

## RESTART OR FALSE START?

JOBSEARCH, in many ways, copies a programme introduced earlier in Britain by the Thatcher Government. There, it is known as RESTART, and was introduced on a pilot basis for the first six months of 1986 and, thereafter, extended throughout Britain.

The independent research and campaign group, UNEMPLOYMENT UNIT, has monitored the programme closely, helped by the - relative to Irish standards - good flow of official statistics which the civil service across the water is obliged to produce.

In the six months pilot-run of the scheme, when the target group was people unemployed for a year or longer, 84 % of those interviewed continued on the dole without any change. 16 %, therefore, saw a change in their position as a result of RESTART but the change in question included everything from having got a job to being placed on a one-week (!) 'training' programme. In fact, only 5.7 % were helped into paid positions as a result of their RESTART interview (1.0 % in jobs, most of which were low paid, while 4.7 % got places on the British equivalent of our SES scheme). There was no attempt, in evaluating the pilot-run of the programme, to find out if the job-hunt-'training', that 7.5 % of all those interviewed were sent on, led anywhere.

In the first six months of the nation-wide operation of the programme, with the target group now widened to any people unemployed for six months or longer, the results were slightly worse. 85.3 % of those interviewed continued on the dole as before while 14.7 % saw some change in their position. Only 3.3% got into paid positions (0.7 % into conventional jobs - we don't know how long they lasted ; and 2.6 % onto government schemes).

These are not spectacular results. Yet the Thatcher Government is enthusiastic about RESTART and, as we know, their enthusiasm proved contagious. The UNEMPLOYMENT UNIT calls attention to such things as the link-up between the RESTART interview and the introduction of a new and tighter test of the available-for-work criterion ; the political mileage got out of the number of people called for a RESTART interview who did not turn up or whose claim to benefit was stopped after being interviewed ("we are weeding out those sponging on the poor taxpayer"); the encouragement being given to unemployed people to lower their expectations and take lower paid, part time or temporary work.