

Dear Chairman

We are writing on behalf of the Production and Accountants Guild of Ireland.

Our members work in TV and Film Drama, Documentaries, Commercials, Music Videos and Internet based production. We work with a variety of budgets from high-end overseas productions choosing Ireland as a location, European co-productions to smaller indigenous Irish productions.

There are at least 300 people working in the Production and Accounts department on a regular basis. We daily interact with all other departments and so have first hand knowledge of what it is like to work in all aspects of the Film & TV Industry of Ireland today.

We feel we need to send you a submission in response to the **Oireachtas Joint Committee on Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht** meeting held on **Wednesday 31st January** to examine **Working Conditions and Development in the Irish Film Industry** with The Irish Film Board, Screen Producers Ireland, SIPTU and Irish Equity in attendance.

Our members felt that some important points were raised in the presentations.

In particular, we believe that a pension fund mechanism should be implemented, as soon as possible, and we agreed that training was something that should be both monitored and encouraged.

Screen Training Ireland has been running some very good courses for crew to broaden their qualifications and experiences. In particular, several courses have been run for our guild to refresh us in Health and Safety, Working Time Acts, Harassment and bullying in the workplace, all of which are invaluable. We would welcome additional funding to Screen Training Ireland to enable these courses and others to be held on a regular basis.

It is also clear that the “trainee” issue needs to be looked at but in our experience it is not as bad as some of the contributors suggested. The majority of people who are now in Head of Department roles in most sectors came through the trainee system, starting their career as trainees, progressing to Assistants, to Supervisors and on to HOD’s. Without a doubt the best way to learn the role of either a Line Producer, PM, Production Co-Ordinator or Production Accountant is to work at the trainee/assistant levels first as it is in those roles that you understand and learn how the process works. In our departments trainees are actively encouraged to move on when their colleagues feel they are ready. We have no knowledge of someone being a trainee for 12 years! In fact, over the last few years the volume of work has required trainees to upgrade quickly, as anyone with a small amount of experience has been required to step up to fill a more senior role.

We would, also, agree with the requirement that section 481 projects need to hire a specific number of Trainees across all departments. We would recommend that this practice should continue but in association with SIPTU taking a more hands on approach to the monitoring of the system.

Most importantly, as a guild we know that continuous employment is not possible in the industry. Whilst we sympathise and understand why some people within the industry would be seeking it, the industry works on the basis of contracts - a production is begun, filmed, and finished. At that point the crew move on - usually to another production.

By way of a bit of history, the concept of 'continuous employment' is not new to the Irish Film/TV Industry. It was the practice put in place when the National Film Studios/Ardmore was first opened in the 1950's where by members of the craft unions, carpenters, painters, plasters, riggers, stagehands, props and some electricians were employed on a full time basis by the studio and 'loaned out' as it were to incoming productions. The burden of maintaining high labour costs to the studio during production down time (in spite of direct Government support) resulted in the model being unsustainable and in the end, lead directly to the closing of the studios after less than twenty years in operation.

From that point on the industry bounced along the bottom producing at best one to two low budget productions per year. During this period employment within the industry also fell into the very low hundreds. In 1986 the reopening of Ardmore Studios was as a result of significant foreign investment from MTM Studios. It was only on the basis of an agreement between MTM and the relative Irish film trade unions at that time to implement the international Film/TV industrial model which included the employment of crew being on a project by project basis that MTM went forward with their investment. Employment within the industry has grown hugely since those barren days thanks mainly to continued foreign investment in addition to the government tax incentives, the work of the Irish Film Board and the development of technical skills, which have largely taken place within the industry itself. We must however be continuously aware that for this foreign investment (which accounts for some 60% of all investment within the industry) to continue, we must remain competitive, maintain international film industry working practices and continue to develop the technical skills of those working in and coming to the industry.

It is an important point that much of Ireland's Film & TV industry is influenced by International practice. For larger budget international productions, such as Vikings, Badlands and Nightflyers, Ireland acts as a service industry. Some shows such as Vikings and Tudors have been extremely successful and have run for several seasons.

Ireland does not have a home grown indigenous studio system, creating high end TV dramas, making it owns decisions about productions and having the ability to provide continual employment. Investment for high end productions is always international!

There are indigenous productions but these are always of a much smaller scale – generally in the region of 1 million euro and though they provide invaluable employment they would never be able to do so on a continual basis. Different

productions require different skill sets and services and so continual employment for one employer would not work. The majority of Production Companies in this country do not have continuity of work themselves, and only get to produce something every two or three years.

It is, also, important to note that the small and medium size budgets are important to maintain for industry growth. Large US TV may hire 100 construction crew, but only hire 2 or 4 Focus Pullers - the small budget would be inverse to that, hiring less construction but more creative roles - ALL are important and are needed to remain viable. The small to medium size budgets allow more scope for trainees to step up (trainee to assistant or assistant to HOD), while the large scale budget allow for more trainees generally, but less likely to take a chance on those without a proven track record in their fields.

Many of our members are freelance and like freelance people in other industries understand the precariousness of this situation, but many are attracted to the freedom that short term contracts allow.

Many crew, particularly those in creative roles, enjoy and benefit from the ability to move from project to project, as it gives them creative freedom. A production designer, costume designer or cinematographer will have to win international recognition in order to progress in their career. We are fortunate that we now have creative crews that are able to lead the creative departments of large international productions, and to make Ireland more attractive on the international stage.

We do understand that the members of Irish Film Workers Association may have a different viewpoint, but it should be noted that their members are primarily in the construction sector, and a part of the transport sector.

Traditionally the viewpoint of the workers would be expressed through the appropriate recognized Film Trade Union, in this case the majority of crew working within the Film Industry would be represented by SIPTU. Unfortunately, SIPTU have taken a back seat for many years, in representing workers within the film Industry. A direct result of the lack of any clear Union representation for Crew workers over the last 10 years has allowed certain individuals or groups to fill that vacuum. We want to make it clear that these organisations including the group calling itself the 'Irish Film Workers Association' do not represent or speak for the majority of Film crews working in the Industry today. As mentioned before, members of this group are predominantly from the Construction Dept. and Transport Dept. and make up less than 10% of the working Film Crews. Over the last 6 to 7 years there has been numerous occasions where non-union affiliated workers groups have used unorthodox methods to further their own agenda.

The below events have allegedly taken place on different projects and they are all unacceptable practices:

- Production Designers and Construction Managers have been forced to hire

certain Construction crew against their wishes. When the Production refuses to be forced to hire specific Crew assigned to their Production by an unofficial Association suddenly all Construction crews are unavailable for that particular project.

- A less senior member of the construction Department was told to leave a Production so that his job could be given to a more senior member of the same department who had just finished up on another project.
- Numerous projects in the past have experienced unofficial pickets from non-union organisations, mainly because their members are not working on that particular project. These unauthorised pickets can be very intimidating towards other crew members who just want to go to work. If there were an official Union dispute, then all crew would be informed of the situation and would be aware of their expectations.
- Construction crew workers have been encouraged to join certain groupings with the implication that if they don't they will not be employed on any Film productions in Dublin.
- Some Producers have been encouraged to employ certain Crew members who are members of a particular grouping. The suggestion is if they hire these people there will not be any unofficial picketing taken out against that Production.
- Anonymous texts and emails have been sent threatening disruption to productions, without any formal engagement with producers, or reference to any legally established dispute resolution process.

It is important to say that the view on continuous employment that must be taken must be egalitarian and equal to all in the industry. The production and costume designer who must strive to win awards and accolades for their work (their protection) cannot be any less than those in transport and construction.

Should the practice of 'continuous employment' beyond the scheduled period of a production be reintroduced into the local industry there is no doubt that this would not only add significantly to the cost of production but would also be seen as a major breach of international working practices. This would cause serious damage to our reputation abroad which would no doubt result in less productions being attracted to the country and lead to a significant reduction in employment within the sector.

Finally, the question was asked if anyone thought that the precarious nature of the sector had led to bullying or intimidation of workers. It was suggested that workers felt that they could not raise any concerns about their employment because they believed if they did they would not be hired on the next production and they may be "blackballed by producers". From the experience of our members this is untrue. In our industry, there is very much open dialogue, with views and opinions regularly heard. If people conduct themselves in a professional way then all views, concerns and problems are listened to and dealt with in the correct way. Traditionally SIPTU

was there to deal with any difficult employment issues that will occasionally arise. There is no reason why the Shop Steward system cannot be reintroduced, where a member of each department is assigned to be the person that a member would go to if they had an issue. Again, we would recommend that SIPTU engage in a more substantial manner so that all crew feel that they have some support should an issue arise.

The biggest issue facing the Irish Film Industry right now is the negative impact this unofficial and unauthorised Industrial activity is having on our reputation abroad, particularly in the US. The actions of a very small minority of workers are affecting the whole Industry as it sends out a message that Ireland's Film Industry is a sector rife with Industrial discord, when in fact it is far from the truth.

Yours sincerely

The Production and Accountants Guild of Ireland.