

# WORKING NOTES

No. 1, November 1987.



## JOBSEARCH QUESTIONED

Last April the Government launched the JOBSEARCH PROGRAMME and since then the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) have regularly released figures intended to show its success. According to the Minister for Social Welfare, Mr. Michael Woods, these figures show the Jobsearch scheme is working (Irish Independent, June 22, 1987). But do they? The latest 'achievements' claimed for Jobsearch (to 23rd October) are as follows:

- 110,897 people interviewed
- 20,272 placed on schemes or programmes
- 3,175 placed in jobs
- 1,226 disallowed at some point
- 8,117 people voluntarily left the register
- 7,614 placed on Jobsearch courses

On examination the success claimed for Jobsearch is less obvious than might appear from the above figures:

- In 1986 the National Manpower Service (NMS) catered for 35,000 people under various labour market schemes and placed 25,000 people in jobs. (Dept. of Labour Annual Report, 1986, p.24) Presumably it will do much the same this year, and would have done so with or without the Jobsearch programme. The figures quoted for jobs and placements on schemes under Jobsearch are not net additions to the normal work of the NMS. They are simply a part of that work presented under a new heading - 'Jobsearch'.

It is possible that in making Jobsearch a privileged vehicle for channeling people onto schemes and to job vacancies more priority is given to those unemployed for longer periods since according to the Department Jobsearch is aimed at those on the register for six months

or longer. This may be useful but its a limited achievement. It amounts simply to helping longer term unemployed take up schemes or job vacancies in preference to shorter term unemployed people.

- The 12,000 Jobsearch course places being provided as part of the programme are a new addition to existing provision. But the Jobsearch course only lasts four weeks. On completion of the course participants in all likelihood return to the dole queue. An independent appraisal of the quality of the course content has yet to be made. However taking the claim made for the course, that it "provides coaching over a four week period on how to look for employment" (DSW letter to I.T. 24/4/87) at face value, it is possible that some unemployed people may find training in job seeking, interview techniques etc of benefit. Others may already be very skilled in these areas and may quite legitimately find having to do such a course a pointless exercise. (This point was borne out by a survey of people in Dublin who had done Jobsearch Courses). For some it may also be a costly exercise. Participants on Jobsearch courses receive their normal welfare payment and some travel allowance. Other costs involved in doing the course are not covered, e.g. cost of child care, travel expenses above the allowance etc.

- The Department has presented the Jobsearch interview as an opportunity for counselling and guidance for the unemployed. Over 110,000 people have already been interviewed under the Jobsearch programme and by December this figure is to reach 150,000. In fact this interview is not particularly new either. For all intents and purposes it is the standard NMS interview. Suggesting that the interview in itself helps people in their search for work (DSW letter to I.T. quoted above) seems a little exaggerated. And for almost two thirds or 100,000 of those interviewed there will be no follow up at all.

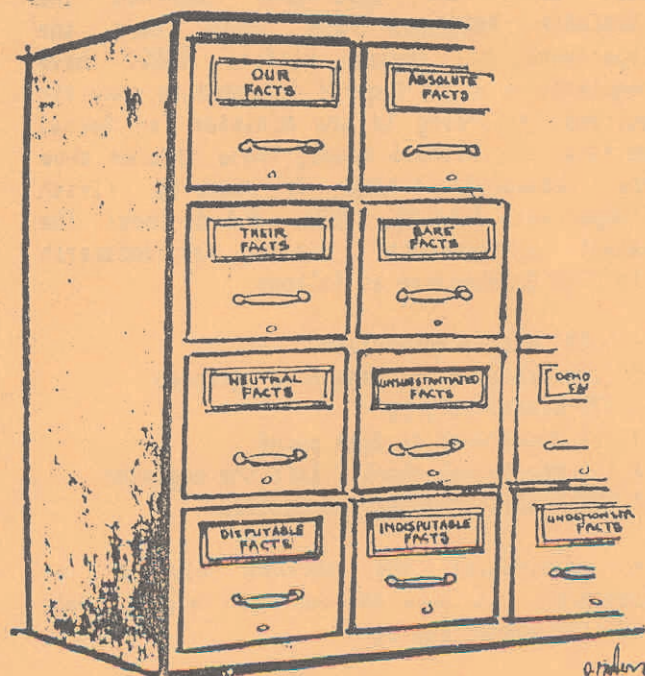


What is new is the systematic nature of the exercise. Almost all those on the register for periods of six months or more will be interviewed. Attendance is compulsory and backed up by a threat to the persons entitlement to welfare. These aspects of the programme taken together suggest that its design is better suited to an exercise in policing the social welfare system than to a significant labour market intervention. Of course the Department has denied that this is the case, but it has not been slow to claim success for the programme in this area.

- one 'achievement' of the Jobsearch programme which in fact has been consistently emphasised by the Department and the media is the number of people it has 'removed' from the register. To date 1,226 people have been disallowed at some point. More than this the Department continues to note 'those who voluntarily left the register' as an achievement of Jobsearch. Last July the Minister stated that this figure represented people who "signed themselves off the Register because they were probably working anyway or were just not willing to attend an interview or take up a position when it was offered to them" (quoted in Evening Press, July 20 1987). This is a serious allegation. It is not at all clear from the figures so far released by the Department that it is justified. These statistics beg a number of questions. People voluntarily leave the register all the time for obvious and perfectly good reasons. As the Central Statistics Office point out (see 'Live Register Industrial Analysis, including analysis of flows on and off' notes on Methodology) "changes in any month reflect underlying trends of loss or gain of full-time, seasonal or casual employment and in addition factors reflecting certain aspects of the Social Insurance system, such as: transfers to or from Disability Benefit, exhaustion of UB entitlement without qualifying for UA etc," i.e. people find work or their Insurance position changes. We could add that they emigrate, become pensioners or even die! The average flow off the register is about 20,000 people every month. The Department has not shown that the people it refers to as leaving the register voluntarily under Jobsearch (just over 1,000 per month on average) are anything other than a normal part of the constant flow off the register.

Furthermore even if someone chose to leave the register rather than take up a Jobsearch course or scheme it is not necessarily true that they had no entitlement in the first place. For example people coming to the end of a benefit entitlement who would not qualify for assistance payments might easily choose to sign off a little early rather than take up a course they considered unsuited to their needs.

- On the basis of the above figures various claims about the savings to the DSW have been made. The Minister is suggesting that Jobsearch is on target to produce savings of £11.5 million this year and he claims a further £8.5 million will be saved in 1988. Two points about this. First until the questions raised above are answered any calculation of savings based on the present figures must be treated with caution. Secondly the calculation of savings simply refers to the total of welfare payments that would be made in a year to the number of people who have left the register. For several reasons this may bear no resemblance to actual savings. For example people who have left the register may qualify for other welfare payments eg Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) or they may return to the register in a period less than twelve months.



The Jobsearch programme is the major initiative promoted by this Government in regard to the unemployed. Any overall assessment of the programme would have to take into account the wider policy context in which it operates. In particular it would have to ask what effect if any Government policies are having on the overall level of employment in the country, i.e. what is it doing about seeing that there are jobs to be sought. It would also have to find out what those most directly affected by Jobsearch, the unemployed, have to say about the programme. Here we simply ask the DSW for an objective evaluation of the programme on its own terms. Given the amount of resources committed to the programme, the claims made for it by the Government, and, more importantly, given the demands it has been making on unemployed people, this seems little enough to ask.



## RESTART OR FALSE START?

JOBSEARCH, in many ways, copies a programme introduced earlier in Britain by the Thatcher Government. There, it is known as RESTART, and was introduced on a pilot basis for the first six months of 1986 and, thereafter, extended throughout Britain.

The independent research and campaign group, UNEMPLOYMENT UNIT, has monitored the programme closely, helped by the - relative to Irish standards - good flow of official statistics which the civil service across the water is obliged to produce.

In the six months pilot-run of the scheme, when the target group was people unemployed for a year or longer, 84 % of those interviewed continued on the dole without any change. 16 %, therefore, saw a change in their position as a result of RESTART but the change in question included everything from having got a job to being placed on a one-week (!) 'training' programme. In fact, only 5.7 % were helped into paid positions as a result of their RESTART interview (1.0 % in jobs, most of which were low paid, while 4.7 % got places on the British equivalent of our SES scheme). There was no attempt, in evaluating the pilot-run of the programme, to find out if the job-hunt-'training', that 7.5 % of all those interviewed were sent on, led anywhere.

In the first six months of the nation-wide operation of the programme, with the target group now widened to any people unemployed for six months or longer, the results were slightly worse. 85.3 % of those interviewed continued on the dole as before while 14.7 % saw some change in their position. Only 3.3% got into paid positions (0.7 % into conventional jobs - we don't know how long they lasted ; and 2.6 % onto government schemes).

These are not spectacular results. Yet the Thatcher Government is enthusiastic about RESTART and, as we know, their enthusiasm proved contagious. The UNEMPLOYMENT UNIT calls attention to such things as the link-up between the RESTART interview and the introduction of a new and tighter test of the available-for-work criterion ; the political mileage got out of the number of people called for a RESTART interview who did not turn up or whose claim to benefit was stopped after being interviewed ("we are weeding out those sponging on the poor taxpayer"); the encouragement being given to unemployed people to lower their expectations and take lower paid, part time or temporary work.

## STATS UPDATE

On the first friday of every month the Central Statistics Office (CSO) issues the 'Live Register - Monthly Statement'. This is the usual measure of the level of unemployment in the State. The latest figures issued at the beginning of October show 241,765 on the live register, 18.6 % of the labour force. The live register measure of unemployment only includes those persons who sign on for benefits or credits. This underestimates the extent of the jobs crisis. To get the full picture we need to consider other factors. For example there are 40,000 people on government training programmes or schemes. Though some of these people are in training that is directly linked to jobs available a large proportion of those on schemes will go straight back to the dole queues at the end of six or twelve months. Some groups do not qualify for unemployment compensation and as a result do not appear on the live register, e.g. people under the age of eighteen cannot claim unemployment assistance.

The unemployment level, as measured by the live register has been levelling out at around 19%. But this 'stabilisation' has been brought about by a new wave of emigration. In the five years to 1986 net emigration totalled 75,000. It is likely that a further 30,000 left in 1986/87 and that this rate has been maintained since. As those leaving the country are in general more likely to be of working age than those entering even this probably understates the impact of emigration on the labour force and on the unemployment figures.

### LONG TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

Twice a year the CSO release their 'Half Yearly Age by Duration' analysis. This records the growth in long term unemployment. The latest figures available relate to 17 April 1987. At that date there were 249,762 people on the live register. Of these 93,185 were unemployed for less than 6 months and 46,577 for periods of from 6 to 12 months. 111,000 people were unemployed for over a year. That represents 44% of the total unemployed. The following table shows the breakdown of long term unemployment by age and sex:

Long term unemployed (12 months +, in 000's)

Age	Male	Female	Total
u/25	15½	7½	23
25/45	48	10½	58½
45/60	19½	3½	23
60+	5½	1	6½
Total	88½	22½	111



## SHELVING ADEQUACY

The ' Programme for National Recovery' published last month plots the framework of Government policy for the next three years. On Social Welfare it says: "The Government will maintain the overall value of social welfare benefits and within the resources available will consider special provision for greater increases for those receiving the lowest payments". What this comes down to in practice is shown in the Estimates published by the Government on October 13th. The estimate for Social Welfare shows an increase of only one per cent. Increases in Welfare payments in next years budget are unlikely to exceed the rate of inflation i.e. will not increase in real terms. The Minister has suggested that people on the lowest assistance payments will receive proportionately larger increases. Again it is unlikely that these will be significant though the exact figures will not be known until the budget in the New Year. Even this much is to be mainly paid for by redistribution within the welfare budget, through 'savings' in other areas.

The Programme and the Estimates ignore the fact that existing social welfare payments are grossly inadequate, 'maintaining existing levels' amounts to condemning people to remain in poverty for the foreseeable future. The Government is sidestepping the issue of adequacy that was at the heart of the Report of the Commission on Social Welfare. The Commission argued that "Social welfare payments should be set at a level that insures a minimally adequate standard of living relative to incomes and living standards in society generally". They estimated a minimally adequate income for a single adult in 1985 at between £51 and £59 per week (£53.55 - £64.26 in 1987 values). The personal rates of most social welfare payments lie below this range and in general social assistance payments are significantly below this.

Last September the Government was challenged again on the issue of adequacy in a submission made by the Combat Poverty Agency. Their submission pointed out that "the position of those on the lowest levels of social welfare payment is critical and unacceptable". They called on the Government to commit itself to reforming the Social Welfare system on the lines outlined in the Report of the Commission on Social Welfare. They also proposed that "There should be an immediate commitment to increase to £48 all adult payments which are at present below that figure; £29 should be the minimum allowance for each dependent adult". Even these modest proposals are being ignored.

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## Call to Solidarity.

During his second visit to the USA in September 1987, Pope John Paul II reasserted that 'the aim of Christian solidarity and service is to defend....in the name of Jesus Christ, the dignity and fundamental human rights of every person'. (Address to Catholic Charities, 15/9/87).

As in previous statements, particularly in his encyclical on work (Laborem Exercens 1981), he grounded his view of social problems and human rights on a particular view of what it means to be a human being. Because each human being is a unique person with an immortal soul, the human person's dignity and value, on one level, is beyond measure; accordingly, he or she can never be treated as a means, only as an end. The full development of the human person is a lifetime process, and work is necessary to achieve this development; 'central to the Church's teaching is the conviction that people are more important than things; that work is "for man" and not man "for work"'. (Silverdome, Detroit, 19/9/87). The Pope goes on to emphasise: 'the Church considers it her task to focus attention on the dignity and rights of workers, to condemn violations of that dignity and those rights'.

Detroit is at the heart of what is often termed "The Rust Belt" - a region of abandoned mines and shuttered steel factories. Speaking to the people of Detroit, the pope challenged the criteria by which decisions are made to introduce new technology, and implied that the mass elimination of jobs and related human costs would in the long run far outweigh the gain to society from rapid introduction of labour-saving technology.

Describing what it means to be a Christian in his speech to Catholic Charities, he remarked: 'The discipleship that the Church discovers in prayer she expresses in deep interest for Christ's brethren....Her concern embraces the area of housing, education, health care, unemployment, the administration of justice, the special needs of the aged and the handicapped'. (15/9/87).

The Pope did not offer specific strategies for much-needed social change. Instead, he concentrated his remarks on the link between faith and justice, by providing (a) a restatement of the deep roots which the commitment to justice has in the Christian tradition of discipleship and fellowship, and (b) a reminder of the core-values of human dignity and solidarity which underlie the Christian's commitment to eliminate injustice.

Church Calendar, November 22: The Feast of Christ the King.



## Why did Pope Paul VI give away the triple tiara ?

There may still be Irish Catholics for whom the spirit of this feast is best expressed by the pomp and ceremony of a papal mass. The raised

platform with the altar, and upon the platform the raised dais with the pope's throne, the triple tiara, the resplendent Swiss guardsmen, the hushed congregation packed with diplomats, businessmen and politicians - a fitting tribute to Christ the King ?

Paul VI gave away the triple tiara, and chose to be buried in the plain wood coffin of a pauper, in order to express - in a world with a growing social conscience - the nature of Christ's kingship. For it is not in people prostrating themselves before a throne, but in people leaving their thrones to come down among those poorer and weaker than themselves, that we can glimpse the lordship and rule that Christ exercises. "The least among you all, that is the one who is great," (Lk 9,48) "The person who humbles her/himself will be exalted," (Lk 14,11) "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (Mt 20,28) "I, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet" (Jn 13,14)

Pope John Paul has been the centre of some great television spectacles - masses with a million or more people in attendance, an entire nation catching its breath. These elaborate liturgies undoubtedly touch the hearts of thousands. But he would be the first to say that it is when he greets the poor in each country, revering in them the special presence of Christ, that then he is most modeling the kingship of Christ. In this sense, one of the most 'regal' acts of Pope John Paul was when he took off his ring during a visit to a Brazilian shantytown and gave it for the people.

The Church, then, rich in its knowledge of its Master, chooses Mt 25, 31 - 46 as the central scripture reading for the celebration of Christ's kingship. The setting is royal : "the Son of Man ... in his glory, escorted by all his angels, seated on the throne of his glory." He is looking for an account of stewardship from every human being, from those whom he entrusted with life in this world. The homage that he is looking for, the evidence that the rule he entrusted to his subjects was wisely exercised in his absence, is stunningly simple : "I was hungry and you gave me food ... in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me."

There is such hunger and want in Ireland today. Hunger for work, thirst for a future that would make it worth staying off drugs ; people stripped of their dignity by a society which values its members by how much they can earn rather than because of who they are ; people sick with worry over the constant struggle to keep their family fed, warm and housed ; people imprisoned within ghettos of high unemployment

and vicious circles of poverty. Let us pray,  
on November 22nd, that every aspect of Irish  
life - but especially our labour market and  
social welfare policies - might have their  
doors thrown open to the kingship of Christ,

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