing the working class.

The problems facing working class people North and South and internationally, can never be fully solved when society is ruled over by the GAMAs, the Irish Ferries' and the big business system of profit, which gives us capitalist globalisation, neoliberalism and state machines that do not serve the interests of working class people. In fact, while this "power structure" remains in place, gains and reforms won today by the working class can come under attack tomorrow in the name of maximising profit.

We can see this with the international attack on workers' pension rights and the assault on young workers' rights which provoked the mass protests in France in March/April 2006. These assaults or "counter-reforms" will come more and more onto the agenda as competition heats up in world markets. For this reason and others, the Socialist Party echoes the words of James Connolly that "the day has passed for patching up the capitalist system - it must go!"

We stand for a break with the capitalist market by taking all major businesses, including the banks, out of the hands of the profiteers. We stand for public ownership of these enterprises and for them to be democratically run by elected governing bodies, with majority representation given to those who work in them and the communities they serve.

We stand for a massive increase in democratic rights and civil liberties and reject totally the monstrous one-party regimes that existed in the old Stalinist dictatorships of the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, etc. We stand for a socialist plan of production so that the wealth created by the worlds' workers is used to benefit the working class.

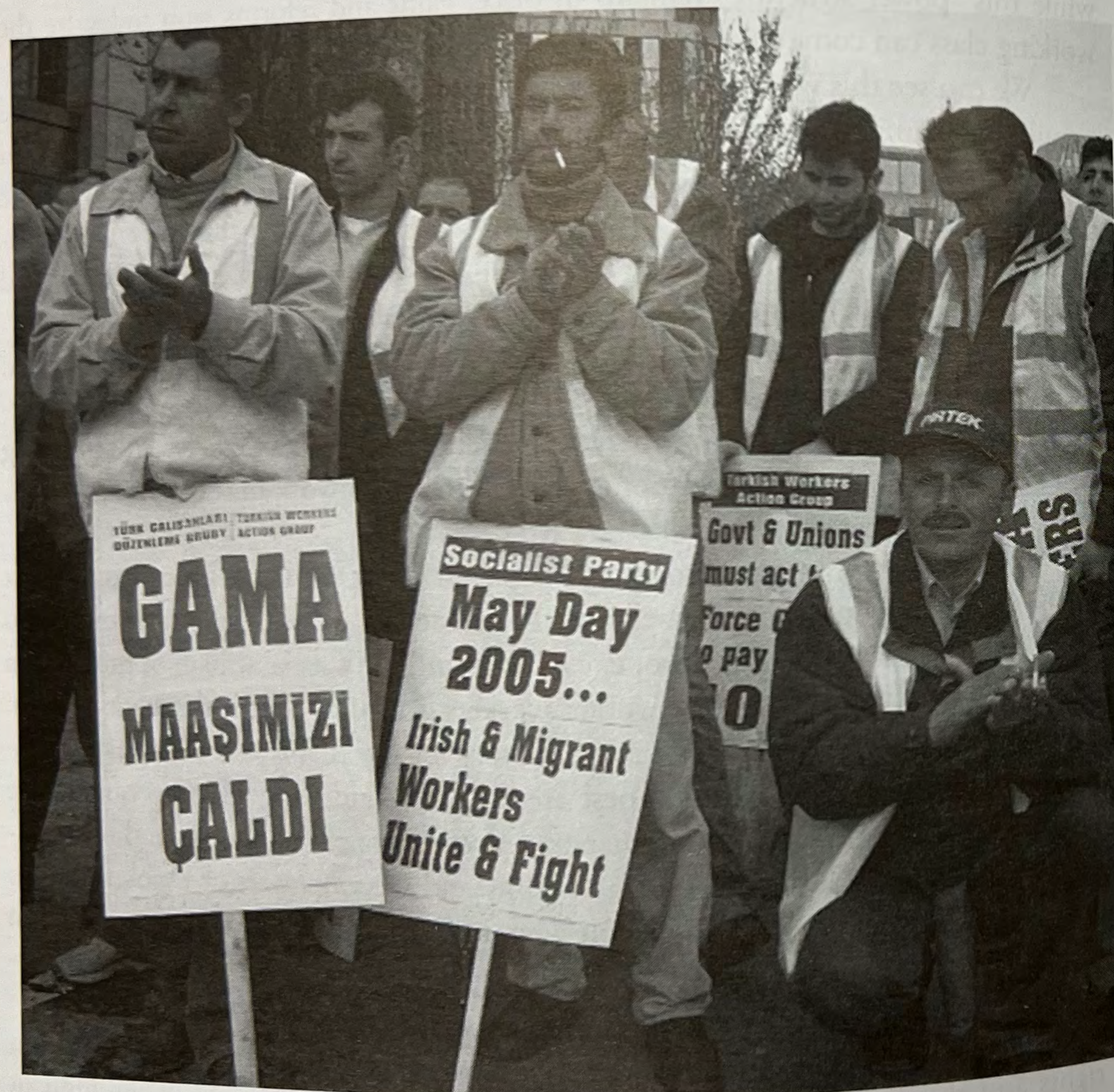
No doubt our enemies and some doubters will say that this is a "fantastic agenda" and will never come to pass. These are the same kind of people who would have cast scorn on the idea of working men and women organising unions and overcoming the resistance of William Martin Murphy and the employers of Dublin prior to 1913. They are the same kind of people who, in October 2005, would have cast scorn on the idea of organising hundreds of Turkish workers to defeat the might of a powerful multinational and the footdragging of a government.

But the workers of Dublin fought the bosses to a standstill and won trade union rights and the Turkish workers secured a smashing victory. The sky is the limit in terms of what can be achieved when the working class fights back, and the working class will fight back in the years that lie ahead. In these struggles they will have many inspirations. The struggle of the GAMA workers will be one of them.



We'll give the final word, then, to Onur Yazilan, an ex-GAMA worker, who explained why he is now a socialist (interviews with ex-GAMA workers who have joined the Socialist Party, Appendix 1):

*"Why am I socialist? You can't be born socialist; you become one as part of living conditions and the system. When there is such an injustice in a system what else can you do but become a socialist? Why not join an existing struggle of people who are fighting for a better future? I am honoured and proud of being part of the Socialist Party who are struggling for justice."*



## APPENDIX 1

# Ex-GAMA workers join Socialist Party

**O**nur Yazilan, Sevinc Ciftci and Savas Guler, three Kurdish workers from Turkey who until the end of the recent dispute worked for GAMA, have joined the Socialist Party. Here they briefly explain why they have become involved in the struggle for socialism.

**Onur Yazilan** – Why am I socialist? The answer to that on one hand is easy and on the other hand very difficult. You can't be born socialist; you become one as a result of living conditions and the system. When there is such an injustice in a system what else you can do but become a socialist? Why not join an existing struggle of people who are fighting for a better future? I am honoured and proud of being part of the Socialist Party who are struggling for justice.

**Sevinc Ciftci** – My reason for being with the Socialist Party is we are looking at life from same angle; my thoughts are the as same as theirs. I want people all over the world to be treated equally without discrimination of language, religion, race or class, and an end to suppression of working class. I want the working class to exist in a democratic, just and free world, that's why I joined the socialist struggle. Long live socialism, long live workers' struggle.

**Savas Guler** – Basis of socialism is freedom, solidarity, freedom of speech and right to defend these freedoms. At the same time, allow equality among people without prejudice. These are the basics that I will always defend, that is why I am in the Socialist Party because I saw these in the party and loved it.



## APPENDIX 2

## Transcript of Joe Higgins speech to the Dail, 8 February 2005

**Mr. J. Higgins:** Many recent reports in the media have highlighted grievous exploitation of immigrant workers. In the construction industry SIPTU officials have found such exploitation. Recently the bricklayers union, BATU, was so concerned that it met the Polish and Lithuanian ambassadors to highlight a gross abuse of their nationals. I wish to raise, in particular, one major scandal of immigrant worker exploitation of massive proportions. There is a major foreign-based multinational construction company employing approximately 10,000 people, 2,000 approximately in this state, which has secured massive local authority and state contracts here. This company imports workers from its home base, who do not speak English, controls their passports and work permits, accommodates them often in company barracks, demands an extent of hours worked that can only be called grotesque and, incredibly, pays unskilled construction workers between € and €3 per hour basic pay and skilled workers somewhere over €3 an hour. In short, this is a modern version of bonded labour. The instigator is Turkish-based Gama Construction Ireland Limited.

The national minimum wage is €7 an hour. The registered employment agreement for the lowest paid operative in construction is €12.96 an hour. This case is a national scandal financed by extensive public funding. I call on the Taoiseach to ask the Minister and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, as a matter of priority, to order an immediate investigation into Gama Construction and its pay and work practices. Will its records be demanded? Will the Taoiseach ensure that interviews are conducted with workers out of the way of company pressure? Will he ensure the Department sees that no worker is victimised as a result of this investigation and if Gama Construction should act to send workers home, a method used by these companies, those workers are sheltered and protected? I will ask SIPTU, to whom the company signed up some of its workers as a cover, to do so. Companies like Gama Construction not only exploit immigrant workers but undermine wages and conditions for all workers and, through crooked means, they underbid other companies who pay the full rate. This is a serious matter.

**The Taoiseach:** I reiterate that every worker is entitled to the full protection of the law. The workers referred to by the Deputy are entitled to full legislative protection. The inspectorate of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment can apply the full powers and rigours of the law to inspect the records and investigate any breaches. I am aware of some other cases where trade unions have asked the Department to investigate and this has been fully carried out. The Deputy has referred to the company by name. The Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment is in the House and will raise the matter of inspection with his departmental officials. Legislation to deal with such cases is pending. Any information on the case will be followed up. The key point is that every worker is entitled to the full protection of the law. The minimum rate of pay has been agreed through the Labour Court and employers have an obligation under the law to pay that rate. The inspectorate implements the law and investigates any employer in breach of the law.

**Mr. J. Higgins:** As the Taoiseach stated, the workers have entitlements. However, these workers are vulnerable and afraid. That is why they need the security of knowing that any attempted victimisation will be resisted. I welcome the Taoiseach's undertaking that the Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment will take action. We will make every information available to the inspectors. There should be many more than 21 of them, by the way.

This company has done work for local authorities. It built the Ennis and Ballincollig bypasses and was proud of the fact that it completed the work six months ahead of schedule. That is easy when using a bonded labour force working eleven or 12 hours a day with two Sundays off in a month. The company can underbid because of these rates of pay.

I want the Minister to take personal charge along with the Secretary General of the Department because it is a serious allegation. This is not a fly-by-night operation from the boot of a car. This is a major company financed by major state public contracts. I will therefore keep a close eye on it. The rights of immigrant workers are paramount, as are the rights of Irish workers who are undermined by this.

**An Ceann Comhairle:** I advise the Deputy that it is not appropriate to name a company in the House when it is not here to defend itself.

**Mr. J. Higgins:** It is entirely appropriate because ...

**An Ceann Comhairle:** No, Deputy, it is not. It is a long-standing precedent in this House.



Mr. J. Higgins: ... it takes advantage of its power over vulnerable workers to exploit them. I will not allow that to happen.

An Ceann Comhairle: There can be no argument about it. The Chair has ruled.

The Taoiseach: I do not know if Deputy Higgins or others have made a complaint to the labour inspectorate about the particular company. The Minister will raise the matter with the inspectorate. I note the Deputy has said he will make the information available to the inspectorate and this will be helpful. I reiterate that every worker in this country is entitled to the protection of labour law. This has been enforced in many cases. Members may remember a case three years ago where the Department took firm and positive action to uphold the rights of the workers who were from one of the now member states, then an applicant country. The same examination will take place in this case.

APPENDIX 3

# Letter from GAMA management to Cllr. Mick Murphy



GAMA CONSTRUCTION IRELAND LIMITED

Councillor Michael Murphy  
C/O South Dublin county Council  
County Hall  
Tallaght,  
Dublin 24

Date: 25<sup>th</sup> November 2004

Subject: Grade and Hourly rate

Our Reference: 800-HK-1322-04

Dear Mr. Murphy,

Further to your recent correspondence, I am happy to clarify that Gama Construction Ireland Ltd., pays all of its employees covered by the Registered Employment Agreement at or above the agreed rates of pay for the construction industry

I attach herewith, a note on the CIF agreed industry rates for your information.

I hope this clarifies matters for you.

Yours sincerely,

M.Hakan Karaalioglu  
Managing Director



## APPENDIX 4

**First leaflet distributed to the  
GAMA workers by the Socialist  
Party (Turkish & English versions)**

### Yurtdışı İnda Çalışan Türk İcilerinin Hakları

Arkada lar

Bizlerde rlandalı i\_çiler olarak ırlandaya ho\_geldiniz. Bu mektubun amacı sizlerin haklarının sizlere bildiril-mesidir. Belki GAMMA sizlerin haklarının sizlere anlatımyıyordu ve bu amaçla Türk ve rlanda toplulukların bir bildirgesidir.

Uzun yıllardan sonra r\_landa ekonomisi çok iyi i\_lemektedir. Bu sebeple birçok r\_landa v\_landa\_ı\_r\_landaya geri gelmi\_tir. Tarihimize ilk defa yabancı i\_çilerde ilk olarak r\_landaya gelmeye ve burada çalışmaya ve ya\_amaya ba\_lamı\_lardır. Bu nedenlerle r\_landa da çok miktarda Konut ihtiyacı do\_mu\_tur. Konut yapımında büyük ilerlemeler olmu\_, in\_aat alanında çalı\_an i\_çilere büyük ölçüde gereksinim olmu\_tur.

Yabancı i\_çilerinde \_randalı i\_çiler gibi örne\_in endüstriyel asgari ücret almaları veisaire. Bizler biliyoruz ki bazı i\_verenler tarafından sömürü lüvör ve istismar ediliyor. Çok az bir ücretle çalış\_tırılıyor.

GAMMA in aat buraya yeni bir system getirmi tir Çünkü i çileri \_rlandaya getirip onlara Türkiye de ödeme yapabilmektedir. Açıkça Türk ve \_rlandalı i çiler ortak bir ekilde davranmalıdır. SIPTU sizlerin Sendikasıdır, \_rlandadaki en geni i ç i sendikasıdır. Fakat SIPTU sizlerin ne maa aldı nızı bilmiyor ? GAMMA sizlerin endüstriyel Asgari ücret aldı nızı söyledi (€12.96 = 1 saat ücreti). A ağıdaki tabloda göre aldı i gibi.

Bununla birlikte biliyoruz ki mao\_uzun birkısmı Türkiye'de, bir kısmı burada ve bir kısmında Avrupada ki banka hesabımıza ödeniyor.

Biz biliyoruz ki sizler günde 12 saat haftada 84 saat çalışmaktasınız. İlanda kanunlarına göre haftalık çalışma süresi 48 saattir. Fakat uygulanmamaktadır. Bazı illerde haftada 50 yada 60 saat çalışmaktadırlar. Ancak 84 saat çok uzun bir süredir.

GAMMA'nın dediğine göre saat ücreti **€12.96** Vassıfatsız içilere. Bu ücret vassıfatsız içiler için anlaşılmı bir ücrettir. relanda da esas çalışması 39 saatir. anlaşılmı derki 39 saatinden sonra bütün ödemeler %50 Pazar günleri için %100 artırla yapılmalıdır. Bununla birlikte aşgari bir saat ücreti yani €12.96 yol masrafı olarak ödenir.

Genelde Vasıfsız bir i cinin haftalık 84 saat çalışması karş ılı ı aylık 66,706 dur. Unutmayın bu en az vasıfsız bir i cinin asgari ücretidir. Kalifiye i çiler örne in (Marangoz, Duvarcı, Demirciye, Boyacı, olanlar) daha fazla ücret almalıdır, Yani iki misli. Burada bizi ilendiren konu sizlerin hakkı olan ücretinin verilmesidir.

Bizim duyularımıza göre Türkiye'deki ailelerinize ayda **₺600** ödeniyormu. E\_er istiyorsanız A\_a (adı ismi) yazılı olan k\_i ile kontak kurabilirsiniz. Sizlerin mad\_ borsodu yahut banka dekontunu görmek isteriz. Bazılarınızla Lucanda kar\_ıla\_tık ancak çok sinirliyidiniz. Bunu anlay\_ı la kar\_ılıyorduz. Biliyoruz ki GAMMA acımasız bir i\_ verendir. Sizleri anında Türkiye'ye geri gönderebilirler. Bizimle yapu\_ unuz her türden görü\_ me konu\_ ma ve bulu\_ ma çok özel ve gizli tutulacaktır.

Eğer bize herhangi bir maaş bordosu ya da banka dekontu gösterilirse kesinlikle gizli kalacaktır. **Çünkü sizlerin kesinlikle zarar görmesini istemeyiz.** Aşağıdaki tabloda gösterildiği gibi ödeme yapılmıyorsa yapılması gerekli olduğu bilmeli ve bu amaçla hakkınızı aramalısınız. Geriye yönelik haklarınızı da unutmadan.

Bunun için Birlikte mücadele edelim. Sizlerin Sendikası SIPTU ve Sosyalist Parti re sizler Haydi Hepbirlikte mücadele edelim.

Savgılarla

Mick Murphy (Local Government Elected Representative, Sosyalist Parti) South Dublin County Council

**Tablo 1** Anla ması Göstergesi Haftalık 7 gün, 84 saat çalış ma €

Tablo 1: Anla ması Göstergesi Haftalık 7 gün, 84 saat çalış ma €							
— anla ması saat ücreti kur k	39 saat Haftalık	39 saat 33 saat %150 ((6 gün x 12 saat) – 39 saat) = 33 saat.	12 saat %200 Pazar günü	Yol Masrafı haftalık, 7 gün	Haftalık Ödenen	Aylık 4.3 Haftalık	
Vastıfsız i ç	12.96	505.44	641.52	311.04	90.72	1,548.72	<b>€6,705.25</b>
Kaliyive i ç	15.71	612.69	777.65	377.04	109.97	1,877.35	<b>€8,128.92</b>
Zanaatkar	16.20	631.80	801.90	388.80	113.40	1,935.90	<b>€8,382.45</b>
Elektrikçi/ Kavakçı	18.98	740.22	939.51	455.52	132.86	2,268.11	<b>€9,820.22</b>

Phone Baki at 00353-87-9331-346.

**If you speak English phone Mick Murphy at 00353-86-9683814**

or Lisa Maher at 00353-8764-65436.

Produced by the Socialist Party

## Turkish workers' rights

## Friends

As fellow workers we would like to take this opportunity to welcome you here. This letter is intended to explain some of the rights you have, which do not seem to be recognised by your employer, GAMMA, and to give you a point of contact in Ireland amongst the Turkish/Irish Community.

One result of the boom has been a lot of people returning to live in Ireland or people coming here for the first time. Therefore there has been a huge increase in the demand for housing. There has been a general boom in Building with most Irish building workers fully employed and in recent years foreign workers have been coming here in ever increasing numbers.

The vast majority of Foreign workers that have come here live in the community and are subject to all the normal laws such as Minimum Wage legislation and so on. But we do know that in general Irish employers as with employers everywhere have exploited these foreign workers and pay them as little as possible. Irish building workers are well used to this and have plenty experience of being exploited abroad with decades of emigration to the UK, US and Europe.

The system GAMMA Construction use is a new development. That is bringing in Turkish workers, and having them living on site and paying them abroad. Obviously Turkish and Irish workers have a common interest in maintaining the pay and working conditions here and making sure that all workers get what they are entitled to.

In order to avoid conflict with local workers you have all been signed up as members of a Trade Union. In this case SIPTU, which is the largest General Workers Union in Ireland. SIPTU have never received confirmation directly from you, its Turkish members, as to the rates you are being paid. GAMMA when asked, say you are getting paid the agreed minimum industrial rates (as per the Registered Employment Agreement)(see Table below). We also know that you are paid some money in Turkey, some in Ireland and the rest into Bank Accounts in Europe. We know that you work 12 hours every day or 84 hours per week. There is a law, which says that you can only work 48 hours in a week, but that is not enforced and many Irish workers do work 50 or 60 hours per week. An 84 Hours week would be considered an exceptionally long week even by Irish standards.

The Minimum Rate that GAMMA say you are paid is €12.96 per hour for General Workers. That is the agreed Minimum rate. The Basic working week in Ireland is 39 Hours. The Registered Employment Agreement also says that after 39 hours, all rates increase by 50% and by 100% for Sunday work. Plus there is a minimum of one hour added on to the day's pay for Travel. At €12.96 per hour as the minimum flat rate for General Workers, when calculated for an 84 hour, 7 day week you should be paid €6,706 per month. Remember this is the minimum and more experienced workers should get more. Many Irish Building Workers get more than the minimum and skilled workers (Carpenters, Brick Layers, Plumbers) could get more than twice this amount.

Our main concern is that you get paid the rates you are entitled to. We have heard that your families are getting €600 per month in Turkey. We would like you to contact any of the names below and talk to Turkish people who live here or if you have good English speak to an Irish Workers and confirm your rates. We would like to see Pay Slips or Bank Statements, which show whether you are being paid the full amount due under the agreement. Some of you that we have met in Lucan seem very nervous to talk about rates and conditions. Nervousness is understandable because we know GAMMA is a ruthless employer and could ship you home at a minute's notice. Any contact you have with us will be in strict confidence. Pay slips given to us will not be shown to your employer so that you cannot be victimised.

If your rates are below the Agreed Rates then you have a right to an increase and also for that increase to be backdated. Then we can fight together with your Union (SIPTU) to have your rates increased to the Agreed Rates. The Table below shows how much you should be paid if you are working a regular 84 hour week.

Yours Sincerely

Yours Sincerely  
Mick Murphy (Local Government Elected Representative for the Socialist Party on South Dublin County Council)

Table of Pay Rates for an 84 Hour, 7 day Working Week in €. (as per the Registered Employment Agreement)

	Registered Employment Agreement Hourly Rates	Pay for the basic 39 hr week.	Pay for 33 hrs at 150% of basic (6 days x 12 hrs) – 39 hrs = 33 hrs)	Pay for 12 Hrs on Sunday at 200% of basic	Travel Money for 7 days.	Weekly Pay	Monthly Pay (4.33 weeks)
Junior General Worker	12.96	505.44	641.52	311.04	90.72	1,548.72	<u><b>€6,705.95</b></u>
Senior General Worker	15.71	612.69	777.65	377.04	109.97	1,877.35	<u><b>€8,128.92</b></u>
Craftworker	16.20	631.80	801.90	388.80	113.40	1,935.90	<u><b>€8,382.45</b></u>
Electrical/Mechanical	18.98	740.22	939.51	455.52	132.86	2,268.11	<u><b>€9,820.92</b></u>

**To Contact us Phone Baki at 00353-87-9331-346.**

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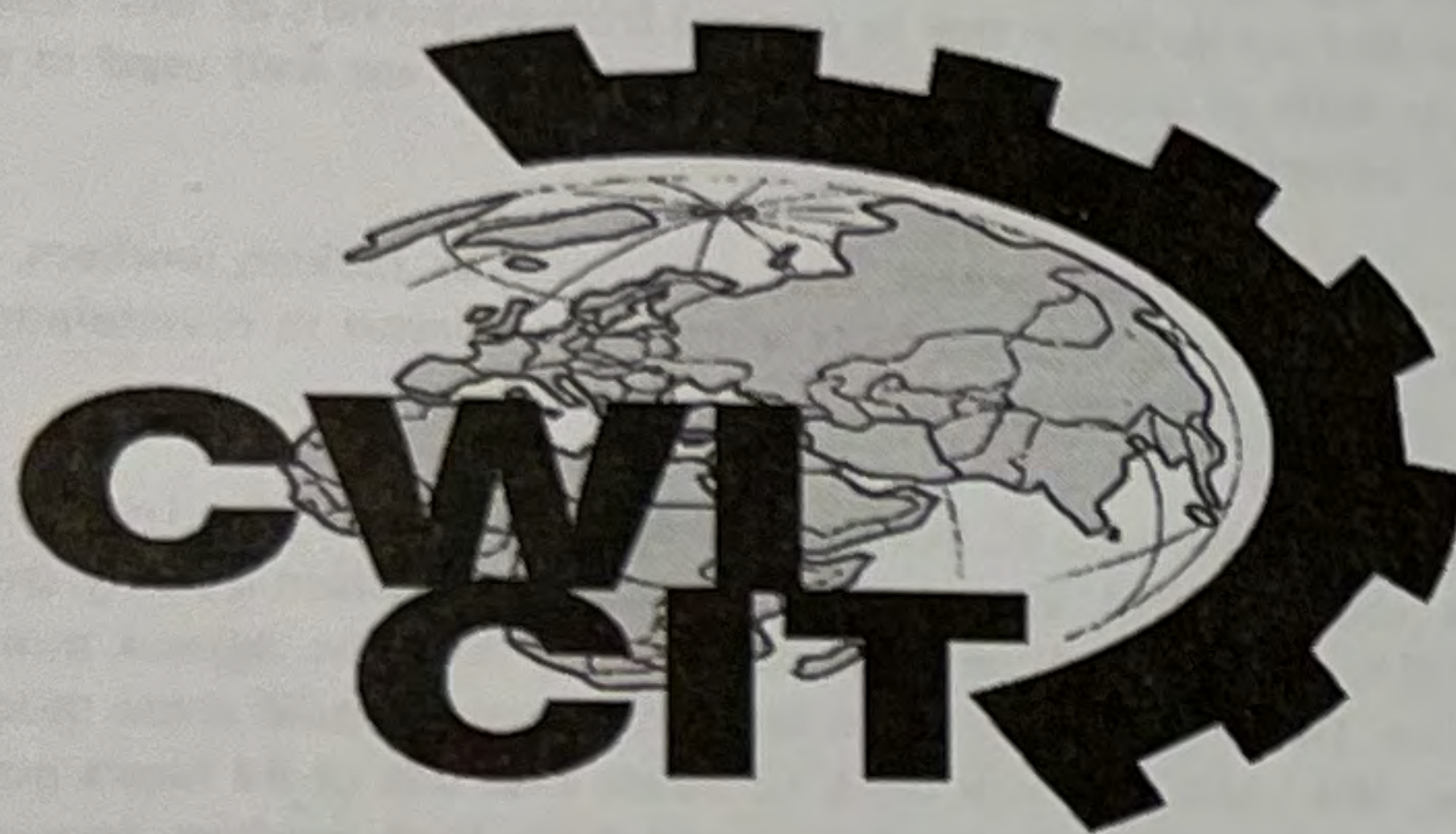
or Lisa Maher at 00353-8764-65436.

**Produced by the Socialist Party**



WE ARE WORKERS NOT SLAVES

# JOIN THE SOCIALIST PARTY AND THE COMMITTEE FOR A WORKERS' INTERNATIONAL



Socialist Party

141 Thomas Street, Dublin 8, 01 677 2592

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Committee for a Workers' International  
CWI

[www.socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net)

[cwi@worldsoc.co.uk](mailto:cwi@worldsoc.co.uk)



In 2005 a group of Turkish workers made history in Ireland when they took on their employer, Turkish-owned multinational construction giant GAMA. Assisted by the Socialist Party, whose members first exposed the scandalous wages and conditions being paid by GAMA to its Turkish workers, they engaged in a bitter and hard fought battle which eventually brought GAMA to heel.

Revelations during the course of this struggle about the brutal exploitation of migrant workers, about the systematic theft of these workers' wages by GAMA, and about the complicity of the Irish state and political establishment in, for years, turning a blind eye to what was happening, rocked Irish society at the time and will have lasting repercussions.

In making a stand against this modern day slavery, the GAMA workers, together with the Socialist Party, have struck a blow for the rights of migrant workers and workers generally. They have written one of the proudest chapters in Irish labour history.

Price €6 / £4



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