

MAY DAY BELFAST 2026

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# TRADITIONS IN TRANSITION

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»»»»»»»» 25 APRIL – 9 MAY ««««««««



Any popular movement, grounded in everyday lives, draws its strength from songs and stories that carry both memory and the call to action.

There are other, less organic and more astroturf, movements which aspire to the traditions of trades councils and their relationship to their locale and its population. You see them emerging with a flurry of press releases and shiny spokespeople proselytising on Instagram and TikTok, advocating this supplement or that tax cut, but all they convey is marketing and noise.

This programme of events and thinking and songs and debate is about recognition of our past and our future as trade unionists. The content and the context are inextricably linked.

We are, in the words of a former Belfast resident, Seamus Heaney, *"not simply a credit rating or an economy but a history and a culture, a human population rather than a statistical phenomenon."*

The traditions are all on show in this enervating programme. Banner making and T-shirt printing. Music played on strings, skins, tin and turntables. Joyful noises abound.

Like tributaries, these events stem from the great river of humanity which is the largest May Day Parade on this island. Over 40 trade unions and thousands of members and activists marching in a loop around their, our, city. The events listed harmonise the steps of the marchers and the swirl of the pipers leading it.

Educate – Exhibitions, walking tours and talks from academic activists.

Agitate – Carnival arts workshop and performances from the upcoming generation of trade unionists. Celebrations of our music and poetry.

Organise – The point of trade unionism, empowering working people by lobbying for Good Jobs legislation, defending the rights of the marginalised and welcoming every person who can add to our confection of humanity.

Most of all, have fun.

Solidarity forever!

*Gerry Murphy, ICTU Assistant General Secretary*

### Acknowledgements, Sponsors & Supporters



## »»»»»»»»»» **MAY DAY BELFAST 2026: TRADITIONS IN TRANSITION** ««««««««««

Tradition can often be mistaken for something fixed, something to be preserved unchanged. Yet the traditions that matter, in the arts, in community life, and in the labour movement, have never stood still. They have always been shaped and renewed by people responding to the pressures, the ambitions and the possibilities of their time.

This year's programme reflects that renewal in very real ways and the partnerships behind the Festival. Young people from communities throughout the city have not simply learned about the history of collective action, they have interpreted it, reimagined it, and made it visible through their own creative work. On May Day itself, that work moves from the workshop to the street, the performance space and theatre, from idea to public expression, reminding us that culture is not passive, it is made and remade through participation.

For the arts locally, this moment is critical. In a time of uncertainty, where structures of support can feel increasingly fragile, the role of creative practice becomes harder to maintain but all the more necessary. The arts provide a space where people can understand change, question it, and shape it. They offer a language through which communities can articulate both their concerns and their ambitions. They offer all of us a voice to help express our disappointment, joy and outrage with our world.

For the labour movement, Traditions in Transition speaks to continuity of shared community purpose. The core values of solidarity, fairness and collective voices remain as urgent as ever. What changes is how those values are expressed, who is included within them, and how new generations come to claim them as their own.

What is particularly powerful about our May Day Festival programme is the way these strands come together. The march and rally, the workshops, the exhibitions, the music and performances, all form part of a single conversation. They connect heritage with lived experience, and reflection with action.


In the times we are living through, that connection matters. It reminds us that the future is not something that happens to us. It is something we make, together, drawing on what has come before, and reshaping it for what comes next.

*Conor Shields, CEO, Community Arts Partnership*

If you have any questions regarding accessibility or other enquiry regarding this event please contact CAP at [info@capartscentre.com](mailto:info@capartscentre.com) or 02890923493

Community Arts Partnership & The ARC (Arts Resource Centre) is located at:  
551-555 Lisburn Rd, Belfast BT9 7GQ

## **REGISTRATIONS**

If you would like to receive updates about any specific events you can register for the event at: [tinyurl.com/mayday-belfast2026](https://tinyurl.com/mayday-belfast2026) or via our QR code 

**Please note:** registration is required for the Walking Tours as places are limited



## **MAY DAY 2026 PROGRAMME LAUNCH: TRADITIONS IN TRANSITION**

**DATE:** Thursday 16th April

**TIME:** 5.00pm

**VENUE:** Oh Yeah Music Centre

Join us to launch this year's bigger than ever annual Festival Programme, a joint project by

the Community Arts Partnership, Irish Congress of Trades Unions, Reclaim the Agenda and the Belfast & District Trades Union Council.

Join us to hear speakers on the intersection between working class culture, the arts and campaigning for a better society for all.

Followed by food refreshments and live music from renowned Chilean musician Victor Henriquez.

## **BLUESHIRTS AND BLACKSHIRTS: BOOK LAUNCH**

**DATE:** Saturday 25th April

**TIME:** 9.45am

**VENUE:** Falls Road Library

This year's AGM of the International Brigades Commemoration Committee includes the launch of a new booklet by historian Brian Hanley 'Blueshirts and Blackshirts in Ireland North and South'. The launch will be followed by the unveiling of a plaque to the men of the Falls Area who went to fight fascism in Spain. The unveiling will be done by relatives of the International Brigaders and Belfast Deputy Lord Mayor, Paul Doherty.

Refreshments will be served at 11.45 – 12.45am

Organised by the IBCC

Further Information: 07751951785



## **PANEL DISCUSSION: THE INVISIBLE WORKFORCE**

**DATE:** Tuesday 28th April

**TIME:** 5.30pm

**VENUE:** The Black Box

ICTU Arts & Culture Committee panel discussion focussing on the unpaid work which makes art happen and what needs to change to promote Good Jobs in the arts. Speakers to be announced.



## **PUBLIC MEETING: ORGANISING OUR COMMUNITIES**

**DATE:** Tuesday 28th April

**TIME:** 7.30pm

**VENUE:** Irish Congress of Trade Unions Building, Donegall Street, Belfast

Community Action Tenants Union (CATU) Belfast will be hosting an open discussion and workshop alongside members of the trade union movement about how to organise our communities in an age of isolation and reaction.

CATU is an all-island union organising tenants and communities in every corner of Ireland. This workshop will look at ways that CATU is organising communities against the ever-worsening housing crisis as well as how communities are organising to build strong networks of solidarity to resist reactionary politics.

Further Information: [belfast@catuireland.org](mailto:belfast@catuireland.org)



## **SEÁN MCKENNA: SIBIN SESSION**

**DATE:** Wednesday 29th April

**TIME:** 7.00 - 10.00pm

**VENUE:** The American Bar, Sailortown

Dundalk's own Seán McKenna returns to The American Bar in one of our events to celebrate International Workers Day.

An accomplished ballad singer and founding member of The Mary Wallopers, Seán now performs solo, thundering guitar melodies and politically charged lyrics to present a gritty mix of traditional folk and modern protest songs.

This is a free event with limited capacity with a first come – first served basis.

Further Information: [americanbarbelfast@gmail.com](mailto:americanbarbelfast@gmail.com)

## **Seán McKenna**

**LIVE**



**Wednesday  
29<sup>th</sup> April**

  
**The American Bar  
Sailortown**

## **ANNUAL MAY DAY LECTURE: THE THREAT OF GLOBAL IMPERIALISM AND BUILDING A PEOPLE'S RESPONSE**

**DATE:** Thursday 30th April

**TIME:** 6.00pm

**VENUE:** Irish Congress of Trade Unions Building, Donegall Street, Belfast

*"War is a game played by maniacs who kill each other. Locate the man who profits by war and strip him of his profits - war will end." – Woody Guthrie*

The inevitable economic and social crises resulting from years of neoliberalism have created an unstable world. Rather than seeking peaceful settlements, conflicts are being fuelled and are escalating towards a global war.

While the Far Right creates threats from the internal 'other' to achieve power in the interests of big capital, many centrist governments are only too happy to create external 'enemies' in response to the failure to solve the crisis in their economies inflicted by the demands of global capital. Indeed, Ireland's historic position of neutrality is under threat.

As imperialist aggressions escalate across the world, war crimes, genocide, ethnic cleansing and occupation, is becoming normalised.

International solidarity and unity of the peoples of the world in building a global movement for peace which flatly rejects imperialist barbarism is our only hope to save people and planet.

Clare Daly, a well known international politician and activist will deliver this year's May Day lecture on perhaps the most pressing issue of our times. Clare will be joined by local Trade Union Educator, Brian McAnoy and BDTUC Vice President, Kerry Fleck.

# The Threat of Global Imperialism

ANNUAL MAY DAY LECTURE



## **SAILORTOWN FOLK CLUB**

**DATE:** Thursday 30th April

**TIME:** 9.00pm – Midnight

**VENUE:** The American Bar, Sailortown

Open session with some of the best musicians Belfast has to offer, compered by Joshua Burnside

## **Sailortown Folk Club**



## **PROTEST SONG KARAOKE WITH THE ARRAY COLLECTIVE!**

**DATE:** Thursday 30th April

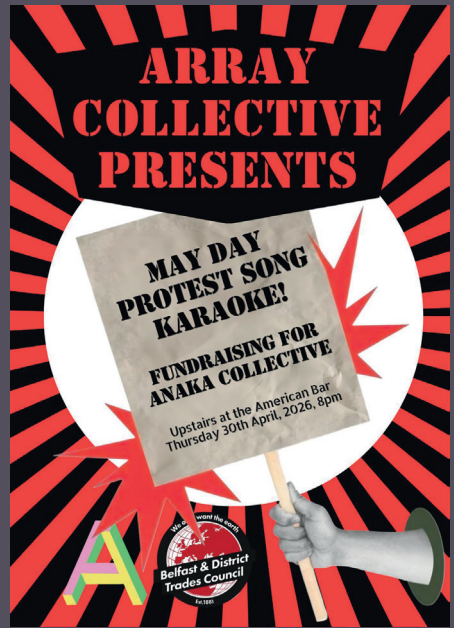
**TIME:** Doors Open 8.00pm

**VENUE:** The American Bar, Sailortown (Upstairs)

Get the May Day weekend kicked into top gear, come along and join the pre-eminent and colourful Array Collective for Protest Song Karaoke! With a songbook packed with anthems of solidarity, revolution and just general craic this event is sure to put a fire in your belly in preparation for the annual trade union rally! So grab your family, friends and muckers and motor on down to Protest Karaoke being hosted in the American Bars newly refurbished cocktail joint!

This event is a fundraiser for the wonderful Anaka Women's Collective!

#SolidarityForever



## **MAY DAY MARCH & RALLY**

**DATE:** Saturday 2nd May

**TIME:** 11:30am

**VENUE:** Assemble for May Day Belfast 2026, Writers' Square:

11:30: Live Music from David Browne Murray

12:00: Speeches from Trade Unions

12:30: March through Belfast City Centre

Join us for Belfast's annual May Day March and Rally - a day of international workers unity. In this age of ongoing economic crises and the looming threat to world peace, Trade Unions continue stand up for ordinary people and their families. This year we stand together and celebrate the working class traditions that unite us and cut through all divisions.

The Workers United Can Never Be Defeated!



## MAY DAY YOUTH AND FAMILY, ARTS AND MUSIC

**DATE:** Saturday 2nd May

**TIME:** 2.00pm – 6.00pm

**VENUE:** Oh Yeah Music Centre

Join us after the rally and march for a full afternoon of music, food and Community across the Cathedral Quarter.

Family friendly festivities will be taking place in the Oh Yeah Centre and include arts and crafts workshops, face painting, food, and youth open mic scheduled in partnership with 'Volume Control' Oh Yeah's youth music production team.

Also don't miss this years art exhibitions with artist printmaker Fiona Ni Mhailllor and groups

of young people and new Mothers from Elevate East, An Droichead, Volume Control, ACSI, Newhill Youth Club.

From 2.00pm there will be free drop-in activities for both for kids and families, including carnival arts and crafts making noise makers, placard and banner making and face painting.

From 2.00pm there will be market stalls and catering by the Kind Economy.



## MAY DAY LIVE!

**DATE:** Saturday 2nd May

**TIME:** 2.00pm – 6.00pm

**VENUE:** The Black Box

Join us on Saturday, 2 May at the Black Box on Hill Street for an afternoon of live blues, folk and spoken word.

Music begins from 2:30pm, featuring:

- Gormacha (two piece with steel guitar) and folk singer Fergus O'Hare (2:30pm)
- Mathew Rice, poet (3:30pm)
- Villers and the Villans (4:00pm), bringing high-energy blues rock

From 2:00pm, enjoy market stalls by local traders including food catering available from the Kind Economy.

Free entry – all welcome.

This event is jointly organised by CAP, ICTU, Reclaim the Agenda and BTUC.



## **AFTER THE RALLY SESSION WITH EDDIE BOOTH**

**DATE:** Saturday 2nd May

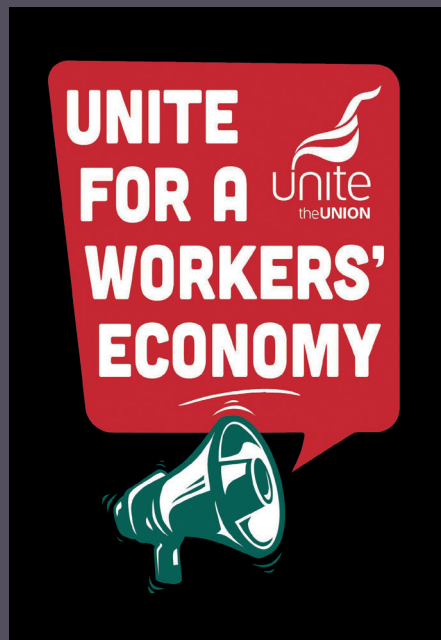
**TIME:** 1.30pm – 4.00pm

**VENUE:** Duke of York, Upstairs

After the rally there will be a live music event organised by Unite the Union in support of the Unite for a Workers' Economy campaign. Kicking off immediately after they made a march and rally with live music from current County Down musician Eddie both. Guaranteed to lift the spirits and keep the made a vibe rocking into the afternoon.

Further Information:

Davy.Kettyles@unitetheunion.org



## **WALKING TOUR OF RADICAL BELFAST WITH LABOUR HISTORIAN JOHN GRAY**

**DATE:** Monday 4th May

**TIME:** 5.00pm

**VENUE:** Meeting point, James Larkin Statue, John Hewitt beer garden.

Led by local radical and labour historian John Gray, this tour of radical Belfast will follow in the footsteps of the United Irishmen when Belfast was the most revolutionary centre in the British Isles. It will chart the emergence of the trade unions during the era of Belfast's breakneck industrial expansion and visit the battlegrounds of the 1907 Dock Strike and recall James Connolly's last Belfast speech. Many of the sites involved have vanished or changed but the spirit of Belfast radicalism lives on in the modern era as we confront the struggles of our times.

<b><i>DATE</i></b>	<b><i>EVENT</i></b>	<b><i>TYPE</i></b>
Thursday 16th April	May Day Programme Launch	Launch / Music
Saturday 25th April	Blueshirts and Blackshirts	Book Launch
Tuesday 28th April	The Invisible Workforce	Panel Discussion
Tuesday 28th April	Organising Our Communities	Public Meeting
Wednesday 29th April	Seán McKenna Live: Sibin Session	Live Music
Thursday 30th April	The Threat of Global Imperialism, developing a people's response	Annual May Day Lecture
Thursday 30th April	Sailortown Folk Club	Live Music
Thursday 30th April	Protest Song Karaoke	Music
Saturday 2nd May	Annual Trade Union March and Rally	Rally & March
Saturday 2nd May	May Day Youth and Family, arts and music	Family Fun
Saturday 2nd May	May Day Live!	Live Music
Saturday 2nd May	Community Market	Market & Food
Saturday 2nd May	After the Rally with Eddie Booth	Live Music
Sunday 4th May	Radical Belfast Walking Tour	Walking Tour
Tuesday 5th May	Solidarity & Strategy: The May Day Chess Social	Community Chess
Thursday 7th May	Until Labour Knows No Master	Pamphlet Launch
Thursday 7th May	Invited to the Mic	Open Mic Poetry
Thursday 7th May	Red Flags and Rising Voices	Book Launch
Friday 8th May	Stars and Strikes: In Search of the Starry Plough	Walking Tour

<b>ORGANISER</b>	<b>TIME</b>	<b>VENUE</b>
CAP / BDTUC / ICTU / RTA	5pm	Oh Yeah Music Centre
IBCC	9.45am	Falls Road Library
ICTU	5.30pm	The Black Box
CATU	7.30pm	ICTU Offices, Donegall Street
The American Bar	7pm - 10pm	The American Bar, Sailortown
BDTUC	6pm	ICTU Offices, Donegall Street
The American Bar	9pm - Midnight	The American Bar, Sailortown
Array Studios	Doors Open 8pm	The American Bar, Sailortown
ICTU	Assemble 11.30am	Writers' Square
CAP / BDTUC / ICTU / RTA	2pm - 6pm	Oh Yeah Music Centre
CAP / BDTUC / ICTU / RTA	2pm - 6pm	The Black Box
CAP / BDTUC / ICTU / RTA	2pm - 6pm	The Black Box
Unite	1.30pm - 4pm	Duke of York Upstairs
CAP / BDTUC / ICTU / RTA	5pm	Assemble John Hewitt Beer Garden
Carrick Community Chess Club	7pm-9pm	First Presbyterian Church, Rosemary Street
BDTUC	7pm	ICTU Offices, Donegall Street
The American Bar	Doors Open 7pm	The American Bar, Sailortown
Fermanagh Trades Union Council	7pm	Enniskillen Town Hall
Aisling O'Beirn / BDTUC	7pm	Meet up BT Riverside Tower

## **SOLIDARITY & STRATEGY: THE MAY DAY CHESS SOCIAL**

**DATE:** Tuesday 5th May

**TIME:** 6.30pm – 9.30pm

**VENUE:** Central Hall, First Presbyterian Church Rosemary Street, Belfast

A shared tradition: A Family Table

Celebrate May Day Through Culture, Community and Active Play

Join Carrickfergus Community Chess Club for a relaxed, inter-generational chess social in the historic First Presbyterian Church in Rosemary Street, Belfast. This is a family-friendly event where children, parents and grandparents, are all welcome to play, learn, watch and enjoy together.

What to Expect:

All ages and skill levels welcome - from complete beginners to regular players.

Learn as you play - friendly members on hand to

help newcomers

Casual, social games - No clocks, no pressure, just time together.

Why Chess on May Day:

Chess has long been played across kitchen tables and community halls, passed between generations. It reflects May Day values of patience, shared learning and collective experience - a simple way to bring people together

Organised by Carrick Community Chess and sponsored by the Communication Workers Union NI Telecoms Branch.

Come together. Share a Game. Pass on a Tradition.



## **UNTIL LABOUR KNOWS NO MASTER – PAMPHLET LAUNCH**

**DATE:** Thursday 7th May

**TIME:** 7.00pm

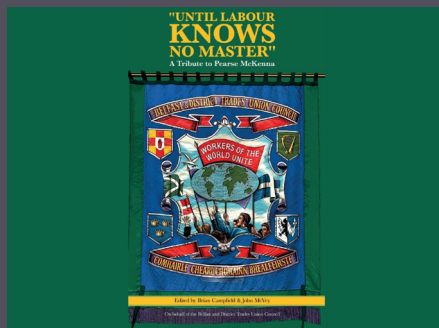
**VENUE:** Irish Congress of Trade Unions Building, Donegall Street, Belfast

To commemorate the passing of a former President of the Belfast Trades Union, Pearse McKenna, the Council have commissioned a publication *“Until Labour Knows No Master”*. The pamphlet includes contributions from activists and academics both local and international with articles a range of subject areas including international solidarity, imperialism, the Troubles and the ongoing challenge of increasing violence against women and girls.

Pearse who passed away in 2025 was a stalwart trade unionist was dedicated to the cause of anti sectarianism. His work in this area led to a failed

assassination attempt by the Ulster Freedom Fighters in 1991 after he had made a stand to promote a workplace free from sectarian symbols and flags, as an ATGWU shop steward in Ormeau Bakery.

Everyone welcome on the night to hear both tributes of Pearse and also a discussion on how his work must continue into the future



## **RED FLAGS AND RISING VOICES: BOOK LAUNCH**

**DATE:** Thursday 7th May

**TIME:** 7.00pm

**VENUE:** Enniskillen Town Hall

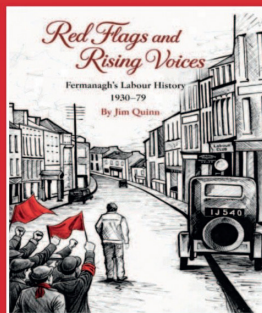
A book launch by Fermanagh Trades Union Council and the second in a series looking at the working class history of Fermanagh. The period covered includes the great depression of the 1930's, the outdoor relief struggles, the fight against fascism, the red scare period following the second world war, the swinging 60's, the birth of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights movement and the subsequent descent into violence and oppression.

What remains constant throughout this study is the preparedness of workers in every sector and every area of our county to stand up for what is right whether through industrial struggle, political struggle or both. We hope our readers

will identify their trade union ancestors in these pages and tell us more about them for use in future publications

Further Information:

Donal.ocofaigh@unitetheunion.org



In association with  
IRISH LABOUR HISTORY SOCIETY

Studies in Irish Labour History 20

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## **'INVITED TO THE MIC': OPEN MIC POETRY**

**DATE:** Thursday 7th May

**TIME:** Doors Open 7.00pm

**VENUE:** The American Bar, Sailortown

'Invited to The Mic' is The American Bar's monthly open mic event, purely for poetry.

Four incredible poets, curated by host Marty McKenna, open in the first half and an open mic in the second half where participants are invited to break the fourth wall and share their beautiful hearts.

## **"DON'T JUST WEAR THE T-SHIRT 3.0" - CREATIVE PRINTMAKING FOR MAY DAY**

Sixty young people took part in a hands-on silkscreen workshops, creating their own unique T-shirts as a form of community advocacy.

Led by printmaker Fiona Ní Mhaoilir, the programme combined practical skills with discussion, exploring how printmaking can foster creative connections within local communities and celebrate May Day.

Look out for the T-shirts on the May Day march and in an exhibition at the Oh Yeah Music Centre on Saturday, 2nd May.



The Belfast Local Community Action Plan is supported by PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

## **WALKING TOUR: STARS AND STRIKES**

**DATE:** Friday 8th May

**TIME:** 7.00pm

**VENUE:** Meeting point, BT Riverside Tower

We invite you to participate in Stars and Stripes (Seeking the Starry Plough), a night walk in Belfast city centre linking local Trade Unionism with star gazing, with the specific aim to seek out the Starry Plough from a number of locations which were the sites of recent strikes, pickets and rallies.

The walk, organised by artist Aisling O'Beirn & Trade Union organiser Kerry Fleck, is intended as an optimistic celebration, reminding us of the active role people continue to take in industrial struggles despite an increasingly hostile political landscape. It also draws attention to light pollution and ways to address it.

We welcome people involved in and interested in the Trade Union movement as this walk is only made possible by the active contributions of participants. We will stop briefly at a number of sites to attempt to see the Starry Plough, asking participants to recall memories of industrial action associated with that particular site.

The walk commences at the BT Tower at 7.00pm

with short stops en route for discussion and contributions from participants. It finishes at the American Bar and lasting 1 hr 30 min - 2 hrs

Aisling O'Beirn is a Belfast based artist exploring the night sky as physical structure and a political entity through sculpture, installation, animation, site-specific projects and alternative walks. Her interdisciplinary work explores the relationship between art, place, politics and science.

[www.aislingobeirn.com](http://www.aislingobeirn.com)



## **COMRADESHIP OF HEROES: BOOK LAUNCH**

**DATE:** Friday 29th May

**TIME:** 7.00pm

**VENUE:** Sunflower Pub

Book launch organised by the International Brigades Commemoration Committee. This 2nd Edition of Comrades and Heroes takes a deeper looking at the role of the International Brigades and the work done to keep their legacy alive.

Followed by live music from renowned folk singer, poet and activist, Joe Solo.

£5 Door.





1926

# THE CRAMLINGTON TRAIN WRECKERS

Written by Ed Waugh

Northern Ireland

**Back on stage by popular demand!**  
 A commemoration of the 1926 General Strike. After the 2024 sold-out tour in England, **The Cramlington Train Wreckers** transfers to Northern Ireland before playing the 1200-seat Theatre Royal in Newcastle upon Tyne.

From the team behind the smash-hit plays **Hadaway Harry**, **Wor Bella** & **Carrying David** comes another incredible working-class story.

**"BRILLIANT, ABSOLUTELY BRILLIANT"**  
 - Kevin Maguire, Daily Mirror & TV pundit

**"A MUST-SEE PLAY FOR ANYONE INTERESTED IN THE LIVES, STRUGGLES AND HISTORY OF WORKING CLASS PEOPLE"**  
 - Matt Wrack, NASUWT General Secretary and former TUC President

**THE PLAYHOUSE**  
 WWW.DERRYPLAYHOUSE.CO.UK  
 Derry/Londonderry  
 8 July 2026, 7.30 pm

**nipsa**  
 Protecting Public Services  
 Supporting Public Servants

**WATERFRONT HALL**  
 -Belfast  
 9 July 2026, 2.30 pm & 7.30 pm

THE AMERICAN BAR  
 1065 DOCK STREET

SUNFLOWER  
 PUBLIC HOUSE AND LIVE MUSIC

THE DUKES OF YORK

THERE'S ONLY SEVEN TYPES OF RAIN IN BELFAST  
*Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday*

PPR  
 NOONELEFTBEHIND

the JOHN HEWITT

The John Hewitt is unique in its ownership as it is owned by The Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre (BURC)

PORTVIEW

# Sat 2<sup>nd</sup> May



**TRADE UNION MARCH  
AND RALLY - ASSEMBLE  
WRITERS SQ 11.30AM**

**MAY DAY FESTIVAL  
LIVE 1.30 - 5.30**

**COMMUNITY MARKET STALLS,  
FOOD DRINK  
LIVE FOLK AND BLUES ROCK WITH  
FERGUS O'HARE, GORMACHA AND  
VILLIERS AND THE VILLIANS**



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ohyeahbelfast.com

**FAMILY FUN &  
ENTERTAINMENT  
2-6PM**

**ARTS / CRAFTS / GAMES  
FACE PAINTING / FOOD  
YOUTH OPEN MIC  
ART EXHIBITIONS**



PRINCIPAL FUNDER



**Belfast  
City Council**



**RECLAIM the  
AGENDA**

**STRONGER TOGETHER  
CONGRESS**  
Irish Congress of Trade Unions  
Northern Ireland Committee