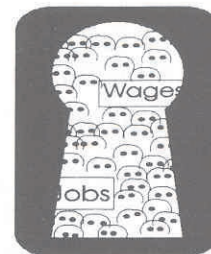


WORKING NOTES

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FACTS AND ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

770 JOBS FOR A MILLION POUNDS

The state currently spends about a billion pounds a year on social welfare payments arising from unemployment. This is undoubtedly a large amount. Unfortunately it does not get anyone back to work. An additional expenditure of £1m. could, however, if targeted properly, get 770 people back to work. And so on, for each extra million spent in this way.

This situation arises mainly because in Ireland tax and PRSI rates are very high at relatively low incomes, while at the same time the total package of benefits for an unemployed family is not inconsiderable. This situation is often seen correctly as a disincentive to offering employment at any wage much below the average industrial wage. However, one can look at this apparent dilemma in another way: let us assume for the moment that there is not much difference between the net income of a hypothetical two parent family with four children whether:

- (a) they are living totally on social welfare;
- (b) they are living on a low wage supplemented by Family Income Supplement; or
- (c) they are living on the average industrial wage.

In this situation it does not make much difference to the state whether it chooses to support this family in mode (a), (b) or (c). However it makes a big difference to the majority of unemployed people, who would prefer to work in mode (c).

The figures below* show that for the outlay

of £1,300 per year, over and above welfare payments, a single person could be employed on a gross salary of £150 per week; or for £2,370 a married person with two children could be employed on a gross salary of £300 per week.

Thus £1m per year could employ 770 single people for a year or 420 married people. £1m may seem hard to raise but the 1% income levy introduced in the last budget brings in approx. £140m per year.

The possibilities in such a scheme would apply particularly to voluntary bodies who do not have the finances to employ additional staff yet who could make a huge (but financially indefinable) difference to the lives of many people if adequate staffing were available to them.

SINGLE PERSON ON A GROSS INCOME OF £150 PER WEEK

The following data assumes short-term unemployment assistance of £55 per week, a tax-free allowance of £57.60 per week, abolition of the 1% employment levy and VAT at 21% calculated on discretionary income (i.e. actual income after deductions less unemployment assistance). The multiplier effects allows for the fact that the additional money which the employed person has at their disposal will allow for further economic activity through expenditure of this extra money on goods and services. Standard PRSI rates are used. The VAT figures may be somewhat overstated in so far as some of the additional income could be spent on, say, food or children's clothing, which are zero-rated.

Single person on gross income of £150 p.w.

	£
Tax at 27%:	24.95
Employee's PRSI:	<u>11.63</u>
Total deductions:	36.58

Nett Income: 150.00 - 36.58 = 113.42

Government income:

Tax:	24.95
Total PRSI:	29.93
Vat on (113.42-55.00)	12.27
Multiplier effect (2%)	<u>3.00</u>
Total:	70.15

Government Savings:

Unemployment assistance:	<u>55.00</u>
Total:	125.15

Total cost to Government: £150.00-£125.15
= £24.75 p.w. or £1300 p.a.

Other less tangible savings include Medical Card expenses, possible rent allowances, heating allowances in winter, double week at Christmas and savings on crime, prison and mental health expenditure.

MARRIED PERSON WITH TWO
CHILDREN EARNING
A GROSS INCOME OF £300 PER WEEK

The following data assumes short-term unemployment assistance of £116.70 per week, a tax-free allowance of £120.43 per week, abolition of the 1% employment levy and VAT at 21% calculated on discretionary income (i.e. actual income after deductions less unemployment assistance). The multiplier effects allows for the fact that the additional money which the employed person has at their disposal will allow for further economic activity through expenditure of this extra money on goods and services.

Married person with two children on gross income of £300 p.w.

	£
Tax at 27%:	48.48
Employee's PRSI:	<u>23.25</u>
Total deductions:	71.73
Nett Income:	300.00 - 71.73 = 228.27

Government income:

Tax:	48.48
Total PRSI:	59.85
Vat on (228.27-116.70)	23.43
Multiplier effect (2%)	<u>6.00</u>
Total:	137.76

Government Savings:

Unemployment assistance:	<u>116.70</u>
Total:	254.46

Total cost to Government: £300.00-£254.46
= £45.54 p.w. or £2370 p.a.

As above there are other less tangible savings.

There are various reasons why the government does not pursue the course of action suggested by these figures and give money to voluntary organisations to employ people at 'real wages'. Probably the biggest reason is that while the costs would accrue to particular government departments, the savings would not accrue to the same departments, and some would be detectable only in overall GNP figures. For instance the savings would accrue to:

- the Dept of Social Welfare (fewer benefits)
- the Dept of the Environment (higher rents)
- the Dept of Health (fewer medical cards)
- the Revenue Commissioners (more PAYE and VAT)
- the Dept of Justice (less crime).

The 'multiplier effect' would not accrue to any particular department in an easily identifiable way.

Who would the costs accrue to? Possibly a department such as that currently dealing with Enterprise and Employment. And, initially, such a department would have to put up much more than a million pounds to create 770 jobs. Assuming the jobs were to pay £14,000 gross each, only about 60 jobs could be created in the short-term for an outlay of a million pounds. But most of this million could eventually be transferred back to the Department of Enterprise and Employment from the departments listed above. In practice it would be simpler to give the total allocation of, say, £13m. to the Department of Enterprise and Employment for each 770 jobs, with other departments enjoying the savings (or income in the case

of the Revenue Commissioners). In practice it is this type of bureaucratic issue that prevents this particular approach to employment creation being pursued. In general the government will only countenance special employment schemes which pay marginally above social welfare rates and seem unwilling to take the wider picture into account.

Another reason why the government might be reluctant to explore the possibilities outlined here, is that the additional payments, however small, do not bring about any reduction in the public expenditure bill. In effect such a scheme translates welfare payments (plus a little extra) into a type of employment subsidy. This is to accept that there will be a continuing, perhaps permanent high level of unemployment in the absence of some mould-breaking initiative. Nevertheless all the commentators are unanimous that this is the position we are facing. Other possible difficulties relate to the administration of such a scheme, the question of its duration, and the associated costs of employing people, such as premises and overheads.

It is not being suggested that a scheme of this kind could be used to eliminate unemployment, but that it would make a significant contribution, as well as being a major shot-in-the-arm for the voluntary sector. The scheme would need to be carefully targeted at people who are most unlikely ever to get work in the ordinary labour market (most of the long-term unemployed, in fact). It would also need to be used in conjunction with other schemes, such as the one which has been developed and further refined by the C.M.R.S., where unemployed people voluntarily make up their dole payments through 'real work at real wages', with some other 'perks' thrown in. Whereas the scheme described here might be more suitable for the voluntary sector, the CMRS scheme would also be applicable to the public sector.

*There is nothing particularly new about these proposals. Among those to make similar suggestions in recent times have been George Lee and John Brady S.J.

GRASSROOTS

The article entitled '770 Jobs for a Million Pounds' arose out of the meeting of the GRASSROOTS group on 16th October in the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice. GRASSROOTS is a group of members of religious orders working in disadvantaged areas. This article, as well as the article, 'Drugs and Dropouts' is a collaborative effort. The members of GRASSROOTS are:

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Further details of GRASSROOTS can be had by ringing Bill Toner at 874-0814. The next meeting is scheduled for 5th February 1994.

DRUGS AND DROPOUTS

It is widely accepted that the drug problem in Ireland is out of control. In many areas of our cities drugs are sold openly on the street. Children as young as ten or eleven are experimenting with drugs. In Dublin alone there are estimated to be over 5,000 drug misusers.

The harmful effects of drug-taking on individuals, families and communities are now well-known. Many people see crime as a more serious problem than drugs, but in fact a huge amount of crime, both organised and casual, is now drug-related. A heroin addict, who is typically unemployed, needs at least £30 cash a day to feed his or her habit.

The question must be asked, Are we as a society doing what we can to deal with the problem? The answer must be a resounding NO.

We submit that there are a number of specific steps that would make significant inroads on the drug problem.

In the area of cure, there is serious underfunding:

Detoxification

While most drug addicts can be 'detoxed' on an out-patient basis, some require residential 'detox'. Incredibly there are only ten beds in the whole country allocated to residential detoxification. There are long waiting lists for these beds and a wait of two or three months is normal. During this time, the addict continues to commit several crimes a day to feed his/her habit. The financial (not to speak of social) cost of this to society must be at least as great than the cost of providing an extra hospital bed.

There are four non-residential detoxification centre in Dublin, but they have huge waiting lists; effectively the only detox centre accessible to drug-users is Trinity Court. The maximum number in treatment in the country at any one time is 1,000. The two Community-based detoxification centres are restricted to their limited catchment areas but still have waiting lists in excess of 200.

Treatment

Most drug addicts return to misusing drugs unless detoxification is followed by a drug

treatment programme. Serious drug users require a considerable period in a residential treatment programme. No residential drug-treatment programme exists in the whole country for young people under 17 years of age. Only one residential treatment centre, Coolmine Lodge (including Ashleigh House, for females), exists for over 17s and it is seriously underfunded. Coolmine actually had its grant reduced by £20,000 in 1991, though this was later restored. Coolmine is only one of several treatment models and it does not suit everyone. Although other treatment models exist elsewhere they do not exist in Ireland.

Few non-residential treatment centres exist in Ireland. The importance of community-based treatment programmes is universally recognised yet few areas where the drug problem is prevalent have such services in the community. In the prisons, where there is a serious drug problem, treatment services are almost non-existent.

Discouraging Early School Leaving

In the area of prevention, one thing that could make a significant impact (in the medium, rather than the short, term) would be the discouragement of early drop-out from school. Many drug addicts will be found to have effectively dropped out of school well before the school leaving age, perhaps never having gone to secondary school for more than a few months. Sixty seven per cent of Coolmine residents have left school before fifteen. While it is true that poor school attendance and drug misuse often have common roots, such as personal or family stress, the first can also lead directly to the second. Young drop-outs are easily drawn into every kind of mischief, and sooner or later they will experiment with drugs to alleviate the boredom. Yet little is done to discourage early drop-out either by enforcing the law or by making the education process more palatable.

Due to government cutbacks the School Attendance Committees have not been able to appoint the full quota of school attendance officers for urban areas. Currently only 19 of the 32 posts are filled. While school attendance officers do not provide the full answer to the problem they can still make a considerable impact, through their informal influence on the children and their families than by bringing them to court. In any case most of the

officers' work has to be informal, since there are no suitable institutions where persistent truants can be committed. Currently there are only about a dozen children in the whole country in care as a result of missing school.

However, without some changes in present procedures, Attendance Officers cannot make much impact on truancy among some of those most at risk among the 12-15 age-group. After fifteen days unexplained absence children are simply struck off the roll. In theory school principals are obliged to draw this to the attention of the School Attendance Officer but in many cases, especially where the child has been disruptive, they do not, and hope the 'disappearance' will not be noticed. At any rate, in some of the worst-affected areas, there are no Attendance Officers. If Home/School Liaison Officers come to be seen as a substitute for Attendance Officers it may well make this situation worse, as the latter are, at least, independent of the school.

School drop-outs in the 12-15 age group run into many thousands, though probably nobody knows the exact figure. It does not seem to be recognized how traumatic the transition from primary to secondary school can be for children. Instead of having just one teacher who knows them well, they can now have eight or nine teachers. They also may have eight or nine subjects, which many of them just cannot cope with. Their parents are faced with many extra expenses, including a first year book bill of up to £130, with £40 being the highest grant available. Children's allowances are commonly used for books and exam fees; for some families the latter may amount to over £130 in a year.

One example of the lack of public will to tackle the school attendance problem seriously is shown by the fact that school attendance officers have never been given jurisdiction over some of the worst-affected areas in the Dublin suburbs, such as Blanchardstown, North Clondalkin, Tallaght, and Cherry Orchard. This is because these areas lie outside the relevant electoral borough boundary. This anomaly could be changed tomorrow if the politicians cared. In areas like this, enforcing school attendance is the responsibility of the Gardai, who admit that they lack both the resources and the will to tackle the problem. Ironically many of them

are tied up dealing with drug-related crime which may have had its genesis in poor school attendance. In some areas the responsibility for school attendance devolves to the Community Gardai but they are reluctant to get involved since they see their role as building bridges, and chasing after truants would not help this relationship.

The young people who stay away from school do so because they find it boring, irrelevant and oppressive. This is not necessarily the fault of the teachers or of the mainstream educational system, but it is a fact of life that needs addressing. It is not being suggested here that unmanageable students should simply be returned to their normal classrooms, but that they should not be simply written off and 'lost'.

One initiative that has had considerable success in keeping potential drop-outs on the rails has been the Youth Encounter Projects. These are special national 'schools', with very small classes, and with an imaginative curriculum designed to win the interest of the pupils. Staff include a full-time social worker, and often a probation officer as well. They liaise closely with the local School Attendance Officer. There are only four of these schools in the state and they have huge waiting lists. Their record in 'straightening out' very disturbed and disruptive youngsters is impressive. The estimated annual cost of £4,000 per pupil is high, but nothing like the £70,000 per annum that it costs to keep a young person in Trinity House, or even the £37,000 p.a. for Wheatfield Prison. There is obviously some potential here for a transfer of funds from the Department of Justice to the Department of Education. Current Department of Education policy is not to fund any more Y.E.P.s and extensive and protracted lobbying in at least one area of Dublin has been unsuccessful.

Even within the current secondary system, initiatives are possible. Several second level schools in Dublin have initiated projects to give students at risk in the 12-15 age group a positive experience of school. However there seems to be a need for some new type of school, perhaps midway between the mainstream schools and the youth encounter projects, to cater for all the 10-15 year olds at risk.

There is a view that drug-taking is often part of the continuous search for excitement that many young people seem to need today. Alternative forms of 'excitement' are often suggested by community groups, such as horse-riding and stock car racing. Unfortunately, there are such high insurance costs that many youth groups will only engage in activities that are 'harmless'. This particular problem, which currently bedevils so many recreational activities, must be addressed, rather than being accepted fatalistically. Any solution must strike a balance between the legitimate needs of individuals and the common good, and this can only be solved by the legislature and the courts between them.

Child Care

Needless to say, at the root of much truancy and delinquency, is inadequate child care. It is important to remind ourselves of our responsibility as a society to children who are at risk. The Child Care Act of 1991 requires health boards 'to provide child care and family support services'. While the Act is silent on the form that such services might take, Gilligan (1993)* suggests that they might include: support groups for socially isolated parents; coaching in parenthood; ante- and post-natal support groups; services offering babysitting, short-break respite care of children, or holidays; comprehensive therapeutic support programmes for identified families; and pre-school day care and after-school day care. Gilligan suggests that to implement the Act properly would require, in each of the thirty two community care areas:

- one forty place day nursery;
- one neighbourhood resource centre offering a range of child and family support services;
- one neighbourhood youth project for youths at risk;
- one homemaker to advise parents on the practicalities of managing a household and family;
- a community-based child care worker.

Gilligan also sees as essential (among other things) the setting up, or extension, of intensive therapeutic family support services, the Community Mothers Programme, the supervised volunteer visiting scheme, and the psychological service. Gilligan estimates

the additional annual cost of implementing the Child Care Act as over £40 million annually.

Conclusion

To sum up, we would see the following steps as essential to make any impact on the drug problem:

The provision of additional hospital beds in all the major cities for 'detoxing' drug addicts;

The provision of community-based non-residential detoxification and treatment centres in the areas worst hit by drug abuse;

The provision of a number of residential treatment centres for both juveniles and adults based on the best models available elsewhere;

Extensive use of residential treatment centres as an alternative to prison for those coming before the courts whose crimes are drug-related;

The provision of drug-treatment programmes within each of the prisons;

The appointment of the full complement of School Attendance Officers;

The extension of the jurisdiction of Attendance Officers to the large Dublin suburbs outside electoral borough boundaries;

The setting up of additional Youth Encounter Projects or similar ventures in disadvantaged areas where considerable numbers of young people have dropped out of school;

The provision of a wide range of family support services, as envisaged in the Child Care Act 1991, to help those families who are unable to cope effectively with their children;

The provision of an adequate number of community-based residential hostels for those children who, even with family support services, can no longer live at home.

*Gilligan, Robbie. "The Child Care Act, 1991 - An Examination of its Scope and Resource Implications". Administration, Winter 1992-93 pp. 347-370.

Whose Law and Order?

On the 14th of December 1993, the Minister for Justice, Marie Geoghegan-Quinn announced her 13 point 'Fight Against Crime' law and order package. The package deals primarily with the implementation of the recommendations of the Garda Síochána Corporate Strategy Policy Document published in April 1993. This includes increased Garda recruitment, and increased recruitment of clerical and administrative staff for the Gardai, the development of an information technology plan and the purchase of additional Garda vehicles.

Following on some of the recommendations of Interdepartmental Committee Report on Urban Crime and Disorder, funding of £100,000 will be made available to develop youth diversion projects in the Dublin area, while £350,000 is being provided to train Juvenile Liaison Officers to deal with drug problems amongst young people in Dublin.

The Garda Fraud Squad is to receive £500,000 for the employment of an additional five staff. The Probation and Welfare service is to receive £2.4 million for the recruitment of 50 new staff and £2.5 million for the provision of probation accommodation and day attendance facilities. Additional judges will also be appointed under this package.

The package also includes the plan to install closed circuit TV in the Temple Bar area of Dublin to assist in the fight against crime at a cost of £200,000.

However, by far the biggest expenditure will be on the extension of the prison system. 210 new prison places are to be created at a cost of £25 million. 150 of these places will cater for male offenders, while the remaining sixty will be provided by way of a new facility for female offenders. The total cost of the fight against crime package will be £66 million.

In analysing the Ministers' Fight Against Crime' package a number of issues become clear:

Firstly, it must be asked if the Minister is reacting to what is quite often media hysteria regarding the extent of crime in Ireland. Banner headlines in various tabloids all suggest a dramatic increase in the extent of crime and in the changing nature of criminal offences, with the perceived opinion being that crimes are becoming more vicious. Yet as Dr. Paul O'Mahony, has highlighted in his excellent book, **Crime and Punishment in Ireland**. (Roundhall Press, 1993), "international comparisons indicate that the crime situation in Ireland remains relatively favourable. With the single exception of the Dublin area, which does have high levels of theft, Ireland is far less crime ridden than most other developed countries...Unhappily, the media, politicians and other commentators are far more likely to indulge in alarmist, melodramatic depictions of the Irish crime scene, focusing on short term trends and especially brutal, individual cases to bolster the view that crime is corroding the social fabric of Irish life - than they do in a balanced assessment of crime in Ireland that does justice to our relatively favourable situation."

Secondly, the proposed increase in the number of prison places flies directly against the declared intent of the Joint Programme For Government to introduce a timetable for the implementation of the Whitaker Report on Prison Reform. The Whitaker report recommended the reduction of the prison population by approximately 25% and henceforth be maintained at that level, not to increase it! The current cost of the keeping somebody in Prison according to the Minister for Justice, Mrs. Marie Geoghegan-Quinn *"is approximately £37,000 on the basis of the 1993 estimates. This corresponds to an estimated weekly figure of £710. These figures do not include any element in respect of capital expenditure. They are arrived at by taking annual gross estimate for the prisons' Vote for 1993, deducting Appropriations-in-aid and expenditure not connected with the running of prisons (Probation and Welfare Service and Community Service Orders' Scheme) and adding relevant costs borne on other votes (Superannuation and Teachers salaries)."* (Dail Debates, 25 March 1993, Cols897-898) The daily average number of prisoners in custody has risen from 2,027 in 1989 to 2,205 in 1992. Based on the above costs, we currently spend over £80 million pounds per annum locking up people, and now plan to spend an additional £25 million on our prisons. The Whitaker committee concluded that incarceration in prison should only be employed as a last resort.

Who benefits from this system? What is the purpose of such a system? Does it achieve any results in terms of 'rehabilitating' people? Could some of the finance currently

being expended in this area be more fruitfully used?

To quote Dr. O'Mahony again, 'our criminal justice system "still very much resembles the British system and any new provisions or approaches, such as the community service order, have usually been imported from Britain after a suitable delay. This is a sorry situation not only because it reflects on the post-colonialist mentality of the Irish state, but also because it indicates a complete failure to respond creatively to the unique aspects of the Irish situation."

Could not for example, the Child Care Act, 1991 be fully implemented and adequately resourced? The Act has enormous potential for preventing children and young people from drifting in crime, yet is being implemented in a piecemeal and fragmented manner over a five year period. The current administration can find sufficient funding to build an additional 210 prison cells, yet cannot find sufficient funding to implement the Child Care Act, 1991. A recent EHB survey of youth homelessness showed that in the first six months of 1993, 280 homeless children were counted. The majority of these children are placed in B&B accommodation, adult hostels or else the EHB was unable to find any suitable place for them. Unless provisions are put in place for these children, they will graduate to fill the 210 new prison cells proposed in the Minister's package, and in 5 years time, there will be a fresh demand to provide more prison accommodation.

Thirdly, it must be asked if the package is

more interested in promoting business interests and protecting the people that frequent the trendy Temple Bar area, than on seriously addressing crime. The Minister aims to spend £200,000 on the introduction of closed circuit TV in the temple Bar area while devoting only £100,000 to community-based crime prevention measures. Such novelties may appeal to the people that fill the restaurants and Bars in the Temple bar area, but will simply entail the exclusion of working class youth from the Temple Bar area in order that others may eat and drink in comfort.

How can funding be more fruitfully used? Family support services and services for pre-school children would appear from all available evidence to be areas where if substantial investment was made now, it would lessen the likelihood of children drifting into delinquency, and more often than not into adult crime. As Tutt and Giller state in relation to England *"It would be an act of political courage to invest substantially in services for pre-school children in the belief that it would relieve spending on services for delinquency later in life."* And O'Mahony has pointed out in his comparison of European Prison systems that *"Ireland, among (a) group of 11 Council of Europe countries, has the largest portion of the prison system given over to juveniles. It has also been shown that Ireland detains in its mainstream prison system at least 50% more juveniles per 100,000 of total population than most of the other eleven countries. Indeed, in some cases, for example Greece and Norway, Ireland detains as many as 5 or 6 times more juveniles."*(O'Mahony,

1990:48) Thus an emphasis on the prevention of juvenile crime must be a priority. Yet the Minister can only provide £100,000 for the provision of delinquency prevention programmes.

The bottom line is that **we need to take crime seriously, yet we also need to take seriously the measures we use to sanction those who commit crime.** The package of reform introduced by the Minister is unlikely to deliver on either.

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A THOUGHT FOR THE 1994 BUDGET

It seems that there is some room for manoeuvre regarding tax reductions this year. What about doing something to correct the anomaly whereby social welfare recipients intending to take up work lose £665 per child as soon as they start work, but gain nothing at all in tax allowances? A major disincentive to taking up employment is created by this anomaly. An obvious step would be to give all employees a reduction in their total tax bill equal to what they would receive for child dependants from social welfare. As part of this concession, Monthly Children's Allowances should be brought into the tax net. Over to you, Minister!

UNEMPLOYMENT: **THE CMRS PROPOSAL**

There appears to be tacit acceptance at Government level that unemployment is likely to remain at around 300,000 for the foreseeable future. In fact some experts project a steady increase, and a figure of 380,000 by 1996 has been mentioned.

In the light of this, and accepting the devastating effect which unemployment has on the fabric of our society, it seems surprising that so little debate has taken place on the recent proposal by the Council of Major Religious Superiors. The basic idea is that unemployed people voluntarily make up their dole payments through 'real work at real wages', with some other 'perks' thrown in.

A summary of the proposals are as follows:

1. That the Government initiate and fund a scheme whereby unemployed people could opt for a job in the public, voluntary or community sectors, and the Department of Social Welfare would reallocate the person's unemployment entitlements to the employer.
2. The work done would be work of public or social value which was not currently being performed by full-time personnel, and it would be paid at the going rate for the job.
3. The new workers would be employed at that rate for as long as they needed to receive the net income equivalent to what they received on the dole.
4. They would lose none of their social welfare benefits.
5. They would be free to work an additional number of hours (suggested up to five) or to seek other employment for the remainder of the week, to enhance their income.
6. They would have a guarantee of being short-listed and interviewed for any full-time position which became available in the relevant area.
7. FAS would provide on-the-job training to enhance their employment skills.

The proposals have been criticised on a number of fronts, but no serious attempt has been made to publicly debate the pro's and con's. More importantly, no serious alternative has been suggested which would have any similar impact on unemployment numbers.

A sample of the criticisms are:

- (a) Would a married person with a number of dependants require to work longer than a single person to "repay" his or her Social Welfare Allowance? (Perhaps the Single Social Welfare payment could form the basis of the work requirement, and Dependants' allowances could continue to be paid separately).
- (b) The prospect of cheap labour will encourage employers to replace permanent workers with Social Welfare recruits. (Perhaps the specific work areas could be designated at the commencement of the scheme and agreed with the relevant unions).

Besides the proposals themselves, probably the most difficult task is the identification of specific areas of work which are not being done at the moment, and which could command agreement with existing employees.

A recent publication by the European Commission, dealing with the possibilities of creating meaningful work for the unemployed, suggested a number of areas where work needed to be carried out over and above what is being done at the moment, such as -

- home help for the elderly and handicapped, health care, meal preparation and housework;
- assistance for young people facing difficulties, comprising help with schoolwork, provision of leisure facilities (especially sports) and support for the most disadvantaged;
- provision of leisure and cultural facilities, provided they are thereby made more accessible to all (adjusted opening hours, lower prices, travelling shows, art schools etc.).

We feel the National Economic and Social Forum would be very happy to receive any representations to help them in their deliberations on this critical topic.

T.N.

ARE THE UNEMPLOYED THE PROBLEM?

In addressing the problem of unemployment, labour market policies have tended to focus on what is known as supply-side factors (those affecting people looking for employment) more so than demand-side factors (those affecting people who wish to employ labour). The demand-side approach identifies characteristics of the unemployed and long-term unemployed themselves as significant factors in explaining why they are unable to obtain employment.

A feature of supply-side policies is that the unemployed themselves are the focus of attention and for the most part are the target of policy interventions. One consequence of the dominance of a supply-side approach is that considerable attention has been paid to designing and implementing programmes such as SES, VTOS, CEDP mainline courses etc. to the comparative neglect of examining the nature of the labour market into which such programmes seek to place the long-term unemployed. Two important and neglected issues arising in this context are the recruitment practices of employers and their attitudes and views regarding the recruitment of people who are long-term unemployed.

A recent research report, When Skills Are Not Enough, published by the Tallaght Centre for the Unemployed and funded by the Tallaght Partnership's Community Development Programme, examined the recruitment practices of employers and their attitudes towards recruiting the long-term unemployed. The research set out to achieve the following:

- a) to ascertain how employers in Tallaght recruited people;
- b) to identify what characteristics they were seeking in job applicants;
- c) to determine their attitudes towards recruiting the long-term unemployed.

The research was based on a survey of 402 companies in the Dublin 24 postal area, of which 131 returned questionnaires.

The main findings from the research were the following:

1. 45% of employers used existing staff, word-of-mouth, personal contacts, or internal advertising to fill positions.

2. The largest single group of recruits were people moving from one job to another, followed by people who had been unemployed for less than one year. Only 5% of recruits came directly from long-term unemployment.

3. Employers highlighted the importance of and desirability that potential new employees should have flexibility, reliability, references, personal recommendations, and good health.

4. The main problems employers have in recruiting the long-term unemployed is their perception (a) that the long-term unemployed have difficulty in adjusting to work; (b) that they lack skills; (c) that they have bad work habits; (d) that they have a lower level of education.

5. Employers indicated that factors such as a reduction in PRSI for long-term unemployed, recent work experience, and a growth in the volume of business, would encourage the recruitment of the long-term unemployed.

6. Only a small number of employers indicated a preference for applicants aged over 35 years.

The central findings highlight two issues, firstly, the extensive use made by employers of a variety of recruitment practices based on some form of interior employee networks; secondly, the emphasis placed by employers on such attributes as flexibility, reliability, adaptability, and motivation.

On the basis of the results of the research, it is clear that improving the educational qualifications and vocational skills of the long-term unemployed is only one of a range of actions that need to be addressed to improve their employment prospects. The findings from this report must be taken on board by organisations such as FAS, the V.E.C., and community organisations interested in addressing the problems faced by the long-term unemployed. In particular there is a need to incorporate into programmes for the long-term unemployed measures which help to meet the requirements of employers, and to address the negative perception employers have of the long-term unemployed as potential employees.

M.C.

THE NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE IN IRELAND - A REASSESSMENT OF AN ASSESSMENT

Under the powers vested in Section 10 of the Housing Act 1988, the Department of the Environment can ask local authorities to assess the scale of homelessness in their area. In 1991, such an assessment was conducted, resulting in the first official national enquiry into the extent of homelessness since 1925. According to the official Assessment of Homelessness, conducted by local authorities on 31st March 1991, there was a total of 2,751 homeless persons in Ireland over the age of 18. According to the Assessment conducted on 31st March 1993, this figure had declined by 3% to 2,667.

At the press conference where the Minister for Housing and Urban renewal presented the results of the 1993 assessment, Minister Stagg commented that 'considering the accommodation being provided and the emergency freephone after-hours service for the homeless... nobody need go without shelter or spend a night on the streets'.

However, the assessment of housing needs conducted by Local Authorities on behalf of the Department of the Environment shows a 44% increase in the number of households in need of accommodation over the period March 1989 - March 1993, with currently 28,620 households in urgent need of housing. All available evidence from organisations working with the homeless would suggest the opposite to what Minister Stagg asserted.

The problem seems to lie with the methodology used by local authorities in counting the homeless. For example, research conducted by the National Campaign for the Homeless in late 1992 showed that six local authorities did not include those sleeping rough as homeless under the definition of homelessness as laid down by the Housing Act 1988! The assessment of homelessness simply lists the numbers of homeless people by category of homelessness by local authority area. No information is available on basic variables such as age, gender, duration of homelessness etc. It is simply a very crude headcount of the number of some homeless people over the age of 18.

Homelessness is a growing and increasingly visible phenomenon in Ireland, particularly in our urban areas. The recent Eastern Health Board Survey showed that in the first six months of last year, a total of 280 homeless children were encountered in that Health Board alone. If Minister Stagg were to attempt to obtain a bed in any one of the emergency hostels for the homeless in Dublin after 7.00 p.m., or attempt to find adequate emergency accommodation for a homeless family any night this week, a different picture might emerge.

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