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TICKET

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Church of Scientology 'exploited' migrants

SORCHA POLLAK and CONOR GALLAGHER

The Church of Scientology has recruited hundreds of asylum seekers to carry out free labour on its behalf, leading to accusations of exploitation.

The organisation, which critics describe as a cult and a scam, recruits international protection applicants as "volunteers" to carry out cleaning work and leaflet distribution.

These volunteers are recruited from temporary international accommodation sites such as Citywest and Crooksling in Dublin, before being bussed to various locations.

They are not paid but once the work is complete they are provided with certificates outlining their voluntary work. Asylum seekers and people working with them said they are told these certificates will help with their applications for asylum.

Asylum law experts told The Irish Times the certificates would be of "zero benefit" when applying for asylum or subsidiary protection.

Scientology has attracted many high-profile supporters, including Tom Cruise. However, its membership has dwindled in recent years.

Anas Ishtiah, a Jordanian-Palestinian who was living in tented accommodation in Crooksling, said he felt exploited by the organisation. He was approached in the early summer by a Nigerian resident who suggested he volunteer with Scientology.

"He said I'd get a certificate that would help me with my refugee status and give me an advantage to remain in Ireland, and that they would help me with job interviews," said Mr Ishtiah.

He agreed to recruit other people for the work. Twice a week he gathered up to 50 people who were bussed into Dublin city centre to hand out anti-drug leaflets linked to a Scientology front group. He said on another occasion he was asked to clean Scientology's headquarters in Firhouse for eight hours. "I thought they would pay me that day, but they didn't. They said it was volunteering."

A spokeswoman for the Church of Scientology said "many hundreds" of asylum seekers have volunteered to date. She said they were enthusiastic participants who "eagerly requested letters or certificates to acknowledge their participation, which we provided".

The church "has never and would never advise any asylum seeker on any legal aspects of their application or circumstances", she said.

➔ **Scientology recruits asylum seekers amid claims of help with refugee status: page 12**



IRELAND v ARGENTINA

Joe McCarthy celebrates scoring Ireland's third try of the game during the test match at the Aviva Stadium in Dublin last night. Ireland beat Argentina 22-19. Gerry Thornley and Johnny Watterson, Sports Weekend. PHOTOGRAPH: BRIAN LAWLESS/PA

Voters prefer FG/FF for coalition

Sinn Féin the least-favoured party to be in government, according to opinion poll

PAT LEAHY

A Coalition led by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil is the most popular choice of voters for a government after the general election, according to the latest Irish Times/Ipsos B&A opinion poll.

Fine Gael leader Simon Harris is the favourite choice for taoiseach, well in advance of his rivals Micheál Martin and Mary Lou McDonald.

Asked which option was their preferred government after the election, 17 per cent opted for a continuation of the Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael-Green Coalition. A further 28 per cent preferred a Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil combination with a different third party while 45 per cent want to see Fine Gael and Fian-

na Fáil form the basis of the next administration.

The next most popular option was a Sinn Féin-led government without either Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil, which was preferred by 18 per cent. Eight per cent favoured a Fianna Fáil-Sinn Féin coalition, while 17 per cent said "none of these".

On the choice of the next taoiseach, Fine Gael leader Mr Harris has a clear lead. He is preferred by more than one-third of voters (34 per cent) to be taoiseach, a drop of three points since September.

Sinn Féin leader Mary Lou McDonald is the choice of 22 per cent, down two points, while Fianna Fáil leader Micheál Martin is preferred by 16 per cent, up two points.

Just over one in six voters (17 per cent), however, say they would like to see someone else as taoiseach, while 10 per cent said they don't know.

Sinn Féin is the party with the highest negative ratings – 40 per cent of respondents said they would not like to see the party in government, an increase of three points since September. The Greens are next, on 26 per cent, while Fianna Fáil (22 per cent) and Fine Gael (21 per cent) are bunched together.

Sizeable minority

Asked about the recent events in Sinn Féin that dominated the weeks before the general election campaign, a clear majority of voters (57 per cent) said that they would "make no difference" to their vote, although a sizeable minority (32 per cent), said it would make them "less likely" to support the party. Seven per cent said it would make them "more likely" to support Sinn Féin.

The result of the US presidential election has made some voters more cautious as the election looms. Asked specifically about Donald Trump's election, 56 per cent of people said they were now more worried about the future; 13 per cent said they were less worried and 28 per cent said it made no difference.

There has been a fall in the number of people who favour "radical change" – 35 per cent, down three points – and an increase in those favouring "moderate change", up by five points to 56 per cent. Seven per cent say they are "wary of change".

The poll was conducted among a representative sample of adults aged 18 years and upwards across 120 sampling points throughout all constituencies.

Unlike most other opinion polls, The Irish Times/Ipsos B&A series is conducted through face-to-face sampling; personal in-home interviewing

took place on Tuesday and Wednesday of this week. The number of interviews conducted was 1,200 and accuracy is estimated at plus or minus 2.8 per cent.

➔ **Poll analysis: page 8. General Election 2024 coverage: pages 6-11. Jennifer O'Connell, Mark O'Connell, Breda O'Brien, Olivia O'Leary: pages 18-20. Editorial comment: page 21**

Soldiers miss flight after drunken fight

CONOR GALLAGHER

Five Defence Forces soldiers due to return home from peacekeeping duty in Lebanon were unable to board their flight after becoming involved in a drunken fight.

Instead of boarding the chartered aircraft back to the homecoming in Dublin Airport, military police transported the troops back to Camp Shamrock, the Irish Unifil headquarters in

southern Lebanon. One man was hospitalised for his injuries.

The soldiers are part of the 124th Infantry Battalion which has just completed a six-month peacekeeping tour in Lebanon. The invasion of Lebanon made it one of the most dangerous peacekeeping tours undertaken by an Irish unit in years.

Fierce fighting meant Irish troops in one outpost near the border with Israel were isolated for almost a month.

Unifil is designated a "dry mission" by Irish military management, meaning soldiers are not permitted to consume alcohol while in the country.

However, a small number of soldiers decided to "blow off some steam" at a bar in Beirut Airport as they waited for their transport home, a source said. A fight involving at least five soldiers broke out, leaving one man with facial injuries.

After the fight was broken

up, the soldiers were judged too drunk to fly and were transported back to the Irish headquarters. They will remain there until November 25th when the second half of the 124th Infantry Battalion will fly home.

Military police have launched an investigation and at least some of the men are expected to face courts martial.

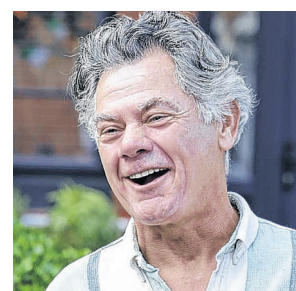
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Kenneth Catherine Kim

Meet the voters

An Irish Times panel WEEKEND



Jennifer O'Connell

Hutch's Dáil run is no joke

OPINION

Wembley showdown

England v Ireland preview



SPORT



Irish winter walks (with food stops)

MAGAZINE

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Weather

Rain will clear to the south by afternoon and it will become dry for most with sunny spells. Highs of 8-11 degrees.

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World News



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Business Today

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Pharma: The Irish unit of Gilead Sciences saw profit fall last year as demand for its Covid therapy fell: page 22

Sports Weekend

Golf: Rory McIlroy is firmly in contention at the DP World Tour Championship in Abu Dhabi after a second round 69 left him a shot off the lead

Cycling: Lara Gillespie is Sportswoman of the Month for October after a bronze at the World Track Championships

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