

# employment update

Recent Labour Force Survey data published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) provides an up to date picture of the employment situation in Ireland. The total number at work declined by 45,000 (4%) from 1,124 in 1983 to 1,079,000 in 1985. Between 1985 and 1987 it remained steady at around 1,080,000. The latter is good news as prior to this some further decline in the total at work had been expected. The figures show that between '85 and '87 a decline in employment in agriculture and in construction was offset by a increase in the services sector, while manufacturing employment remained steady. Somewhat less positively, it is possible that the stability of the total number at work has been achieved in part by an expansion in part-time employment. What is the significance of these new figures? One commentator, Prof. Gerry Sexton of the ESRI, concluded that while the better than expected employment situation was obviously to be welcomed "the changes are not of a sufficient magnitude to make a serious dent in the unemployment and emigration levels".

Not everybody has been so cautious in their assessment of recent developments. Professional optimists as ever, the IDA launching its 1987 annual report in July, proclaimed that confidence is returning to the econo-

my and 'thousands of jobs are being created'. According to the report 'In 1987, 11,470 first time jobs were created and filled in IDA backed companies in the manufacturing and international services sectors. Also the IDA 'has taken as its central and core target the stimulation of 37,000 jobs in the three years 1988-90...This is 6,000 jobs more than attained in the preceding three years'. An improvement in job creation performance would certainly be welcome.

All this must be seen in context. The report shows that the IDA's 1987 performance was 'approximately at the same level as in 1986' which (according to their '86 report) was 'on a par with the 1985 figure'. So thousands of jobs were being created while unemployment was rising steadily. On their own these figures tell us very little. For example those quoted for jobs created are not net figures for the manufacturing sector. As we saw above total manufacturing employment has been static since 1985. Some indication of whether the overall situation is changing and to what extent will be given by the April 1988 labour force survey, first results of which are due to be published in October. ■

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