

Solutions to the jobs crisis?

Workers Solidarity Movement

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WITH THE NUMBERS officially unemployed approaching 300,000 in the 26 counties and 108,100 in the 6 counties, there is no sign of light at the end of the tunnel. Latest estimates say the combined figure could be 350,000 within a year ... and rising. Unofficially there are already 321,000 (Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed estimation for October). All the politicians say they are concerned about this. But instead of helping the unemployed, the government has been consistently attacking people's Social Welfare entitlements.

Since the last budget the cuts have included no more maternity benefit, no more supplementary welfare payments for local authority rent arrears and means testing introduced for deserted wives. Disability, unemployment, occupational injuries and pay related benefits are now taxable.

Obviously a government which makes cuts like these doesn't give a damn about the unemployed but does anyone have a serious solution?

PESP & PNR

For the past five years the main plan touted to combat unemployment in the 26 counties has been the PESP (Programme for Economic and Social Progress) and its forerunner, the PNR (Plan for National Recovery). The PESP is an agreement made between the so-called social partners — the trade unions, the government and the bosses. It involves the unions restricting pay demands and industrial action. In return there is meant to be greater investment in the country and more jobs.

This strategy has not worked. Since the PNR was first signed in 1987, unemployment has risen from 237,000 to 291,200 (October 1992, government figures). At the same time Ireland's Gross National Product, which is the total wealth produced in this country, has broken all records. So the PNR and PESP have been a massive con job. It has meant on one side record profits for the bosses and on the workers' side pathetic wage rises and no union action for better conditions. For the unemployed the PESP has given nothing.

JOBS FORUM

The other and most recent attempt to deal with unemployment has been the Jobs Forum. This is a Joint Oireachtas Sub-Committee made up of representatives from most political Parties in the Dáil. It is worth noting that even Fine Gael's Michael Noonan said the Jobs Forum was "a useless talking shop" and "a sham put in place to fool the people".

Some proposals have already come out of the Jobs Forum. One of them is compulsory education. This will mean that people who are unemployed and under the age of twenty can be forced to do some sort of education course by the government. The other proposal mooted has been Workfare.

Workfare is only a proposal so far and the details have not been finalised but it will mean essentially that people will have to work for their dole. People who are on the dole and who fill certain requirements will be made to work in order to receive any money. They will get the same as the dole for their work. The sort of work suggested has been "community work" but again this has yet to be finalised and no doubt there will be all sorts of shit jobs thrown in. This is no solution to unemployment.

SCHEMES OR JOBS?

Workfare and the compulsory education will have two effects. It will reduce the numbers officially unemployed, giving the impression that things are getting better.

It will also mean workers in permanent full-time jobs being replaced by people on Workfare, just like what has already happened with some SES schemes. Since 1984 the number of permanent staff in local authorities has fallen by 6,000. Some 3,000 people on FAS schemes are working for local authorities, doing mainly labouring jobs. Some local authorities have almost no labourers left on their permanent payroll. With Workfare the government have another tool to attack present jobs and replace them with ones that have no security, sick-leave or maternity leave. Scheme 'allowances' will replace trade union rates of pay.

What makes the Jobs Forum and the PESP most sickening is the degree of support that they get from the so-called opposition in the country. The PESP is supported by the unions. It was promoted by members of the pre-split Workers Party in their jobs as union officials. It is even critically supported by the Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed!

LIMITS OF THE SYSTEM

SES schemes are only be introduced with trade union agreement. This means that unions are supporting the destruction of real jobs. The Jobs Forum is backed by the Labour Party.

The problem is not that these organisations have bad leadership, nor can they just be labelled "traitors to our class". The problem is their politics. All the groupings involved whether it be the Labour Party, Democratic Left, the unions or the INOU are looking for solutions within the capitalist system.

But as long as you work within the present system you must give priority to the profit motive. In capitalism if something makes a profit it is good and if it doesn't make a profit it is bad. That is why it makes sense for them to lower wages, attack working conditions and do nothing for the unemployed.

FIGHTBACK

But we do not need to take this lying down. There is the potential to fight back and achieve better conditions. The unemployed need to organise to fight for jobs. They must link up with people who have jobs so that together the unemployed and the employed can fight for better conditions. This starts with smashing the PESP and forcing the government to make job creation a priority.

Some groups have started fighting back. The Portobello Unemployed Action Group (PUAG) is a local activist group in Dublin fighting for more jobs. It works within the INOU and is trying to make them take a more activist route, organising pickets, demonstrations and marches. Most other unemployed groups are funded by the church or state and are only involved in providing services such as doing CVs and helping with social welfare problems.

PUAG was very much involved in helping to organise the 2,000 strong march for jobs held last October 6th. More action groups like this will need to be set up by the unemployed as a step towards larger mass action.

Trade Unionists and Unemployed Against the Program (TUUAP) is a network of trade unionists campaigning against the PESP. They produce a quarterly paper called Trade Union Fightback.

ANARCHIST SOCIETY

In the long run there will never be full employment unless there is an anarchist society run to satisfy peoples' needs, not to make profits for a few. There will never be full employment while we are living in a system based on profit. We will always have recessions and the bosses will always be trying to have lay-offs. Even in the best of times there has always been unemployment, both East and West.

But the fight for a future anarchist society begins with the fight for better conditions now. The government will not take unemployment seriously unless the unemployed take fighting for jobs seriously. There are small groups out there, more need to be created. Last October's march was a good start, lets see some more of the same.

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