

Annual Delegate Conference 2009

The INOU's Annual Delegate Conference was held on Thursday 21st May at Wynn's Hotel, Dublin. The conference was officially opened by Mary Hanafin, TD, Minister for Social and Family Affairs.

In welcoming everyone to the conference, INOU Chairperson, Ann Fergus commented on the huge changes that had arisen since the last conference with almost 385,000 people on the Live Register and strongly challenged those who were advocating that social welfare rates should be cut.

Minister Hanafin acknowledged the good working relationship that she and her Department had with the organisation and noted the important work undertaken by the INOU and the delegates in attendance who worked in supporting people who were unemployed and suffering from the impact of the current economic crisis. The Minister said that the over-riding consideration for the government must be to ensure the protection of jobs and the creation of new jobs and emphasised the importance of a co-ordinated effort, getting Government departments to work together, so that Social Welfare could be used to support education and training and to get people back into work. The Minister also referred to waiting times for social welfare payments and said that processing times in some of the busiest offices were good but some of the smallest offices were unacceptable. The Minister summed up by saying that the real challenge for Government was how to use Social Welfare to support people back into the workplace and also to encourage people to take the next step through training and education.

Continued over ▶



ADC 2009

Addressing Unemployment: what's happening?

In the INOU's mission statement the organisation notes that it campaigns 'for policies for full employment for all... for an acceptable standard of living for unemployed people and their dependents'. How did Budget April 2009 do in addressing these two aspects of unemployment?

Welfare rates

In April's Budget the basic adult social welfare rate was not changed even though many economic commentators had called for it to be reduced. However, it was reduced for 18 and 19 year olds to €100 on the presumption that this would encourage young people to take up education and training options. The INOU is keenly aware of the relationship between educational status and employment status but we are not convinced that using the big stick approach will work. We are also concerned that given other budgetary cutbacks that the level of provision will be inadequate to cater for all of the young people affected. What's more it will present additional challenges for alternative education and training providers as they will now have an older age cohort who may be sceptical of the ability of the course on offer to really improve their long-term prospects.

Economic commentators including the Minister for Finance have made much of the emergence of deflation across a range of goods and services including housing and accommodation. The Minister has stated that welfare

recipients have seen an 8% increase in their income. However what these commentators fail to take into account is the impact of recent budgetary changes on social welfare recipients. The loss of the Christmas Bonus; the increase in the minimum contribution towards one's own rent; and the decrease in the level of Rent Supplement support means that many welfare recipients are seeing a decrease of 5% in 2009. The State must find a mechanism to support Rent Supplement tenants to not only seek but secure a reduction in their rent. Otherwise the reduction in the Rent Supplement payment will be borne by the welfare recipient and not the landlord as the Minister for Social and Family Affairs had hoped in her post-Budget speech.

Employment

In April's Budget a number of proposals were made to generate earlier access for unemployed people to education and training. A welcome development is the improved co-ordination between three Government Departments: Education and Science; Enterprise, Trade and Employment; and Social and Family Affairs. However, the INOU is concerned that given the scale of the unemployment problem to be addressed, the scale of the initiatives announced in April's Budget is too limited to make any real difference.

For example, the Pilot Training Scheme for Workers on Short Time aims to support 277 people in vulnerable employment. It will provide training and income support to these workers through a pilot scheme for companies that have placed staff on a 3-day week, to provide 2-days training a week to up-skill employees for a period of 52 weeks. This scheme, entitled the 'Short Time Working Training Programme' and the 2,000 places on the new 'Work Placement Programme' were announced jointly by the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment Mary Coughlan, TD, and Minister for Social and Family Affairs Mary Hanafin, TD on 27th May. FÁS is to administer both of these schemes locally yet there is nothing up on their website about them and how they can be accessed.

Continued over ▶

Unemployment Statistics

Live Register (LR) adjusted =
402,100 May 09

Redundancies year to date =
35,925 May 09

LR Standardised Unemployment
Rate = **11.8%** May 09

Quarterly National Household
Survey (QNHS) Unemployment
Rate adjusted = **7.7%** Nov 08



Addressing Unemployment: (Continued)

The Back to Education Allowance and the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance are two schemes where earlier access has been created. However access to the latter has been at the expense of the Back to Work Allowance which has been closed to new applicants: this has particular implications for long-term unemployed and disabled people's access to employment.

Other initiatives include an increased range of short-term courses administered by FÁS; extra places at Third Level including short part-time transition courses and accelerated certificate programmes; expansion of Post Leaving Certificate places; and, a Redundant Apprentice Scheme at the Institutes of Technology. The INOU is concerned that without the publication of the Implementation Plan for the National Skills Strategy it is unclear how these additional courses and places will improve unemployed people's long-term employment prospects.

Social Partnership

Arising out of the review of 'Towards 2016' the social partnership groups on activation and the labour market were merged into the 'High Level Group on the Labour Market' to be chaired by the Department of An Taoiseach. The INOU welcomed this development as it meant all of the relevant Departments and the social partners were meeting in the one space where issues could be raised and addressed properly. However, since the end of January social partnership is very much in abeyance. As a consequence the HLGLM has only met once on January 16th. Since then the Live Register has increased by 32.5% and redundancies by 88.5%. If ever Ireland needed all of the relevant players working together to trash out what needs to be done to address the growing unemployment and subsequent social crisis it is now. At a time of limited resources more innovative, inclusive and effective approaches are urgently required.

The INOU is calling for an increased focus on job maintenance and creation; and in the meantime the maintenance of social welfare payments and supports to ensure "an acceptable standard of living for unemployed people and their dependents".

ADC 2009 REPORT (Continued)

John Stewart, INOU Co-ordinator, gave an overview of the work of the organisation since the last ADC. John referred to the dramatic increase in the workload of the organisation given the unprecedented rise in unemployment and redundancies and outlined the ways in which the organisation responded to the emerging crisis including the supports provided to workers who were losing their jobs as a result of redundancy and to trade union officials and employers dealing with redundancy situations. John also highlighted the huge increase in the number of welfare rights queries being dealt with by the Welfare to Work Section and the number of requests for Welfare to Work training and the INOU's related FETAC training module. John finished by outlining the on-going funding difficulties being experienced by the Organisation of the Unemployed Northern Ireland which, unfortunately, had not improved since the last conference.

Brid O'Brien gave an overview of policy developments in the organisation since the last ADC. Brid referred to the dramatic increase in the numbers on the Live Register and to the numbers of redundancies notified to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment over the past year. Brid also referred to the dramatic decrease in Government revenues and highlighted the main unemployment/employment related aspects of the initial 2009 Budget and the subsequent 'emergency' Budget in April.

Brid also highlighted the very extensive range of policy publications and submissions produced since the last ADC and gave details of her wide-

ranging involvement with external organisations. Brid ended by outlining details of the INOU's 'Getting it Right Education and Training' Seminar held in Dublin in December 2008 and invited delegates to view the Seminar Report on the INOU's website.

Twelve policy motions were submitted for discussion and debate at the conference. The motions included calls for: targets for maximum waiting times for processing applications for unemployment payments; improved employment services; access to CE for qualified adults; the maintenance of basic social welfare rates and for the restoration of the Christmas bonus.

There were no elections to the National Executive Committee as there were fewer nominees than places available and therefore Seamus Orr, INOU General Branch, Edel Kelly, EDI Centre Longford, Barrie McLatchie, Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre, and Des Bonass, Dublin Council of Trade Unions were automatically elected to the NEC.

The conference also featured three workshops on Training and Education, Social Welfare and Employment Services. On a sad note, conference delegates observed a minute's silence for Pat Murphy who passed away on 1st April. Pat had previously been a long-standing member of the National Executive Committee, through the Larkin Centre for the Unemployed and made an enormous contribution to the work of the organisation over many years.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who attended the conference for their input and support. ■

Annual Delegate Conference 2009



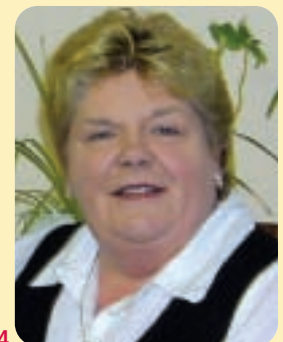
1.



2.



3.



4.

INOU Meets key Ministers

The INOU recently held separate meetings with Mary Hanafin, TD, Minister for Social and Family Affairs and Dara Calleary, TD, Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

The meetings provided very useful opportunities for the INOU to raise issues of concern and to re-enforce the organisation's position in a number of key areas.

At our meeting with Minister Hanafin, we took the opportunity to again outline our position that basic social welfare rates must not be cut in the next or any subsequent budgets. We also made a strong case for the re-instatement of the Christmas Bonus and for greater support for people on rent supplement in negotiations with landlords on rent reductions. Other areas covered included waiting times for jobseekers' payments, initiatives to tackle queues in local social welfare offices and the changes to the Back to Work Allowance and the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance. We also highlighted the

need to significantly reduce the bureaucracy around people undertaking short training courses and related social welfare issues.

At the meeting with Minister Calleary, we discussed the Department's job maintenance and job creation initiatives. We also highlighted issues in relation to the new training initiatives and the interconnectedness between labour market policy and education and training policy. We also raised the need for greater integration of services across FÁS, Social Welfare and the Department of Education and Science. The meeting also provided an opportunity for us to express concerns about the recent detrimental changes to Community Employment and to reiterate the need for flexibility, in terms of the training grant, at local level in order to ensure that CE Participants can continue to access quality training and development opportunities. Since the meeting, FÁS have advised that the proposed changes to CE have been put on hold. ■

Are you paying the income levy?

In response to queries raised with the INOU, further explanation was sought from the Revenue Commissioners as to who exactly must pay the income levy.

The income levy is not payable by anyone in receipt of a social welfare payment. What was not immediate clear in the aftermath of Budget 2009 was if schemes like Community Employment would be exempt from this levy. We can

report that the Revenue Commissioners have clarified this situation with a recent publication on their website entitled "Income Levy, Frequently Asked Questions". In the first appendix of this document it is outlined what sources of income the Revenue considers to be 'social welfare like payments' which are exempt from the income levy. This list includes Community Employment, Jobs Initiative Scheme, Rural Social Scheme

and the Back to Education Allowance amongst others. Unfortunately the Community Services Programme is not exempt from this levy.

For more information please visit the www.revenue.ie website and download the "Income Levy, Frequently Asked Questions" document. ■

1. General Branch Members at the ADC
2. Social Welfare Workshop at the ADC
3. Lorraine addresses the Education and Training Workshop at the ADC
4. Ann Fergus, Chairperson of the INOU
5. Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Hanafin, opening the ADC
6. Carol Thornton, Sharon Kane and Patricia Waters at registration for ADC



New INOU Affiliates

We are delighted to welcome new members, both individuals and organisations that have joined us in 2009. We would like to thank the very significant numbers of unemployed individuals who have joined the organisation so far this year. We have facilitated an easier membership process through our on-line membership applications and the majority of applications are now being emailed in. We would like to welcome the following organisations as new members:

An Siol Community Development Project, Inchicore, Dublin

Canal Local Employment Service, Stoneybatter, Dublin

Fast-track Information Technology (FIT) Ltd, Glasnevin, Dublin

Millennium Jobs Club, Killeedy, Limerick

Thurles Action for Community Development, Thurles, Co. Tipperary

Tralee Local Employment Service, Tralee, Co. Kerry



Meetings for INOU Individual Members

Meetings for INOU Individual Members are held at the INOU offices, Araby House, 8 North Richmond Street, Dublin 1. The next meeting will take place on Tuesday, 24th June. The meeting will start with a light lunch at 12.30pm (sandwiches and tea/coffee and biscuits) and is scheduled to finish at 3.45pm. Items to be discussed include the exceptionally high number of redundancies that have occurred.

We also have introductory meetings for new members, which usually take place on the same day as the Individual Members meetings. The next introductory meeting will take place from 11.30am to 12.30pm on Tuesday, 24th June. This meeting looks at the history, structure and aims of the organisation. INOU Individual Members of longer standing are also welcome to attend the introductory session if they are interested in finding out a little more about the INOU and haven't attended a meeting previously.

If you are interested in attending please contact the INOU Membership Officer, John Farrell (email: membership@inou.ie; phone: 01-856 0088) who will be very glad to post or email an agenda and booking form for the next meeting. ■

Getting Unemployment payments paid into a Bank Account

In July 2008, the Department of Social and Family Affairs made it more difficult for some unemployed people to receive their payments by changing how people's payments were collected. A decision was made that all new applicants for either Jobseeker's Benefit or Jobseeker's Allowance were no longer entitled to have their payment paid into a bank account but instead had to collect their payment weekly at the Post Office.

We highlighted at that time that this measure was unnecessary and would only result in newly unemployed people having to queue for an additional four times in a month for a payment that could have been paid directly into their account.

If an unemployed person who has signed on since late July/August 2008 has been in receipt of an unemployment payment for more than six months they can now apply to have their Jobseeker's Benefit or Jobseeker's Allowance payments paid in to their bank account. We have raised this issue with the Minister with a view to the Department of Social and Family Affairs highlighting this as an important option for unemployed people. People who have been collecting their payments from the Post Office for six months are entitled to apply, if they wish, for their unemployment payments to now be paid directly in to their bank account. ■

Pat Murphy RIP

It is with much sadness that we report on the death of Pat Murphy who passed away on 1st April. Pat was a long-standing member of the INOU's National Executive Committee, through the Larkin Centre for the Unemployed, and made an enormous contribution to the development of the organisation over the years.



Pat was held in very high regard by staff and NEC members. In addition to bringing the issues and concerns directly relating to his work as an Enterprise Officer in the Larkin Centre, Pat also brought an analytical mind and an ability to see the bigger picture. His analysis, good sense and advice was very much appreciated by staff, the NEC and the wider organisation. He will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

Richard McGhee RIP

It is with great sadness that we report on the sudden death of Richard McGhee on 8th June. Richard was a long-standing NEC member, through the EDI Centre, Longford, prior to stepping down from the Committee earlier this year.



Richard was deeply committed to the INOU and made a huge contribution to the work of the organisation in his role as NEC member, Vice Chairperson and most recently as INOU Treasurer. Richard will be greatly missed by his many colleagues and friends in the organisation. We would like to take this opportunity to send our condolences to Richard's wife, Anna, his sons Joseph, Charlie and family and also to the Longford EDI Centre on their sad loss.

Getting it Right

Seminar Report

The report of the INOU National Seminar "Getting it Right: Linking Education



and Training to Employment" is now available for download on www.inou.ie.

Irish National Organisation

of the Unemployed,

Araby House,

8 North Richmond Street,

Dublin 1.

Tel: (01) 856 0088

Fax: (01) 856 0090

E-mail: info@inou.ie