WORKING NOTES

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FACTS AND ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

THE NEW CMRS PROGRAMME: PART-TIME JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The imaginative proposal for job creation proposed last year by the Council of Major Religious Superiors (now renamed the Conference of Religious of Ireland) has finally seen the light of day, and first indications are that the pilot programme will be fully subscribed to. The pilot programme is running only in seven selected areas, viz. Waterford City, Co. Laois, part of South Tipperary, Co. Kerry, the Islands, Blanchardstown, and Finglas. This stretches the resources of the Conference of Religious to the limit, and any extension of the programme will depend on more direct involvement by the Department of Enterprise and Employment.

The basic idea behind the programme is that participants work a number of hours at the 'rate for the job' to give an amount equal to what they would earn in Community Employment. For instance someone with an adult dependent might work sixteen hours at a 'going rate' of £7 and hour to earn an entitlement of £110.70. The most hours that need to be worked on the programme is 19.5. Once the required number of hours has been worked participants are free to take up another part-time job for the remainder of the week. All participants will retain secondary social welfare benefits. Employees will not have to pay PRSI (J rate), with sponsors paying 0.5%. Tax payable will depend on circumstances. Participants may stay on the programme for up to three years. Education and training of participants in an essential requirement of the programme. The programme can be used only to carry out work not being done, or only partly being done, so that there is no question of people already in jobs being displaced. It cannot be used in the private sector.

The following are some of those eligible:

- -Persons of any age who have been receiving Unemployment Benefit of over one year;
- -All people over 21 receiving Unemployment Assistance;
- -All adult dependents of people over 21 on the live register, if the person and the dependent exchange places on the programme;
- -most lone parents.

Applications currently being processed include Production and Stage Work for a Dramatic Society, a Wind Energy Project, Teachers Assistants, Home Nursing, Sports Coaching, a Support Group for terminally ill teenagers, Working with Choirs, and Development Education in relation to the environment. Appropriate 'rates for the jobs' are being worked out with the help of the relevant trade unions.

Congratulations to Sean Healy, Brigid Reynolds and their colleagues for the imagination, persistence and stamina they displayed in getting this project off the drawing board!

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SCHOOL ATTENDANCE: A TIMELY REPORT

Many of the issues highlighted in the January 1994 edition of Working Notes figure prominently in the Report on School Attendance and Truancy issued in April 1994 by the Minister for Education, Niamh Bhreathnach.

The Report includes many interesting statistics. It notes that the average attendance of 90 per cent in national schools is not particularly good. This works out at about 16 days absence per year, but apart from that the figure is also likely to mask more serious absence patterns. If, as is quite possible, half the students are absent on average for only five days in the school year, then the remaining half would be absent on average for almost six weeks in the year.

Attendance problems are clustered in particular socio-economic groups. Of the children who came to the notice of attendance officers for the first time during the past year, only 13 per cent had a parent working outside the home. Fifty per cent came from one-parent families. Only 3 per cent lived in privately owned houses.

In line with concerns voiced in Working Notes the Report estimates that up to 8 per cent of primary school leavers may not transfer to second level schools at all. This would mean that about 5,000 twelve year olds drop out every year, an extremely worrying figure. In the absence of a formal registration-cum-tracking system (recommended in the Report) there is little hope of tackling this problem.

Is there a link between truancy and delinquency? Whatever about non-attendance leading to delinquency, there is no doubt that the majority of juvenile delinquents are persistent non-attenders. In St Joseph's Clonmel, only one boy out of 69 was said to be a regular attender at school.

Many of the reasons for absence cited in the report relate, as expected, to factors such as family stress, family break-up, or lack of parental control. Interesting questions are raised by another category of reasons given, viz.:

-parents' lack of confidence in the value of education;
-belief on the part of the child or the parents that the educational system had nothing of value to offer;
-family tradition of attending primary level only; and
-the perceived irrelevance of existing curricula.

Data from the recent ESRI publication on transitions to adulthood show clearly that children who stay on in school have a greater chance of employment regardless of the their socio-economic background. This will not seem very surprising to middle-class people, but for some reason many parents and children from lower socio-economic groups remain unconvinced. It may be that they recognize that for a working-class person education is a much riskier investment than for a middle-class person, given that there are so many other factors besides education (such as accent, address, social class etc.) that determine employment chances. There is need for major research in this area, and, depending on the outcome of such research perhaps a national strategy for 'selling' education as a necessity in a technological age.

The Report twice adverts to a problem highlighted in Working Notes, namely, the lack of a school attendance service in some major centres of population, such as the newer Dublin suburbs. However, rather than urging for immediate legislative change to amend this, the Report puts its proposals regarding attendance officers into the context of the proposed Regional Education Councils. Since these are unlikely to be in place for some time, a chance to make an immediate impact on the situation has been missed.

The Report proposes putting increasing responsibility on parents for school attendance. While this is welcome, caution is also necessary. It is very difficult being a parent today, particularly in certain areas, and punishing parents who are already under stress may only make matters worse. What is certainly needed is more support services for families, and these will only become available if the 1991 Child Care Act is fully implemented and properly resourced.

BROAD-BASED ORGANISING

Ciaran Leonard, an Oblate priest working in Liverpool, recently gave an interesting talk on this topic in the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice. Although the concept may be familiar to many community activists, this brief account may be of interest to others.

Broad-Based Organising (BBO) originated in the U.S. as a way of addressing issues of concern to local communities. It got much of its inspiration from the writings of Saul Alinski who wrote Rules for Radicals in the 1930s, but the process has been much refined since then. There is no central world-wide organisation - each city or area is responsible only to itself.

BBO is based on a system of house-meetings. At these meetings there is brainstorming about the issues that put stress on you and your family and your community - issues such as drugs or housing. These local meetings can culminate in well-organised public meetings of perhaps 1,000 people, where somebody puts questions to some influential individual. This is called 'public business'. In a city or area there are may be a number of different units, centred around houses or institutions, and these may form a region.

There are some basic principles in BBO. One is that it is best if people directly affected by an issue can handle it themselves. Another is that BBO won't take on an issue it can't win. For instance BBO would not take on the issue of unemployment, but it would campaign against the closure of a particular factory. BBO would not take on the whole drugs issue, but might try to challenge a particular pusher. Part of the process of BBO is to break the issue down into its parts.

BBO is not involved just with single issues. This week it might deal with unemployment, on another occasion drugs or housing etc. It looks to create a broad base of people around these issues. BBO mobilises institutions like the Churches.

BBO is open to people irrespective of religious belief. However it is based on a commitment to values, such as justice, peace, dignity, respect, and neighbourliness, and those involved must subscribe to these values.

BBO seeks to take power. It sees people giving away their power too easily, - voting every four or five years with no further involvement. Organised money can get things done, that is one kind of power. BBO does not have that. The alternative is organised people, but for this you need numbers and this is central to BBO strategy. BBO is based on the concept of accountable power that has the ability to effect real change.

In the case of much local action, BBO recognizes that people get fed up going to meetings. Leaders get into posts and stay too long. BBO requires that people are available for whatever time they can afford. This may be a commitment of two hours a week, but they are accountable for these two hours.

BBO trains people to deal with issues. It helps people to identify who are the significant people and who can do things. It trains them to formulate some action. They organises what they call accountability sessions. This may involve some individual, say from the Housing Department, and get them to give a public commitment, something they can be held accountable for.

BBO also recognizes that if you are dependent on finance you have given away your power. The group needs to be financially independent and the members contribute. A Church may opt to join and a membership rate of £1,000 or £2,000 might be set. Fund raising events are organised. A full-time organiser is paid, and transport to venues for mass meetings is another important expense.

There is never one leader in the group, so no individual can be targeted. In making representations there is always a minimum of three people and a maximum of ten. The three to go this time might not be the same three as last time. BBO goes after the people in the community who have contacts. They may be people whom everybody goes to when they have a problem. People who are identified who have a following. These people will play the crucial role of recruiting people for mass meetings. This means that if the BBO organiser tells, say, a public representative, that 1,000 people will attend a meeting, then 1,000 actually will attend. Absolute commitment to attend meetings like this is crucial to BBO.

BBO always operates within the law and takes care not to jeopardize anyone's job, e.g. a civil servant who may be a valuable contact.

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How BBO Works in Practice

In practice BBO works something like this. A group of people meet. They will start the meeting by identifying issues and prioritising them. In Liverpool there are 44 local units. Issues are fed to a central strategy group and these will pass on selected items to a small research group who have more time. Training is provided to groups to deal with a selected issue, and in particular how to do public business e.g. to stand up and speak.

In Liverpool one issue was fly-tipping (illegal dumping). The Central Strategy Group saw this a winnable, got in touch with people in local government, and set targets. They also put up proposals of their own. At a public meeting the council gave a commitment to clear 30 sites.

BBO seeks allies, but it has no permanent friends and no permanent enemies. For instance, it may seek help from the police in certain situations but may challenge them in other situations.

In Bristol the issue of homelessness was identified as important. People noted that the Building Societies were making big profits repossessing homes. BBO proposed that they should give one per cent of their profits to the agencies for the homeless. To influence events 1,000 people joined one of the building societies so that they could attend the A.G.M. A thousand people turned up. They did not get the one per cent, but they did get a lot of money for the agencies.

The key to BBO is organising large numbers of people. The basic involvement of most people is that they leave their phone numbers and are available to be bussed into City Hall etc. maybe three times a year. BBO does not seek to have issues solved immediately, and tries to build up people in the process. In Liverpool the Churches have played a central role, and the Moslem community have become very involved. Most of the units in Liverpool are centred around Catholic Churches and there are also a few tenants associations. Sometimes four or five units in a area will deal with issues in that area.

Obviously some of the people involved in BBO give a lot of time to it. The paid organizer may be very busy indeed. Other people may put in ten hours or more a week. Others may contract only to be at the other end of a phone line. The generosity of many individuals is crucial to success and there is no magic formula that can substitute for this.

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

In Ireland as in many other European countries measures to maintain and stimulate economic growth continue to form a central strategy to combat unemployment. Despite relative good economic growth the rise and deepening of unemployment raises a doubt over the ability of such a strategy, alone, to address the problem of unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment.

Within the European Union, the level of unemployment shows a worrying tendency to be little affected by positive growth rates. Increases in output do not seem to translate easily into new jobs. Within the Union as a whole, relatively high employment growth at the end of the 1980s tended to be associated with increases in labour force participation rather than with falling unemployment. For instance, between 1985 and 1990, when nine million new jobs were generated across Europe, less than one third of these went to the registered unemployed with only around one million going to the long term unemployed. Overall seventy per cent of the jobs created in the second half of the 1980s were filled by new entrants to the labour market rather than by the unemployed

The ESRI in its latest Quarterly Economic Commentary (Spring '94) predicts a growth rate of 5% GNP for 1994. On an annual average basis they estimate that between 1993 and 1994 total employment will increase by 23,000. Over the same period the Live Register is expected to show an annual average decline of only 12,000.

Of particular concern is the steady increase in long-term unemployment (the share of the registered unemployed who have been out of work for a year or more). In Ireland, about 45 per cent of the Live Register are in this category, with the average figure for the European Union standing at about half this. If measures are not taken to assist these individuals they can easily become the permanent unemployed. This will tend to happen as they lose skills and morale, and the financial resources to pursue employment opportunities. Added to this is the reluctance of employers, to recruit from among the long-term unemployed. Thus despite good economic growth there is a growing category of people for whom the prospect of employment is small.

The above would tend to support the view that a rise in economic growth, relative to previous trends, leads first to an increase in the supply of labour, then reduces the number of short-term unemployed and only in the long run, and at that weakly, reduces the number of long-term unemployed.

In the Irish context the manner in which technology is used is an important factor in explaining why economic growth fails to have a significant impact on the levels of unemployment. In Ireland manufacturing industry accounts for a higher share of output growth relative to international trends, but the employment-intensity of Ireland's manufacturing growth has itself been very low relative to other countries. This occurred mainly for two reasons: first, there was a huge swing in the contribution of the high-tech sector to total manufacturing value added, from 10 per cent in 1975 to 40 per cent in 1985; Second, the gap in productivity between the high-tech and low-tech industries is exceptionally wide in Ireland.

A special factor that explains Ireland's failure to obtain so few new jobs for each increment of GNP may, in part, be the pricing policy of the Republic's large multinational manufacturing sector. The huge profits recorded in some multinational industries are likely to reflect a return to R & D undertaken in the USA and elsewhere and an optimisation of Corporation Tax (10% in Ireland). A large part of these profits are immediately repatriated and although recorded in the Irish national accounts do not form part of the Republic's income.

Erik Thorbeke, writing in a journal of the International Labour Organisation, states "historical evidence abundantly demonstrates that attempts to retard technological progress bring about greater poverty and lower growth". Yet one finds deepening unease about technology. Thorbeke himself concedes that research is needed into the impact of technology on employment. David Algeo writing in the Irish Jesuit journal Studies comments:

> *The current unemployment problems are largely attributable to the deployment of labour-saving technologies whilst minimal attention is being paid to the need to transform some of society's institutions and behaviour patterns.*

It is also important to distinguish between technological innovation and improvement of products and processes on the one hand, and automation, on the other hand. Automation involves the substitution of labour for capital. This is not always socially efficient when the supply of labour is increasing, as it still is in Ireland and a number of other European countries.

Significantly, the recent White Paper of the Commission of the European Communities, Growth, Competitiveness, Employment uses the term 'technological' unemployment, along with 'cyclical' and 'structural' concepts. It suggests that:

> *"we are once again passing through a period in which a gap is opening up between the speed of technical progress, which is concerned primarily with how to produce and which therefore often destroys jobs, and our capacity to think up new individual or collective needs which would provide new job opportunities".*

An important factor which can contribute to unemployment is a mismatch between the skills of the workforce and the skills demanded by the technology. In fact, over the period 1982 to 1990, recruitment difficulties increased throughout the Union, particularly in the UK, France, and Germany. The problem for the Union is that it is not always the only, or indeed the leading, producer of high technology. However in order to compete successfully its enterprises need to use the latest technology, often imported from Japan or the US. While it is easy enough to import the technology, it is not so easy to train or recruit people able to operate it.

The prospect of filling these skills gaps through training the unemployed will prove difficult. Many of the unemployed have received only limited initial education. The training undertaken in the European Union is provided mainly for adults who are in employment and who are not likely to lose their jobs in the near future. On average, persons without a job make up only 14 per cent of all participants in employment related training. While in some Member States, such as the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany, 15-30 per cent of the unemployed receive training, in other countries, such as Belgium, Ireland and Greece, less than five per cent of unemployed adults are trained for re-employment. A recent government-commissioned report on industrial training in Ireland (Roche and Tansey, 1992,p.81) concluded gloomily that:

> *"Employers, big and small, are almost unanimous in their unwillingness to hire the long-term unemployed... In these circumstances, the whole strategy of providing training for the long-term unemployed is called into question".*

Such views, while reflecting, the difficult nature of the problem appear to advocate that 45% of the unemployed should be denied permanent access to high quality training and education. If this view became dominant it will mean that the employment available to the long-term unemployed will, at best, be permanently confined to low paid opportunities.

Long-term unemployment generates major economic, social and personal problems The main cause of these problems is the exclusion of the long-term unemployed from active participation in the labour market. As a consequence there is a reduction in the supply of labour which amounts to a costly waste of resources. High levels of long-term unemployment also increases public expenditure as a result of maintaining people in idleness.

There is evidence from other countries to suggest that measures can be taken to bring the long-term unemployed back into work. For example in Sweden intensive counselling, retraining and placement can help to reduce the numbers of unemployed who become long-term unemployed.

Economic and social policies must recognise the situation that economic growth does not 'lift all boats' and that special measures are required to ensure that as many long-term unemployed individuals can be helped to keep in touch with the labour market and to compete within it. This is necessary for two reasons: first, to ensure that the individuals stock of human capital (an individual's education/skills levels, employment record and employment pattern) maintains its relevance to that which is in demand in the employment market, in order to ensure that they can take up an employment offer; second, to minimise future productivity loss. Unless action is taken to achieve the above there is a danger that the long-term unemployed will be excluded from the economic and social benefits that can be generated from positive economic growth.

Unemployment: The Hidden Impact

The recent report* from the ESRI on transitions to adulthood among Irish Youth is disturbing. It identifies the breakdown in patterns of living caused by a number of factors but particularly by unemployment. The report first of all describes the normal events marking the transition from youth to adulthood. The first stage involves leaving school and getting a job. The second stage is moving out, though it is unusual to move out if employed locally. The third stage is marriage after some stability of employment has been achieved. The fourth is starting a family of one's own after marriage. This sequence of events would be regarded in Ireland as a successful tradition to adulthood.

Getting employment is a crucial stage in this transition to adulthood. Getting a job gives people financial independence and status. Being unemployed prevents people being able to move out of the family home, or forces them to return to it. In one particular group of young people studied, 50 per cent of those employed had left home, whereas only 30 per cent of those who were unemployed had done so. One group who feel particularly trapped and show high levels of distress are unemployed people who have never lived outside the family home.

Another disturbing finding about unemployment is that generally, as the proportion of time spent unemployed rises, so do rates of premarital pregnancy, marriage, and fertility within marriage; and this is particularly concentrated among those who have spent almost all their time since leaving school unemployed. This obviously will create a spiral of disadvantage if nothing is done to counteract it.

The ESRI Report employs the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) to measure the psychological distress experienced by people in a variety of disadvantaged situations, particularly unemployment. This questionnaire asks such questions as, have you recently been feeling more than usually unhappy or depressed, or been thinking of yourself as a worthless person, or lost much sleep over worrying, or feeling that you are playing a useful part in things. International studies suggest that any respondent exhibiting more than two symptoms is more than likely to be independently assessed by a psychiatrist as ill. While about 7 per cent of employed people are in this category, in the case of unemployed people who have recently held a job the percentage rises to 36.6 per cent. This suggests that about a third of unemployed people are made mentally ill by the experience of unemployment. The item in the questionnaire which distinguishes most clearly between employed and unemployed is the response to the question, Do you feel you are playing a useful part in things? This research contrasts starkly with the common middle-class perception that the unemployed are having a great time at their expense.

It may be thought that the common experience of unemployment would create some kind of community. This may be true, but the ESRI research shows that among young people at least the overall effect of being in a high unemployment peer group is to raise levels of distress. Those suffering most from unemployment are those whose friends are generally unemployed. In this case, as the ESRI put it "alienation shared is alienation amplified". Unemployed adults do not seem to form any kind of coherent group, particularly in the case of males, who tend to withdraw into isolation. Unemployed people are reluctant to see themselves as a group, tending to see their unemployment more as a personal problem. That is one reason why it is so difficult to organise the unemployed. Neither community nor parish flourishes in the large high-unemployment suburbs.

All in all, the evidence suggests that unemployment is highly destructive of living patterns among what has traditionally being called the lower working class, but can now be more accurately described as the lower non-working class. Unemployment is in danger of destroying the pattern of normal transitions that lead to adulthood, thus stunting the development and potentialities of hundreds of thousands of people.

*Hannan D F, and S O Riain, Pathways to Adulthood in Ireland. Dublin, ESRI, 1993.

THE MANAGEMENT OF OFFENDERS - A FIVE YEAR PLAN

by Eoin O'Sullivan, National Streetwise Coalition

According to this recently published report, on the 15/4/94 there were 2,153 inmates in the Irish prison system, distributed through our 12 custodial institutions. The daily average number population incarcerated within our prison complex has risen from 1,594 in 1984 to the current figure of 2,153.

The objective of this document, a first in Irish penal policy, is to outline the objectives of the Irish Penal system, to describe the accommodation available within the system, and to outline the services available for those incarcerated. However, we should avoid the temptation to welcome this document simply because for the first time ever a policy document on the penal system has been produced by the Department of Justice. We should instead judge it on the merits of its proposals and question why there has been a blanket of silence with regard to the operation of the Penal system to date and why a plethora of reports, both independent and statutory, have been virtually ignored.

For example, it was only in December 1993, that the annual reports on Prisons and Places of Detention for the years 1989, 1990 and 1991 were published. We are now entering into the second half of 1994 and no annual report has appeared for 1992 or 1993. The latest information on the Probation and welfare service is the annual report for 1989/90 which was only published in January 1994. For a public body vested with the control of a highly sensitive and contested area of public concern, the failure of the Department of Justice to provide basic information on the operation of the penal system is inexcusable. And as Paul O'Mahony has pointed out in a recent article in the "Irish Law Times" much of the data produced in these annual reports is of dubious quality and accuracy.

So what does this document tell us about the penal system and its operation in the future? The answer is frankly very little. No discussion is held on the need for the new prison in Castlerea or why we need a 60 bed women's prison. A host of minor improvements in the system are outlined in the document, yet nowhere is there a sustained critique of the objectives, rationale and outcomes of our prison system. As David Garland has highlighted "The structures of modern punishment have created a sense of their own inevitability and of the necessary rightness of the status quo. Our taken-for-granted ways of punishing have relieved us of the need for thinking deeply about punishment and what little thinking we are left to do is guided along certain narrowly formulated channels. Thus we are led to discuss penal policy in ways which assume the current institutional framework, rather than question it - as when we consider how best to run prisons, organise probation, or enforce fines rather than question why these measures are used in the first place. The institutions of punishment conveniently provide us with ready made answers for the questions which crime in society otherwise evoke."
(Punishment and Modern Society - A Study in Social Theory. - Oxford University Press 1990.)

It is thus vitally important that in examining the penal system that we move beyond the narrow focus of the prison itself and question the role of punishment in Irish society. Rather than attempting to make an ineffective system more potent, as the Management of Offenders document does, we need to question the basis for the prison in the first place, rather than starting our critique from the basis of the inevitability of the existence of a penal realm. The Management of Offenders document is a cosmetic public relations exercise to plaster over the substantial cracks in our penal system (and as a public relations document it is to be commended).

One searches in vain for any semblance of a coherent policy that can realistically reduce the rate of recidivism in our prisons and the creation of a 'delinquent class'. More importantly, the title of the document is significant, suggesting as it does that those our laws deem to be offenders are created out of fresh air, as if there is no social basis to becoming an offender. Irish society in one sense gets the prisons it deserves, in that those who enter our penal system re-enter society more likely to engage in criminal activities. If society wishes to address the genuine fears of many people who feel threatened in their homes, on the streets etc., the incarceration of people in our prisons will not alleviate their fears. What was needed from this document was a radical, fresh way of organising our criminal justice system and the recognition of the social basis of much crime committed in Ireland. Instead we received a bland, innocuous document that will not advance penal reform in Ireland.