news SPECIAL

VOL.33 / NO.5

DECEMBER 2010

TEACHERS' UNION OF IRELAND / AONTAS MÚINTEOIRÍ ÉIREANN

A Word from the President

The Christmas season is upon us but I know we do not feel it is a time to celebrate. However, I would like to wish members all the best for the holiday period and a brighter new year.

Regardless of the season, it is impossible to escape the doom and gloom that pervades Ireland today. The Scrooge-like Budget introduced by this Government has seen to it that there will be little festive cheer for workers in the Public Service nor for the most vulnerable in our society.

A Government that attacks pensioners, the blind and carers should not rule in any civilised society. My wish for Christmas is that this Government would go now. These people have already done so much damage and every extra day they stay in office plunges Ireland deeper and deeper into debt. A debt which ordinary workers are expected to repay. We did not ask for this bailout. We did not create the situation where a bailout was necessary. Why then should we pay for it? Perhaps the most fundamental economic principle is that if something cannot be afforded then it should not be bought into. We cannot afford to repay this money to the IMF/ECB. This loan will not benefit us. It will benefit the bondholders. The entire population is being asked to get involved in a debt it cannot repay to protect the interests of these bondholders. We cannot afford this debt, our children cannot afford this debt and the unborn cannot afford it so we should renege. Let the bondholders take the hit.

Investment in education has long been lauded as the best means to fight a recession. This Government constantly talks about creating a smart economy whilst at the same time introducing fees for PLC courses, increasing college fees, increasing the pupil teacher ratio for LCVP students, closing Traveller Training Centres and cutting back on resource and language teachers. These ingredients clearly do not create a smart economy. In fact they spell disaster for our education system which is the most valuable asset this country has.

TUI PRESIDENT BERNIE RUANE

The new year will hopefully bring an early election. There will be many false promises made on our doorsteps. Let's all ask the obvious questions and demand answers. "If elected will you restore our salaries to what they were? Will you guarantee that our pensions will be protected from further cuts and levies? "

If the answers are "no" then we should tell them where to go.

Bernie Ruane.

Latest Budget cutbacks

The Four Year Recovery Plan and Budget announcements contain a number of cutbacks that directly concern past, present and potentially future TUI members.

The various cuts already foisted on the education system must be viewed in combination with the litany of previous retrogressive measures. TUI is abhorred that some measures maintain privilege while attacking those among the most marginalised. For example, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) pupil teacher ratio has been raised while that of schools which charge tuition fees was left intact, further proof of continuing inequalities in our era of 'sharing the pain'.

Elsewhere, both those teachers and lecturers who have retired and those yet to enter the system were targeted for pension and salary reduction, while a ludicrous €200 charge to enrol on a Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) course will only deter more students from furthering their education.

Third level students will now be forced to make up the massive deficit in funding in the sector by way of an increased 'back door' fee, while Traveller education has been particularly severely hit.

The main measures are outlined below.

- Reduction of teacher numbers by range of measures
- 10% salary cut for all new entrants to public service
- Starting point for new teachers reduced to first point of scale meaning salary cut is effectively 16%
- All incremental credit on appointment for IOT lecturers removed
- Third level student services charge to increase to €2,000
- €200 charge for PLC students – means tested
- 7% cut in non-pay grant to Institutes of Technology (initially flagged as 5% cut – increase in student charge will make up 2% deficit)
- 5% reduction in all capitation grants, including all schools and grants for Adult Literacy, Community Education, School Completion Programme, Youthreach etc
- Phasing out of Senior Traveller Training Centres
- Reduction of school capital ICT allocation to just €1.5m in 2011 (97% reduction from 2010's €63m figure)

Detail on reduction in teacher numbers to take effect in 2011/2012 school year

€24m in savings (€98m in 2014) will be achieved by reducing teacher numbers through a combination of measures. These measures will lead to a reduction of up to approximately 1,200 posts in 2011 (700 primary posts, 500 post-primary) which, however, will be partly offset by the addition of some 875 new posts due to demographics. The measures to reduce teacher posts include:

ALL IMAGES FROM NAT

- Defer provision of 150 extra teachers in September 2010
- Change favourable pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) to the standard PTR for the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and for Gaelscoileanna
- Withdrawal of Resource Teachers for Travellers posts at primary level and of equivalent teaching hours for Travellers at post-primary level. Transitional arrangements will be put in place for schools with a high concentration of traveller children
- Redeploy existing supernumerary posts in post-primary schools from September 2011
- A phased reduction in numbers of Language Support Teachers, through demand driven reduction and, if necessary, a change in allocation rules and
- Removal of Rural Co-ordinator teaching posts and of Visiting Teacher Service for Travellers. Teachers will be redeployed in accordance with the terms of redeployment schemes

Measures affecting retired teachers

- For existing public service pensioners, the legislation will provide for an average reduction of some 4% in pensions (from Jan 2011)
- Specifically, there will be a reduction of 6% on the band between €12,001 and €24,000; a reduction of 9% on amounts between €24,001 and €60,000; a reduction of 12% on balances above €60,001

Pension provision

- The Government has decided to extend the 'grace period' under which pensions are calculated by reference to the pre-cut rates of public service pay to the end of February 2012
- There is no change in public service pension scheme terms for existing staff
- Pension lump sum payments in excess of €200,000 to be taxed
- For those public servants who retire before the ending of the 'grace period' at end-February 2012, there will be an average reduction in pension of some 4% as outlined above
- As those who retire after this date are subject to the pay reduction of 7% on average, which will reduce the pension and lump sum to be paid, the Government has decided that it would not be appropriate to also apply the pension reduction to this group

New entrant public service pensions

The main provisions for the new pension scheme decided by the Government are:

- Raising the minimum pension age to 66 years initially and 67 in 2021 and 68 in 2028
- Career average earnings rather than final salary will be used to calculate pension

Legislation will be published shortly facilitating the introduction of the new scheme in 2011.

The new pension scheme which will apply to new entrants from 2011 will use the CPI rather than, as at present, a link to the pay of serving Public Servants to calculate increases for pensioners. TUI will continue to oppose this vigorously with the other teacher unions.

Retirements

As clarified in the Budget summary, the Government has decided to extend the 'grace period' under which pensions are calculated by reference to the pre-cut rates of public service pay to the end of February 2012. Anybody retiring before this date will have their pension provision calculated on the salary scales effective before the pay cut introduced from 1/1/10.

However, all current pensions were reduced in the Budget by an average of 4%. This equates to a reduction of 6% on the band between €12,001 and €24,000; a reduction of 9% on amounts between €24,001 and €60,000 and a reduction of 12% on balances above €60,001. This reduction will also apply to the pensions of those retiring before the end of February 2012.

Snow Days

In an Irish Times report on 3/12/10 the Department of Education and Skills clarified that schools are not required to make up days lost because of inclement weather. This information should be brought to the attention of school management should any attempt be made to change the standardised school year.

Teachers and students may have made arrangements to make private use of agreed school closure days. It would be unreasonable to expect that these would be changed now and the practice in the past has been that teachers would facilitate the completion of the year's programme in such a manner as not to disadvantage students. This practice should be continued at the present time.

Rally at the GPO

100,000 concerned citizens took part in the massive march from along Dublin's quays and subsequent rally at the GPO on November 27th, with large numbers of TUI members and banners among the crowds. The rally gave a clear message to the assembled international media as to the depth of anger at the Government's abject mismanagement of the economy.

Probation of Teachers

The Executive Committee recently considered the issue of probation of teachers. The Executive is aware that a number of VECs have unilaterally introduced schemes for the probation of teachers. These are not agreed and where they have been introduced or in the event of an attempt to introduce such schemes they should be resisted and should not be cooperated with.

A letter outlining this position has been sent to the Chief Executive Officer of each VEC.