

PROVISION FOR THE UNEMPLOYED

One positive feature of the budget is the 11% increase in rates of Unemployment Assistance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance. A number of inconsistencies limit the positive impact of this measure. Though a single person on long-duration urban rate of Unemployment Assistance will receive an additional £4.20 per week the additional increase for an adult dependent is only 80p per week. This represents an increase for married couples of 7.7% compared to 11% for single people. Secondly, under the differential rents scheme in local authority housing, people's rent increases as their income increases. This could reduce the value of the social welfare increases by up to 50% in some cases. Unemployment benefit payments are being increased by 3% in line with inflation. Overall, the unemployment payment levels remain far below the minimally adequate income of between £53.55 and £64.26 at 1987 prices recommended by the Commission on Social Welfare and even far below the minimum payment of £48.00 sought by the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed (I.N.O.U.) and Combat Poverty as a step towards the introduction of the rates recommended by the Commission.

The Government estimates for 1988 cut the allocation to FAS for training (i.e. training carried out up to now by AnCo) by 7%. Of the two temporary employment schemes, the SES has approximately the same allocation as last year while Teamwork is down 15%. The Enterprise Scheme (formerly the Enterprise Allowance Scheme) is down 15% while the Community Enterprise Programme is down 16%. These cuts will have the effect of reducing training and temporary employment opportunities for unemployed people. Also there has been no increase in the payment levels for participants on schemes.

A new development in State policy towards the unemployed in the last couple of years has been the entry of the Department of Social Welfare into the area of 'Programmes for the Unemployed'. The Budget confirms that the Jobsearch programme

is to be continued in 1988. A further 50,000 people will be interviewed in 1988. Jobsearch interviewees (including those interviewed but not placed in '87) will get priority in the allocation of 42,000 places on mainline FAS schemes along with 14,000 Jobsearch course places. The Jobsearch programme is fast becoming the standard procedure for allocating places on State schemes. Despite widespread criticism the strong elements of compulsion and welfare investigation included in the Jobsearch programme have been retained.



The Part-Time Job Allowance Scheme, which has been operating on a pilot basis, is to be extended nationwide. It is open to anyone who has been signing on for 13 weeks or more. Participants in the PTJAS are allowed work up to 24 hours a week and pay tax and P.R.S.I on those earnings. They also receive a social welfare payment of £25 if single or £45 if married.

The Minister for Social Welfare has announced his intention to introduce a Pre-Retirement Scheme in the near future. Unemployed persons aged sixty or over who have been signing on for a minimum period (yet to be decided) would be re-classified as 'pre-retired'. What was their dole will then be paid to them as an early pension, paid by means of a pension book at the post office rather than having to sign on.