

## “WORK IS THE KEY” - WHAT NEXT?

The Bishops' Pastoral, Work is the Key, has been well received by the media. Its broad-ranging analysis has found few dissenters. It emphasises the devastating effect of unemployment on a large section of the population, and the serious responsibility of a large sector of the community to tackle the problem. The Pastoral was particularly critical of the growing apathy and fatalism which is one of the biggest obstacles to finding solutions.

However, the Pastoral has steered away from the difficult area of specific solutions, the Bishops considering that because these were in the sphere of economics they were outside their competence. The conclusion seems to be that someone else must come up with solutions. But in fact, is anyone coming up with the sort of radical solutions necessary to have any significant impact on the problem? Is there an opportunity for us to come up with and lobby for solutions?

The difficulty with solutions - or even small steps to improve the situation - is that many of them require difficult decisions and a willingness on the part of those who have wealth or work to share it out a little more equitably with those who have not. Archbishop Connell emphasised this in his recent talk on the subject.

If we agree that the problem is so serious that it cannot continue for the long term, then difficult decisions become easier.

A broad division of the problem into two areas helps to focus the mind -

- (a) the creation of additional jobs;
- (b) the need to sustain those who remain unemployed in terms of their physical wellbeing and with some degree of hope and dignity.

The first area (a) requires few policy decisions - everyone is in favour of more jobs; (b) however is the area where difficult decisions are needed and where consensus will be hard to achieve.

Can we persuade our organisations to support even one initiative which could impact on the long term problem of unemployment? To help the thinking process we set down a few random suggestions and ask you to select, debate, and, if in agreement, to lobby.

(a) Support the introduction throughout Europe as quickly as possible of a maximum 48 hour working week.

(b) Allow people on the dole to earn part time wages - without affecting their dole entitlements, as long as their total earnings were subject to tax - and within specified limits. The Part-Time Job Incentive Scheme is not the answer to this problem.

(c) Commence a programme aimed at reducing the retiring age throughout Europe, and reducing the qualifying age for Old Age Pension.

(d) Increase the Tax Free Allowance to ensure that those on low earnings do not pay tax. The cost of this measure to be paid by a surtax on earnings over £50,000.

(e) Encourage more job sharing in areas of the economy not directly open to competitive pressures, e.g. teaching.

(f) As we go to press, the CMRS model is receiving a lot of airing. This model has a lot of potential - is there anyone in a position of influence prepared to champion it?

(g) Other suggestions? - we would be glad to hear them.

If we agree with the analysis of Work is the Key, that we cannot allow the present situation to continue, we need to do more than tinker around the edges of the problem. Difficult decisions need to be made soon.

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