

Is there any such thing as a 9 to 5?

HERE'S always a holiday snap you wish you'd taken. This year, the missed photo op was of a sign hanging outside a (closed) craft shop in Marseilles that read: "Opening hours. Very often".

I imagine, though, it wouldn't be hard to convince anyone that the laidback southern French have a whimsical approach to the working day. The sign and its promise of finding that elusive thing known as work/life balance came to mind earlier this week with news that just one in ten Irish people are working in their childhood dream jobs.

In truth, one in 10 seemed rather a lot but it turns out most young people don't want to be astronauts, circus acrobats or fire-engine drivers any more; instead, they told researchers at the Open University of Ireland they wanted to work in education or medicine.

Dream job is one thing but you have to wonder what the work/life balance is like in education and medicine these days.

It's not popular to take the side of doctors refusing to sign up to free healthcare for the under-6s, but the Association of General Practitioners (NAGP) has a point when it says doctors are already overworked and could now be completely swamped.

Nurses already have a large degree of public sympathy — and rightly so — but that should also extend to teachers.

True, your average 9 to 5 office worker might curl a lip at the suggestion, particularly at this time of year as teachers' long summer break draws to a close. But research is on their side. The hours worked by Irish secondary school teachers are the fourth highest in Europe, according to the annual OECD "Education at a Glance" report.

Come to think of it, is there any such thing as an average 9 to 5 worker in the modern world of work with its shifting boundaries and ambiguous mores? And if so, can the end be far away?

In one way, that's a cagey thing. Technology has opened the way for flexibility, accessibility and endless variety. Depending on your line of work, it's now possible to live the life of a digital nomad, logging on wherever and whenever takes your fancy.

That's the dream, and it does work for some. The downside, however, is that you are always switched on.

Cultural theorist Johathan Cray was the first to pick up the digital debate with his book *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, but he did put it very well when he said that we have dealt with the problem of leisure by getting rid of it.

There was a time in the 1960s when the big issue was what people were going to do with all the free time technology and better working conditions were going to unleash. Now the issue is how we might lack it back.

Cray is unambiguous about new media and technology. They have not



heralded a new age of freedom and self-determination, but have ensured us in a stickier web of control, he said.

He is absolutely right. The generation who got their Leaving Cert results last Wednesday are the ones who will have to negotiate a path through the digital maze. One of their biggest challenges will be to find a way to separate work and play in a world where tweets, Facebook, texts, emails and blog posts feature prominently in both.

If we could tell them anything, let it be this: The idea of striking a work/life balance is a nonsense. It somehow casts work as something to be endured and life as a saving grace. But work is part of life, and life is often (hard) work. If you can be reasonably happy in both, you'll be doing extraordinarily well.

However, we have to draw some kind of line in the sand, with "public, paid, professional" on one side and "private unpaid" on the other. That's too many P's to make a catchy phrase, but the next generation must make a distinction if they are to find a way of mentally clocking out. The workplace has already changed beyond all recognition — and not for the better. The worker of the future is going to need a way to figuratively close the office door.

In some ways, it seems as if we are going backwards. Now, time-motion advocates like Taylor and Henry Ford who wanted to increase efficiency but, at the same time, improve pay and condi-

tions seem like radical pioneers.

One of the most profoundly depressing developments in recent months is the emergence of the #WorkMustPay campaign, a group of activists campaigning to end JobBridge and unpaid internships.

That young Irish people have to point out basic rights, such as "a day's work = a day's pay", shows that something is seriously wrong in the Irish workplace. Poor Jim Larkin must be spinning in his grave. At least the campaign seems to be having an effect. This month, a private school, Headfort School in Kells, Co Meath, withdrew two adverts for teachers through JobBridge after a backlash.

Its principal Dermot Dix apologised, saying he had not done enough research on the scheme. In a rather poetic and surreal statement, he wrote: "I feel a bit like the blind man in a dark room who couldn't see the black cat that wasn't there."

Hats off to him for the admission, but

the Department of Social Protection confirmed last week that a further 94 education jobs are being advertised under the JobBridge scheme before the start of the school year.

Trade unions — and even government ministers — have said emphatically that JobBridge was designed to provide developmental opportunities rather than displace full-time jobs. Let's hope the schools doing the hiring will take note of that. But the problem extends well beyond JobBridge. There is something seriously amiss in the wider employment market. Just ask the Clergy's workers who were dismissed, in some cases, with just 30 minutes' notice. Or the Dunnes Stores workers who are campaigning against low-hour contracts.

Unfortunately, there's no shortage of disheartening news. Statistics point to a growing wage inequality in Ireland. Half the population in Ireland now earns less than €28,500 a year.

Public sympathy should extend to teachers as the hours worked by Irish secondary school teachers are the fourth highest in Europe, according to the annual OECD "Education at a Glance" report.

EU figures tell that dispiriting but familiar story of the wealthy few: The top 10% of households in Europe have nearly 25% of the wealth, but the bottom 10% have just 3.1%. Here, the figures suggest the scales are tipped even more in favour of those at the top.

Workers in Ireland aren't the only ones trying to fight battles they thought they had already won. In the US and across Europe, workers have been demonstrating against low wages and erratic work conditions.

One study of Dutch workers found that being on call when they were not scheduled to work increased stress, anxiety and family conflict. But what now for the new school-leavers and the 11 to 16-year-olds who still cite teaching (number two) and medicine (number three) as their dream jobs?

Central Statistic Office figures suggest that the most promising way to guarantee a good income is to work for a large firm, get a good education and join a union.

There won't be any guarantees of stability, though, or that the "professional" won't leak into the "private". It's time to really start thinking outside the box.

Taking inspiration from that little craft shop in Marseilles mightn't be a bad place to start.



CLODAGH FINN

Our female politicians will continue to exit stage left

GENDER quotas, aren't they just awful?

Well no, they are not, unless we are talking about the unofficial, though omnipresent one that has existed since the beginning of this State which dictates that at least 85% of the Dáil must be male — regardless of ability or intelligence.

This one-sided regime is now under mid threat due to new rules saying parties will lose half their funding from taxpayers unless at least 30% of actual TDs are women — after all, they are a majority of the population — male candidates is a start in the right direction. Or it would be if it were not for the unfortunate habit of "chick dumping" where female candidates are clustered in unwinable seats in order to make up the numbers.

The main parties have all just about scraped past the 30% level with the exception of Fianna Fáil where Micheál Martin's problem with women continues.

This is hardly surprising given the treatment meted out to Fianna Fáil's one prominent woman Oireachtas member — Senator Avelil Power. It is deeply ironic Ms Power quit over what she called Fianna Fáil's "cowardice" on the marriage equality referendum campaign given that Mr Martin leads a defiantly same-sex party with 20 male TDs and zero women.

Although saying Mr Martin "leads" Fianna Fáil could be overstating things, as far too often he merely follows his TDs. Which helps explain Mr Martin's curious absence while the party publicly rips itself apart over whether it should go in for coalition as junior partner to Fine Gael after the looming general election.

Finance spokesman Michael McGrath says yes, most of the others say no, and Mr Martin says nothing. This reminds us of the old joke wherein some people say that Mr Martin is indecisive, but he cannot make up his mind whether they are right or not.



Gender quotas will see more female election candidates in the field but not necessarily in the Dáil and the woman who spearheaded the policy, Joan Burton, could lose out in the capital's battle royale



Former Fianna Fáil senator Avelil Power and party leader Micheál Martin. Fianna Fáil is the only major political party that has failed to ensure that at least 30% of its election candidates are female, hardly surprising given how Ms Power was treated by her male colleagues. Picture: Gareth Chaney Collins

Given the way Fianna Fáil sucked in and spat out the PDs and the Greens before leaving both parties in a shallow political grave, it is hardly surprising that the bulk of FF-ers balk at the prospect of letting the Blueshirts do the same to them.

But then the anticipated endless reign of his Endaness has come to a somewhat abrupt, well, end, after he was forced to the highly embarrassing position of having to announce his retirement after the next election.

Authority will soon drain from him as a result as prime ministers have two key powers of control — timing and patronage.

Mr Kenny has the power to choose when the election will be most beneficial to him, and, if returned to power, he will then decide who sits in

the Cabinet. But that will be his last significant act as authority will then dissipate from him, as all the ministers and backbenchers will know he will be out of office when the reshuffle occurs two years later, and thus openly jostle for position.

Foremost amongst these will be Simon Covey and his arch rival Leo Varadkar. Though Leo likes to play coy with his people describing the leadership option as a "bottle of smoke". But, it would seem, there is no smoke without the burning ambition of little Leo to be taoiseach.

But then even the best laid leadership campaigns can go awry, as is currently happening with the British Labour Party where events have taken some most peculiar turns. Taking the old business maxim "Fail again. Fail

better" to the extreme, a form of political fundamentalism seems to have gripped the party as evidenced by crusty old leader Jeremy Corbyn emerging as the clear favourite to win when the results are announced on September 12. This is being dubbed Labour's 9/12 scenario as a type of anti-politics seemed to have gripped the political party, which is most odd.

Like the Tea Party in America, Corbynistas do not seem to care that most people find him and the policies he espouses to be unelectable as they seem to have made the calculation that Labour is going to lose anyway, so why not lose on principle rather than attempting to win by diluting ideology by appealing to the centre ground?

Of all people, it was that little-known political sage Charlotte Church who

summed-up Corbyn's appeal, stating: "He doesn't seem to have been trained in neuro-linguistic programming; unconflicted in his political views, and abstemious in his personal life, he is one of the only politicians of note who seems to recognise the dire inequality that exists in this country today, and actually have a problem with it. He has a chance of actually doing something to create a shift in the paradigm from corporate puppetry to conscientious societal representation." Blimey.

But then the alternatives to Mr Corbyn are hardly appealing themselves with Blairite-lites in the form of Yvette Cooper and Liz Kendall duelling with synthetic leftie Andy Burnham. And things have gotten rather nasty, with the Kendall camp claiming that Cooper's people have been using the

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fact she does not have children against her.

In a rough week for Ms Kendall, her recently divorced campaign chief has also had to officially deny the pair are having an affair after rivals were accused of peddling the rumour. Mr Burnham, on the other hand, has been forced into the even more embarrassing position of officially denying he wears gay-lineer make-up around his eyes. This is because Burnham, the former favourite to lead Labour, has the unfortunate look of someone who is permanently on the brink of tears. While this is not an ideal look for a prime minister, especially during negotiations with the likes of Vladimir Putin, it is probably fitting for a British — or indeed Irish — Labour Party leader on election night as the losses roll in.

Indeed, with just one government seat left in the reduced Dublin West constituency next time out, Leo will have to take out Joan Burton in order to save his seat and this challenge Simon for the top job.

One less woman in the Dáil, but, despite pushing through gender quotas, the loss of Ms Burton is probably something Fine Gael would be quite happy to live with next time out.

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